



New Zealand Medical Association

Briefing for the incoming Minister of Health

November 2020

About the NZMA

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) is the only pan-professional medical organisation in New Zealand representing the collective interests of all doctors. Our members come from all disciplines within the medical profession, and include specialists in various fields including general practice, doctors-in-training and medical students. We have approximately 5000 members.

Role

The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. The key roles of the NZMA are to: i) provide advocacy on behalf of doctors and their patients; ii) provide support and services to members and their practices; iii) publish and maintain the Code of Ethics for the profession; iv) publish the New Zealand Medical Journal.

The NZMA works closely with many other medical and health organisations, and provides forums that consider pan-professional issues and policies. The NZMA provides a platform for doctors to come together to focus collectively on issues for the profession and for the health of New Zealanders. The NZMA aims to influence the policy environment in which doctors study and work, and navigates the political environment on behalf of the profession.

The NZMA's advocacy focuses on strengthening the medical profession and delivering an effective health service to our patients. We value our regular meetings with Government health officials and other agencies at the highest levels. We also make submissions on a wide range of topics, and are regularly invited to comment by the media.

Our high profile and influence places us in a strong position to advance core health issues, such as addressing medical workforce challenges and achieving the best value for investment in health services. The opinions and input of the NZMA are sought at all levels of policy development and review.

The NZMA is in the unique position of being able to provide you with timely and independent information that is representative of the entire breadth of the medical profession. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you regularly.

Structure and key people

The NZMA organisation consists of a Board and several advisory Councils.



Dr Kate Baddock

[NZMA Chair](#)

A General Practitioner in Warkworth, Dr Baddock is a Fellow of the Royal NZ College of General Practitioners, was a member of the Medical Council of New Zealand, and held leadership roles in a number of general practice organisations.



Prof Harvey White

[Deputy Chair](#)

A cardiologist, Professor White is the Director of the Greenlane Cardiovascular Research Unit at Auckland City Hospital, and Honorary Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Auckland.



Dr Joshua Freeman

[Specialist Council Chair](#)

Dr Freeman is the Infection Prevention and Control Clinical Director for the Canterbury District Health Board, and a Microbiologist at Canterbury Health Laboratories.



Dr Vanessa Weenink

[General Practitioner Council Chair](#)

A partner in a Christchurch GP practice, Dr Weenink has held a variety of clinical leadership roles. She is a director of Pegasus Health and a member of Home Care Medical clinical governance committee.



Dr Katelyn Costello

[Doctors-in-Training Council Chair](#)

Queenstown-based doctor in training, Dr Costello is an active member on a number of medical committees, and part of both the GP and rural hospital training programmes.



Ms Lesley Clarke

[NZMA CEO](#)

CEO of the NZMA, Ms Clarke has held several executive leadership roles in the health sector and has a Masters degree in Public Policy.

Key issues

Health Investment Priorities

The NZMA believes that spending on health is a positive investment in the health, wellbeing and productivity of New Zealanders, and grows our economy. Ultimately, health money saves money in many sectors. Other countries achieve returns on investment of nearly \$5 for every \$1 spending on health. We ask the Government to take an investment approach to health with the following as priorities:

- Invest in public health measures including health promotion, control and prevention of disease, and effective health services. COVID-19 has been a timely reminder that investment in public health is vital for the nation's wellbeing.
- Invest in the recommendations of the Health and Disability System review, ensuring engagement with the sector. Any changes need to have adequate funding attached.
- Ensure inter-sectoral and whole-of-government approaches to addressing the upstream social, economic and environmental determinants of health, including effective regulation.
- Invest to reduce the number of barriers vulnerable and high-need patients meet when trying to access the care they need.
- Invest resources in those with the highest need, and those least able to pay.
- Invest in mental health initiatives.
- Invest in primary healthcare to ensure the sustainability of general practice.
- Ensure equity is at the forefront of innovations such as e-health.

General Practice Sustainability

General Practice is the cornerstone of successful primary healthcare, which underpins population health outcomes and is key to ensuring we have a high-quality, equitable, and sustainable health system. We believe that GPs should be at the centre of the health care system, helping people maintain healthy lives, preventing disease, treating acute illness, and caring for people with chronic disease.

We ask that the next Government recognises the efficient, cost-effective and quality care that General Practice provides in New Zealand and urgently undertakes the long-promised review of Primary Healthcare. We seek increased resourcing to frontline General Practice. Models of service delivery should be refined to recognise the importance of GPs as generalists and nurture the value of the GP-patient interaction.

Public Health

Public health is about promoting health and preventing disease through organised efforts at a society level. The Government can influence a large number of factors that affect the health of New Zealanders. We ask the next Government to establish a central public health authority with the power to lead and co-ordinate public health initiatives across the country. We also wish to see health impact analyses incorporated as part of the legislative process and as part of a health in all policies approach.

We ask the next Government to take measures to reduce alcohol-related harm. These include introducing specific health targets to address harmful drinking, expanding treatment services across the country, phasing out alcohol marketing and sponsorship, raising excise taxation and considering minimum pricing, and lifting the minimum purchase age to 20 years.

We ask the next Government to take measures to combat obesity. These include protecting children from marketing of unhealthy food and implementing a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. Other steps include implementing a consistent, easy-to-use food labelling system and including nutrition as part of the school curriculum.

We ask the next Government to establish a tobacco control strategy and action plan to achieve Smokefree 2025 and closely review the effectiveness of regulation of e-cigarettes.

Māori Health and Health Equity

Current disparities in health outcomes between Māori and non-Māori are unacceptable. There is a need to commit to a multi-faceted approach to address inequities in Māori. This should address upstream social and other determinants of health and include improved prevention, diagnosis and management of illness.

We ask the Government to establish the Māori Health Authority without delay and empower it to make decisions on where funding is invested.

We also ask the next Government to lead efforts to improve health literacy. Limited health literacy is associated with high health system costs. Addressing health literacy needs improves health behaviours and outcomes. We would like to see health literacy principles embedded into health and education. Strengthening regulation to provide healthier environments is also important to improve Māori health and health equity.

Climate Change and Planetary Health

Climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. Yet well planned and effective measures to mitigate climate change can have substantial health (and health equity) co-benefits. Planetary health has been defined as “the health of human civilisation and the state of the natural systems on which it depends”. A holistic effort to reorient human systems to achieve better human and planetary health is our most important and urgent challenge.

We ask the next Government to commit to environmental health impact assessments for all major policies and to prioritise policies that help make a rapid, whole-of-society-transition to a low greenhouse gas (GHG) emitting nation.

We also ask that the health co-benefits of measures to mitigate climate change (as well as health costs associated with inaction) are factored into all climate policy.