

# Cancer Society of New Zealand

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# Manifesto

# 2023-24

# Cancer in Aotearoa

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Seventy one New Zealanders are diagnosed with cancer every day. Approximately 9,500 New Zealanders die from cancer each year, with Māori twice as likely to die as non-Māori. And these numbers are set to increase, with our growing and aging population.

Cancer has no quick fix. There are significant challenges in cancer control that are larger, more expensive, more complex and more acute than other areas of health. We are quickly falling behind Australia and many other similar countries in addressing cancer and the gap in our statistics shows.

The good news is that there are steps you can take to address key cancer issues right now. Below, we outline 12 things we want you to do within your first term to make a tangible difference. Many of these asks don't require vast overhauls of systems or major reviews; the infrastructure to deliver them is already in place. They require commitment, acceleration and investment. These recommendations will save lives. They will also make the health system more efficient over time, saving you money so you can direct health spending to other issues.

## Who are we?

The Cancer Society is New Zealand's largest cancer charity and one of New Zealand's most trusted organisations. We work at the intersection of cancer research, care and prevention, and are committed to improvements within the cancer system.

In both our mission and our mahi, we are driven by our communities. We have staff members on the ground in offices from Whangārei to Invercargill, and we talk to thousands of families affected by cancer every year. We're walking beside the people you serve.

We are uniquely placed to offer you evidence and community-informed insights - to help you make decisions that make a difference to cancer outcomes and are meaningful to the people impacted by this disease.

# What do we want?

There is no quick fix for cancer, and action against cancer needs initiatives across a range of areas:

- Invest in prevention – so more New Zealanders live cancer-free
- Detect cancer sooner – so more lives are saved
- Ensure timely and accessible cancer services – so all New Zealanders receive the treatment they need
- Bring cancer care and support closer to home - so all New Zealanders receive the support they need

# We're here to help

If you're ready to take bold action against cancer, we want to be part of the conversation - now and after the election.



# Invest in prevention – so more New Zealanders live cancer-free

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About 25,000 New Zealanders are diagnosed with cancer every year. Yet up to half of all cancer cases are preventable – by reducing exposure to avoidable risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and ultra-violet (UV) radiation. The biggest difference you can make to save lives and reduce health system costs is to stop people from getting cancer in the first place.

## **1. Fully implement the key measures of the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Smoked Tobacco) Amendment Act 2022, including monitoring and enforcement of these measures.**

Tobacco is one of the most preventable causes of cancer, yet over 2,000 lives are still lost to cancer every year because of smoking. Bold new amendments to the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Act (1990) will bring rapid declines in smoking as they are implemented. The measures include removing almost all nicotine from smoked tobacco; reducing the number of retailers selling tobacco; and creating a Smokefree Generation. We want you to commit to ensuring that the amendments to the Act are implemented as intended. In doing so, you can turn the tide on one of our biggest killers - lung cancer.

## **2. Reform our alcohol laws to address alcohol-related harm.**

Alcohol causes cancer. Drinking even small amounts of alcohol causes at least seven types of cancer including breast and bowel cancer. In New Zealand, alcohol causes 642 cancer deaths each year, which is more than the annual road toll. Māori are inequitably affected by hazardous drinking and alcohol-related cancer. Our current alcohol laws are not fit for purpose. To address alcohol harm, we need to reduce the affordability and availability of alcohol, restrict alcohol marketing in all forms and embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our alcohol laws. Government must act now to address the significant alcohol-related harm in our communities.





### **3. Develop a Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection Action Plan by mid-2024, with dedicated funding of \$2 million per year to support its implementation.**

New Zealand and Australia have the highest skin cancer rates in the world. Yet it is estimated that around 90% of skin cancers could be prevented by reducing population exposure to UV radiation. Australia has for decades invested in reducing UV-related harm and its rate of skin cancer has begun to decline. New Zealand has been left behind.

Skin cancer places an enormous burden on the health system, with the total cost of publicly-funded skin cancer treatment estimated to grow from the current \$180 million per year to around \$300 million by 2025. Yet our Government's investment in skin cancer prevention has significantly reduced over recent years, from \$1.2 million per year in 2006 to just \$200,000 per year in 2023. In stark contrast, the Australian Government recently announced a \$10 million investment in a national skin cancer prevention campaign over two summers. Every dollar dedicated to skin cancer prevention has a return on investment of 2-4 times. We need to be doing more.

