

## **Labour's cost of living policies could benefit Māori**

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Many Māori whānau could benefit from Labour's new policies to reduce the cost of living, including removing GST from fresh fruit and vegetables, according to the Public Health Association (PHA).

PHA Senior Māori Analyst Keriata Stuart said one in five New Zealand households regularly does not have enough nutritious food to eat, and this proportion is even higher in Māori whānau.

"Being unable to afford healthy food means many whānau cannot sustain their basic health. This puts them in danger of getting seriously sick, and ending up off work and in hospital. Children in these whānau can have their whole development put at risk by poor nutrition."

Research by the University of Otago in 2008 looked specifically at what Māori, Pacific and low-income families thought was preventing them from eating healthy food. Focus groups led by Māori researchers rated high cost as the main reason they did not buy nutritious food.

"When you're short of cash, you're inevitably going to go for high-energy and junk foods which are cheap because they're mass produced. This has long term negative health consequences for our Māori whānau, including diabetes and heart disease.

"At a time when our health system is struggling to cope with demand, it is more important than ever that we do everything we can to reduce keep our people out of hospital."

Ms Stuart said recent research from the University of Auckland found that removing GST from healthy foods increased their purchase by 11 percent. She said that it also comes as no surprise that the same research found that educating people on the importance of healthy eating made no difference.

"Māori don't have to be told that fresh fruit and vegetables are good, especially for our tamariki but also to keep our kaumātua healthy. It's the cost that makes the difference.

Ms Stuart said arguments that removing GST selectively was too hard or unaffordable were short-sighted and a cop out.

"Other countries are doing it successfully, and it's not that complicated. Considering the health and health dollars it could save, removing GST from healthy food is one of the most sensible investments we could make in Māori health."

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