

Building the Future:

More medicines and earlier care



Over this term, National has reduced wasteful spending to invest in the frontline, putting patients back at the heart of the health system with faster access to care and the largest ever funding boost for new cancer and other life-saving medicines. Now, National will lock in that progress and go further.

Responsible fiscal management is paying a dividend. Together, National and hardworking Kiwis have put New Zealand back on a path to surplus, and National will maintain that discipline by bringing money back home. We will reduce foreign aid outside the Pacific, where we will continue to support our closest neighbours and strongest interests. Every dollar saved will be put to work for Kiwis fighting cancer and other serious illnesses, with no new taxes.

A re-elected National Government will deliver a further \$604 million uplift in Pharmac's medicines budget, paid for by these savings. The last time National made this investment, it delivered 66 new medicines benefiting hundreds of thousands of Kiwis, including 33 new cancer treatments.

National will also back new ways to bring the latest treatments to New Zealand through more clinical trials and locally produced CAR-T cell therapy. Money that was once spent offshore will instead be invested in cutting-edge care, ensuring more Kiwis benefit from world-class treatment here at home.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Deliver a further \$604 million uplift in Pharmac's medicines budget**, building on National's track record of expanding access to new cancer and other life-saving medicines.
- **Turn responsible fiscal management into more medicines**, by reducing foreign aid outside the Pacific.
- **Set a national target for clinical trials** in New Zealand, so more Kiwis can access the newest treatments sooner, with a focus on cancer and rare disorders.
- **Unlock CAR-T cell therapy** by supporting New Zealand's medical sector to develop and produce this life-changing cancer treatment here at home.

Preventing serious illness

The best time to beat cancer and chronic disease is before it takes hold. A re-elected National Government will expand screening and prevention, building on the progress achieved this term. National's package brings hundreds of thousands more Kiwis into free cancer screening, trials new ways to find prostate and lung cancer early, and helps more Kiwis get active and avoid chronic diseases like diabetes. That means more cancers caught when they are most treatable, and more New Zealanders staying healthy.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Lower the free bowel screening age to 50 by 2029**, backed by additional colonoscopies, so bowel cancer is caught earlier when it is most treatable.
- **Complete the free breast screening extension to age 74 by 2029**, finishing the job National has started so more women have access to early detection.
- **Launch new screening pilots for prostate and lung cancer**, so more cancers are found earlier.
- **Deliver free cervical screening for all women aged 25 to 69** from March 2027, so cervical cancer can be stopped before it starts.
- **Establish the Healthy Kiwis Programme**, expanding active prescriptions with a target to double the number of people receiving them by 2030, helping more Kiwis get active, stay healthy, and avoid chronic diseases like diabetes.

Increasing the medicines budget

When National entered Government in 2023, Labour had left behind a funding cliff in Pharmac's budget, putting New Zealanders' access to medicines at risk. National filled that gap, then went further with a record \$604 million uplift in Pharmac's medicines budget, delivering 66 new medicines benefiting around 250,000 Kiwis, including 33 new cancer treatments.

But there's more to do. Too many New Zealanders are still missing out on medicines available in other countries, making their fight against cancer and other serious illnesses even harder.

A re-elected National Government will invest that same \$604 million again, largely paid for by reducing foreign aid outside the Pacific.

For Kiwis, this means even more people can access the medicines they need. Pharmac will be able to fund new cancer and other life-saving medicines that aren't currently available here, and widen eligibility for treatments that are already funded so more people benefit from them.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Deliver a further \$604 million uplift in Pharmac's medicines budget**, building on National's track record of expanding access to new cancer treatments and other medicines for New Zealanders.

Clinical trials for more Kiwis

Clinical trials are one of the best ways for Kiwis to get the newest treatments, often years before they are publicly available. For someone facing cancer, a trial can be a chance to try a promising new medicine they could not get any other way. It matters even more for people living with a rare disorder, where so few treatments are funded that a trial can be one of the only options available.

Trials are good for New Zealand too. Between 2013 and 2018, trials of new medicines added more than \$150 million a year to our economy and supported more than 700 jobs. However, companies wanting to run a trial here often face a slow and confusing approvals process that changes from district to district, adding cost and delay. As a result, trials are too often taken to other countries, and New Zealanders miss out.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Set a national target** that within ten years, 5 per cent of New Zealanders being treated for cancer will have part of their care delivered through a clinical trial, where a trial is right for them and they want to take part, aligning with Australia.
- **Set up a single national front door for clinical trials**, so companies have one clear place to go and patients can be matched to trials more easily, including those with a rare disorder who often struggle to find a relevant study.
- **Simplify and standardise the approvals process**, so a trial approved once can run right across the country, while keeping strong protections for patient safety.

Unlocking CAR-T cell therapy for cancer patients

CAR-T cell therapy works by taking a patient's own immune cells, reprogramming them to recognise and attack their cancer, and returning them to the body to do the job. For some people with rare or aggressive cancers that have not responded to other treatments, it can be life-changing. New Zealanders who need this therapy currently rely on having their cells sent overseas to be made, which is hugely expensive, yet New Zealand has the scientists, clinicians, and know-how to do it here.

