

# Key Strategies – General Election 2011

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## Public health and the general election 2011

This information from the Public Health Association is to help you, your friends and colleagues promote the importance of public health during the lead up to the General Election on 26 November 2011. Further notes on the PHA and why we are doing this are attached at the end.

This document contains an introduction to seven key strategies and one underlying theme for improving health and reducing health inequalities in New Zealand

You may want to use this information to seek more detailed information from politicians and political parties at meetings leading up to the election, and discuss these ideas with a range of friends and colleagues.

## Use your vote!!

One of the key themes of the Chair of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health at the World Health Organization was the crucial importance of participation in all spheres of society. We see the damage of social exclusion in many ways. Participating in the electoral process is a vital way for all of us to contribute to not only our own wellbeing as citizens but also to participate in building a healthier future for our society and the world.

So, honour our ancestors –those who achieved

- the vote for all Māori men in 1867 and all men in 1879 (not just the land owning rich),
- the vote for all women in this country in 1893,
- citizenship option – and therefore the right to vote – for Chinese migrants in 1951
- an equal proportion of Māori electorates based on the number of people registered in the 1990s.

You may also want to honour those who have protested (and many who have died) in this past year in other parts of the world for the right to be able to elect their own rulers.

Up to 25% of eligible young New Zealanders are not enrolled yet, so they won't be able to vote! Support your young colleagues, family members and neighbours to enrol and vote.

## Seven key strategies and one underlying theme

There are seven key areas for political action to improve health and reduce health inequities. The first is that here, in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a pressing need to improve Māori health. The other six are from the review for the British Government on improving health and improving fairness in health (*Fair Society, Healthy Lives*<sup>1</sup>) These six strategies are the most effective ways to address inequalities, based on sound evidence. That review was led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health at the World Health Organization. He and the Commission were able to draw on the total resources of the WHO expert knowledge of what has been tried and what has been found to be effective, based on the facts.

The seven strategies are:

- Improve Māori health

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<sup>1</sup> Marmot M, Allen J, Goldblatt P, et al. *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review: The Marmot Review*, 2010

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

## Proportionate universalism – the underlying theme

One cross cutting theme is that the focus needs to be on lifting everyone up, that's it's important to give everyone a chance to live a healthy life. Wellbeing should not be a lottery dependant on who you are, where you live or how much money you have. That means that society should not be picking and choosing, but making sure that every family has the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education, or ethnic background. And the evidence is that the most effective and the lowest cost way to do that is to make services available to all, with a top-ups for those who need more help. It's about giving everyone a fair chance.

The improvement in immunisation rates in the past three years as an example of what can be done when there is the political will to do it – and when the approach is for all children, not just those picked out because they are 'at risk'. What works is when services are universal for everyone, and where extra support is provided wherever there is extra need.

Just the way we do with health services, where all pregnant women are entitled to good basic maternity care, but if you have complications then you get additional specialist support. We do it in education – every child is entitled to attend school – and if some children need additional assistance with reading recovery then they get it, or if a child is blind then they get the support they need to be able to learn maths like every other child.

## 1 Improve Māori health

Too many New Zealand Māori don't have the same opportunities to be as healthy as other New Zealanders – even though Māori are entitled to the full benefits of being New Zealand citizens. But in so many ways Māori do not get those opportunities – in education, housing and especially in health.

We need to maintain and enhance Māori policies and programmes, including health promotion, screening and health care services models that are effective and culturally specific.

When we ensure health services are equitable, including ensuring a strong equity focus in prioritisation of health resource allocation, quality improvement policies and programmes, and improved information systems Māori health will benefit enormously. Transparent monitoring, smoothing out regional variations in access, and on-going provider education and support are all required.

These actions will improve health for all New Zealanders, but because of the very significant ethnic inequities these actions are crucial for Māori.

## 2 Give every child the best start in life

Responsible societies look to the future and are broadminded enough to realise that every child, no matter what their background circumstances, deserves the chance to live a healthy, productive life. Evidence points to the fact that early life experiences influence health and wellbeing in later life

It's past time we made it possible for all children to afford to see a doctor, but it's also time we made it less likely that they need to.

We need to maintain and enhance investment in early childhood. Child poverty rates need to be reduced. There needs to be greater coordination among services for children, and a visible cross-party agreement that determines the strategy for improving the environment in which children live.

### **3 Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives**

Increasingly research shows us that societies that include everyone are healthier and less people die young.

