

Government Development Assistance to Enhance Health Public Health Association of New Zealand position statement 2004

The New Zealand Government and people should actively work with United Nations and WHO to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the world.

Government development assistance should increase to at least 0.7% of GDP.

New Zealand assistance should focus more strongly upon the Pacific and South East Asia, and less on other parts of the globe.

Health assistance should focus on primary prevention and primary care, supported by assistance for local capacity development.

New Zealand should regulate or eliminate the export of hazardous products to developing countries (eg, tobacco products, fatty meat products).

Health worker training and organisational capacity building programmes should be supported to maintain in-country capacity and capability.

This position statement links with PHA statement on global climate change, nuclear disarmament and breastfeeding

Adopted by the Council of the PHA of New Zealand on 27 June 2004

The PHA notes that:

- Major health problems exist in the South Pacific Countries.¹
- Many needed health interventions are highly cost-effective.^{2 3 4 5 6}
- The New Zealand Government's development contribution is low⁷ and spread widely across Asia and the Pacific.⁸ However, New Zealand does make significant contributions in other ways (eg, international peacekeeping and disarmament initiatives).
- New Zealand can pose health risks to Pacific countries from inadequately controlled infectious diseases in New Zealand.^{9 10}
- Pacific countries can pose health risks to New Zealand through diseases imported from the Pacific or at risk of being established here.^{11 12 13 14 15} Also migrants have relatively high rates of tuberculosis.¹⁶
- New Zealand's actions have not always been beneficial or effective for health in the Pacific. Examples include involvement with tobacco,^{17 18} and unhealthy exports. Many Pacific health professionals migrate to New Zealand¹⁹ and medical aid has been poorly targeted.
- The United Nations and the World Health Organisation have called upon countries to work towards the Millennium Development Goals which include the health goals to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The Public Health Association affirms the following principles:

1. That development, poverty reduction, universal education, gender equality and the empowerment of women, environmental sustainability and public health are intricately related.²⁰
2. That development assistance in health is most effective when it involves local capacity building, emphasises primary prevention and emphasises primary health care.
3. That development assistance in health will be most effective if it is culturally appropriate, and if it works to reduce discrimination (gender and ethnic) and to reduce socio-economic inequalities.
4. That development assistance is most effective when it focuses on a region where the donor country has established good working relationships and many close linkages. For New Zealand this probably means focusing on the South Pacific region.²¹
5. That the protection and promotion of health is dependent on security in its broadest sense (ie, ecosystem health and protection from civil conflict, violence and external threats).

The Public Health Association believes the following steps should be taken:

- 1) ***Increase the level of assistance:*** That Government should increase overseas development expenditure as a proportion of GDP so that New Zealand at least fulfils its commitments to the United Nations (ie, to at least reach the 0.7% level by 2006).
- 2) ***Strengthen the regional focus:*** That Government should increase the focus of New Zealand's development assistance on the Pacific and South-East Asia regions. Exceptions to the regional approach may arise in areas where New Zealand has world-leading expertise (eg, as in the clearing of land mines).
- 3) ***Appropriate focus:*** That Government should ensure that development assistance has a strong emphasis on local capacity building and creating robust institutions that are both democratic and culturally appropriate. Assistance relating to health should be focused predominantly on primary prevention activities and primary health care and capacity building initiatives for local NGOs involved in these activities. Furthermore, actions to counter discrimination (gender and ethnic) and reduce inequality will benefit both health and social development.
- 4) ***Control hazardous exports:*** That Government should review the export of hazardous products to developing countries and institute appropriate controls (eg, on tobacco, alcohol, foods high in saturated fat, military supplies and hazardous chemicals).
- 5) ***Review pharmaceutical and related exports:*** That Government should review the New Zealand involvement in the export of any pharmaceuticals and related exports (particularly infant feeding formula) to developing countries and institute effective controls needed to comply with international Codes and ensure consumer information and the protection of public health.
- 6) ***Health workforce:*** New Zealand should continue to support training, and provide ongoing support, career development and specialist advice to health workers in Pacific countries to ensure that health workers there are well supported and that local needs are met.

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