

PHA welcomes Labour's promises on the cost of living

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The Public Health Association welcomes Phil Goff's announcement that Labour, if elected, would implement policies to reduce the cost of living for low and middle-income New Zealanders, including removing GST from fresh fruit and vegetables.

National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating says the cost of making healthy basics affordable for all will be nothing compared to what taxpayers will have to pay to support people with associated diseases in years to come.

"Research shows that about one in five households, particularly low income, Māori and Pacific households, regularly do not have enough nutritious food to eat, which means they cannot sustain their basic health. They are in greater danger of getting seriously sick and ending up off work and in hospital. Children in these families can have their entire development put at risk by poor nutrition.

"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 avoidable hospital admissions. Giving people more choice about what they put in their shopping trolleys will go a long way towards that."

Dr Keating 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 comes as no surprise that the same research found that education on the importance of healthy eating made no difference.

"All family shoppers know that oranges are good for you and that you should eat your greens. It's the cost that makes the difference.

"The research presents a compelling case that removing GST from nutritious food works. It will make our population healthier and save us money, so it just makes good sense."

Dr Keating said arguments by other parties that removing GST selectively was too hard or unaffordable were short-sighted and a cop out.

"Other countries are doing it successfully and the concept is not that complicated. Considering the health and health dollars it could save, removing GST from healthy food is one of the most sensible financial decisions we could make."

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