This means supporting all people and communities to be active participants – particularly in political processes! Actively supporting participation so that all people, including migrant communities and young people, not only know that they can be involved, but experience increased control over their lives by taking part.

### **4 Create fair employment and good work for all**

The jury is in – safe and meaningful work with healthy work-life balance is good – good for your health, good for the economy

But too many New Zealanders are in precarious casual work, too many young New Zealanders are out of work and, according to workplace health and safety experts, too many New Zealanders are dying unnecessarily from workplace injuries, cancers and lung disease.

We need to ensure fair employment and safe and healthy workplaces, extending to include greater access to work for beneficiaries and people with disabilities, a low unemployment rate, and strengthening of occupational health policies.

### **5 Ensure healthy standards of living for all**

New Zealand is one of the wealthy 20% of world nations. So it's disappointing that, according to government reports, so many New Zealanders can't afford the basics of a healthy life, such as things like food, housing, education, health care, transport and social/ family support. The sorts of essentials that too many New Zealand families are having to go without are things like heating in the main rooms, warm bedding in winter, enough room for family visitors to stay the night, going without fruit and veges, children with worn out shoes, not able to afford to pick up prescription medicines, and not being able to afford to go to family funerals.

Our government, on our behalf, should operate equitable and fair fiscal and social welfare policy, ensuring that everyone has a minimum income for healthy living.

### **6 Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities**

Health begins long before sickness, where we all live, learn, work and play.

There's need to align our country's climate change, sustainability and pro-equity policies. We can have environmental, health and health equity win-wins in so many ways. One option is programmes for warm and healthy housing in deprived areas; another is such as increased walkability of neighbourhoods; yet another is financial incentives that both reduce carbon emissions and increase

healthy compared to unhealthy food production. Transport, trade, food and agricultural policies all intersect with respect to health and the environment.

## 7 Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

Wise governments don't let their people get sick and die unnecessarily. A recent World Bank report is clear that it is an inefficient use of resources for countries to wait and try to "treat their way out" of the looming challenge of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart diseases. They point to cost-effective prevention measures, some targeted to individuals but mostly population-based interventions.

New Zealand has an aging population and there is no guarantee that the global fiscal crisis will pass leaving New Zealand richer than before. Like the rest of the world, we need to shift attention to place more emphasis on prevention that works.

The most effective prevention measures will be healthy policies made by our government for the wellbeing of citizens:

- Make New Zealand Smokefree by 2025 (as per Parliament's response to Māori Select Committee).
- Encourage and ensure healthy food formulation (e.g. salt content in breads and cereals, clear labelling of foods that are healthy and unhealthy, packages of taxes and subsidies to improve healthy eating).
- Stronger policies to tackle harmful alcohol consumption.

Also effective are policies and programmes for health promotion, screening and health care services models that are culturally specific or tailored, such as for Pacific and Asian peoples.

## Who is the PHA and why are we doing this?

The Public Health Association of New Zealand (PHA) is a voluntary association which provides a major forum for exchanging information and stimulating debate about public health in New Zealand.

Health begins long before sickness, where we all live, learn, work and play. So the decisions that we make, as a society, through our politicians, about the circumstances in which we live, learn, work and play has a huge impact on health and sickness.

Discussing public health issues in the lead up to an election helps improve public health in several ways.

- It helps us in public health to firm up our own views on what are the important issues that we seek government action
- It gives us an opportunity to discuss with friends, colleagues, neighbours and the person next to you on the bus what we think are important actions that governments can take
- It gives an opportunity for politicians to hear and understand what communities are seeking from our elected representatives, and finally
- It may help some of us to decide how to use those most precious votes.

### Does this mean that the PHA is a political organisation?

No, the PHA is not a party political organisation. We have no affiliation with any political party and we do not endorse any political party.

But we care deeply about the policies that any political party may put forward. Our focus is on what impact will policies have on health and wellbeing.

### **But isn't the PHA an agent of the Crown, through a Ministry of Health contract?**

Yes, the PHA does hold a contract with the Ministry of Health that includes providing credible, research based information and comment on public health issues.

But like many other community and voluntary groups that provide services in the community using funds from taxation, we are not just another government department with a different name. We are an independent organisation, and have independent sources of income from membership fees, donations and other earnings, and our biggest resource is the voluntary time donated by our members. This election activity is funded from PHA independent funds.

As this is material in relation to the General Election 2011, for the avoidance of doubt, this pack is authorised by Gabrielle Keating, National executive Officer, Public Health Association of New Zealand Inc, 85 Victoria St Wellington.