#### 4. Eliminate cervical cancer. By the end of 2024:

- **Vaccinate all those who have missed their Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations, prioritising tamariki who have not received their first dose, and**
- **Fund free cervical screening for all people with a cervix aged 25-69.**

You can eliminate cervical cancer in New Zealand. Both Australia and New Zealand have committed to the World Health Organization goal to eliminate cervical cancer by 2030. Australia is on track, due to their high rates of HPV vaccination coverage (over 80%) and cervical screening.

New Zealand's HPV vaccination rate is well below its target, with only 56% of the eligible population receiving both doses. Uptake is worse for Māori and Pasifika children, with fewer than half of children receiving both doses. We want you to commit to vaccinating all our tamariki, prioritising those who have not received a single dose.

We also want you to invest in meeting targets for cervical screening. Current funding is only given to those in the priority groups (Māori and Pasifika people, underscreened, unscreened, and those with a Community Services Card) on a 'first in, first served' basis. We support the announcement of a new, free self-test, but are disappointed that funding will only be available to priority populations from September until December 2023. This new test offers clear cost savings. Given the timeframe, your first months in government will be your best opportunity to make much-needed funding changes.



# Detect cancer sooner – so more lives are saved

New Zealand falls far behind comparative countries when it comes to detecting cancer sooner. Focusing on early detection is one of the most powerful ways to close the gap in international survivorship rankings. National screening and early detection programmes can save thousands of lives each year, reduce demands on an already stretched health system and make significant inroads in addressing cancer inequities. We are sure you'll agree this approach makes sense.

Globally, there continue to be improvements in detecting cancer early. We note the advances in the European Union to develop an early detection programme for prostate cancer. We endorse the Prostate Cancer Foundation's recommendation to establish a trial screening project in New Zealand to assess the viability and value of such a programme here.

## **5. Fully implement bowel screening from 50 years for Māori and Pasifika people by the end of 2024.**

New Zealand has one of the highest bowel cancer incidence rates in the world. Bowel screening saves lives by finding bowel cancer at an early stage when treatment is more likely to be successful. We have previously called for the Government to prioritise Māori and Pasifika peoples to be eligible for free bowel screening from age 50 (rather than 60), to address current inequities in the programme. We acknowledge that the Government has committed to this age expansion to take place during 2023. However, this is progressing very slowly and should be rolled out across Aotearoa without further delays.

## **6. Extend the current breast screening age from 69 to 74 by the end of 2024.**

The current upper age limit of 69 for breast screening is outdated and leaves New Zealand far behind Australia, the United States and Canada. This delay is costing one life every month. Two different Select Committees have already accepted the evidence that screening to 74 will save lives and recommended that it needed to increase. We must stop stalling on this. It is costing lives.





## **7. Develop a national lung screening programme, based on the findings of Te Oranga Pūkahu.**

About 1,750 deaths per year in New Zealand are from lung cancer. Lung cancer also contributes to inequities in health outcomes, with mortality rates three to four times higher for Māori than non-Māori. A lung screening programme has huge potential to substantially reduce these statistics but is not currently available in New Zealand. We are again trailing Australia, which recently announced a \$250 million commitment to implement a National Lung Screening Programme.

Lung screening must be given priority, with the planning and implementation fast-tracked. Te Oranga Pūkahu provides a way forward through its leading “by Māori, for Māori” research on lung screening. The next step is to develop a national lung screening programme. This, coupled with the key measures of the Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Act (1990), will help turn the tide on lung cancer.



# Ensure timely and accessible cancer services – so all New Zealanders receive the treatment they need

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We hear every day that New Zealanders simply cannot afford to get cancer. As well as facing disruption to their jobs and income, many New Zealanders face huge costs in travelling to treatment and must pay tens of thousands of dollars to access medicines they would get in other countries for free. People who need treatment are missing out because of the cost. We want you to focus on three areas of discrimination:

## **8. Update and implement a fully funded National Travel Assistance Scheme that is straight-forward, fair and fit-for-purpose by the end of 2024.**

The current National Travel Assistance scheme was set up in 2005 to provide critical support for people who needed to travel long distances or frequently for treatment. The Ministry of Health reviewed the current scheme in 2018 and found it to be underfunded, too complicated and creating inequities for those who needed it most. Despite clear recommendations at that time, changes have yet to be made.

The gap in provision is growing wider. Due to the changes to the health system, more cancer patients are needing to travel across the country for treatment. Many simply cannot afford this and are missing out. The health reforms will not deliver the intended outcomes if you do not solve this travel issue.

Recent media attention on this issue has prompted Te Whatu Ora to schedule work to address current inadequacies in this scheme, with improvements planned for 2024. We fear that there is currently no budget commitment and that the current schedule of work will not be completed in time for the 2024 Budget. We want you to commit to:

- Accelerating Te Whatu Ora's current work to review the scheme,
- Developing fit-for-purpose criteria and reimbursement rates that address inequities and barriers to treatment, and
- Funding this scheme from 2024.

## **9. Ensure Pharmac assesses and funds medicines in a timely way for people who can't afford to wait, by:**

- **Setting fixed timelines for assessing new drugs, including a fast-track pathway for medicines that save or prolong lives,**
- **Providing more funding certainty by right-sizing the Pharmac budget, and**
- **Directing Pharmac to publish analysis (including cost-effectiveness) on new medicines.**

People with cancer do not have time to wait and most do not have the means to pay for expensive treatments. There are regular media reports about whānau with cancer trying to find funding for treatment that's available in Australia, but not here.

Pharmac does important work to manage the cost of medicines in Aotearoa. However, its current systems are not keeping up with the rapid advances in cancer treatment, which means New Zealanders have to wait years to benefit from treatment widely available elsewhere. It takes New Zealand 822 days on average to fund a new drug, compared to 460 days in Australia – that's a year longer.

## **10. Impose a complete legislative ban on the use of genomic information by insurance companies.**

Genetic testing can help identify inherited faulty genes that increase the risk of cancer. However, New Zealand insurance companies can currently ask for a person's genetic test results, which they can then use to increase premiums or deny cover. This deters some people with strong family histories of cancer from taking potentially life-saving genetic tests or other health measures.

This is genomic discrimination. This was identified by the United Nations in 1999, who stated: 'No one shall be subjected to discrimination based on genetic characteristics'. New Zealand is again sadly lagging behind Australia, United Kingdom, USA and Canada. Putting a stop to genetic discrimination by insurance companies bears no cost to government and can potentially save lives.

# Bring cancer care and support closer to home – so all New Zealanders receive the support they need

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It makes sense that people should not miss out on cancer related care and support, simply because of where they live. And it makes sense that we should be looking ways to provide support for people closer to their homes. Here are two simple steps that will make a huge difference to the lives of those with cancer.

## **11. Extend free and consistent treatment services for people with cancer-related lymphoedema to all Te Whatu Ora regions.**

Lymphoedema is chronic condition affecting people with cancer as a side effect of treatment. It negatively impacts the person's quality of life and adds a financial burden to cancer patients. Capital, Coast and Hutt Valley, and West Coast are still without lymphoedema therapists. Additionally, some regions allow for two compression garments every six months while others do not. It is important that this postcode lottery ends for people with cancer-related lymphoedema.

## **12. Ensure appropriate support is available for whānau Māori with cancer, through \$1 million funding to expand Kia ora – E te iwi.**

Māori are 20% more likely to get cancer and nearly twice as likely to die from cancer than non-Māori. Once diagnosed, Māori have worse survival for almost all cancers. There has recently been investment in hauora Māori services to provide whānau with support and navigation. However, not all Māori are enrolled with hauora Māori services.

The Cancer Society has developed a “by Māori, for Māori” approach that offers a culturally safe environment for Māori with cancer to share their experiences, learn about cancer and access peer support. The Cancer Society of New Zealand partners with local hauora Māori to deliver Kia ora – E te iwi, acknowledging that not all whānau Māori are engaged with their iwi or marae. The ability to roll this out to all Cancer Society areas is severely restricted by funding. While the Cancer Society has largely existed without government funding, we now need your support for this important work.

# In summary

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Cancer is challenging. There are however many potential good news stories about cancer for this election and a new government term – if you act now.

You can choose to eliminate some cancers. You can invest in finding cancer sooner, reducing pressure on the health system, minimising treatment costs and increasing survival. You can prevent cancer and reduce the impact of a cancer diagnosis on families.

We're here to help. If you would like to talk about our Manifesto, share your thoughts on addressing cancer or would like to support our election asks, then please do get in touch.

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