A re-elected National Government will back BioOra, a New Zealand-based commercial-stage biotechnology company, with a \$25 million co-investment to expand its cell therapy manufacturing, research, and clinical facilities in Christchurch and produce CAR-T right here at home. BioOra's Christchurch precinct could supply the whole country, anchoring a high-tech industry in the South Island, supporting skilled jobs, and keeping New Zealand at the cutting edge of the fight against cancer.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Co-invest \$25 million with BioOra to expand its cell therapy manufacturing, research, and clinical facilities in Christchurch**, so Kiwis who need CAR-T can be treated at home rather than sent overseas.

The Prevention Package

The best time to fight cancer and chronic disease is before it takes hold. National's Prevention Package will find more cancers early and keep more Kiwis healthy and out of hospital.

Catching bowel cancer earlier

New Zealand's rate of bowel cancer is among the highest in the world, with more than 3,300 Kiwis diagnosed every year and over 1,200 losing their lives to it. National has already lowered the screening age from 60 to 56 as first steps towards aligning with Australia, but we are not stopping there.

Early detection is the difference between survival and tragedy. People whose bowel cancer is found and treated at an early stage have a 90 per cent chance of long-term survival. National will take the next steps to lower the screening age to 50, bringing hundreds of thousands more Kiwis into the programme. Taking steps to lower the screening age to 50 is expected to prevent 1,149 cancer cases over ten years.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Extend free bowel screening**, by lowering the age by two years every year to reach 50 in the next term of Government, so we catch bowel cancer earlier when it is most treatable.
- **Continue the roll out of free bowel cancer tests** for people of any age with symptoms, so cancer is found sooner no matter how old a patient is.
- **Deliver additional colonoscopies** to increase system capacity.

Earlier detection for breast and prostate cancer

Breast cancer is New Zealand's most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, with nearly 3,900 new cases a year, and the risk grows with age. Free mammograms currently stop at 69, leaving older women to pay for screening themselves or go without. National has already begun extending free breast screening to women aged 70 to 74, and a re-elected National Government will finish the job.

Kiwi men deserve the same focus on early detection. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among New Zealand men, with more than 4,000 diagnosed and more than 700 deaths each year, making it the second biggest cause of cancer death for men after lung cancer. Found early, more than 90 per cent of men survive at least five years, but that falls below 40 per cent once the cancer has spread.

Unlike breast, cervical, and bowel cancer, there is no organised screening programme for prostate cancer, so whether a man gets checked is too often left to chance. National will pilot organised screening in the two districts with the highest demand, allowing Health New Zealand to gather evidence for a potential nationwide programme, based on a proposal from the Prostate Cancer Foundation.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Complete the free breast screening extension to age 74 by 2029**, ensuring older women have access to early detection and life-saving preventative care.
- **Launch a prostate cancer screening pilot in two high-demand districts**, offering men aged 50 to 70 regular screening to evaluate what works for a potential nationwide programme.

Free cervical screening for all women aged 25 to 69

Cervical cancer is among the most preventable cancers, because nearly every case is caused by HPV, a common virus the screening test picks up well before any cancer develops. When it is caught early, around 91 per cent of women survive, but that falls to around 19 per cent once it has spread.

Unlike breast and bowel screening, cervical screening is not free for every woman. That's despite successive Parliamentary Reviews since 2018 having recommended it.

As announced in September, National has funded free cervical screening for all women aged 25 to 69 from 1 March 2027, meaning an estimated 786,000 women will no longer have to pay.

Earlier detection for lung cancer

Lung cancer is New Zealand's biggest cancer killer, claiming more than 1,700 lives every year, more than breast cancer, prostate cancer, and melanoma combined. Most people are only diagnosed once the disease is advanced and the chance of a cure is slim. Screening can change that. International trials have found that low-dose CT scans for people at high risk reduce lung cancer deaths by 20 to 25 per cent, and Australia began screening through its own national programme in July 2025.

A re-elected National Government will deliver a lung cancer screening pilot in Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay, offering low-dose CT scans to people at high risk, such as current and former smokers. The pilot will test the best way to find, invite, and screen those most at risk, catching more lung cancers early and building the evidence for a potential nationwide programme.

Keeping Kiwis active, healthy, and out of hospital

New Zealand is facing a chronic disease epidemic. The number of Kiwis with type 2 diabetes is set to nearly double by 2040, yet most cases are preventable, and billions are spent every year treating disease that could be stopped before it starts. Beating this epidemic means getting Kiwis moving and eating well.

Active prescriptions do exactly that. A GP or practice nurse prescribes exercise and healthier eating, and a trained coach then provides free, personalised support over several months to help the changes last. National introduced the scheme in 1998 to get Kiwis active and healthy, and it works. The evidence shows that 85 per cent of patients are more active after receiving their prescription, as are 80 per cent of child patients, and patients see significant improvements in HbA1c, blood pressure, and BMI. Yet only 26,000 people a year receive this support, a fraction of those who need it.

National will expand active prescriptions through a new Healthy Kiwis Programme, working with local providers across the country, and setting a target for Health New Zealand to double the number of people receiving them by 2030. That means more Kiwis getting the support they need to stay healthy, fewer cases of chronic disease, and less pressure on our hospitals.

A re-elected National Government will:

- **Establish the Healthy Kiwis Programme** to deliver active prescriptions, with a target to double the number of people receiving them by 2030, helping more Kiwis get active, eat well, and avoid chronic diseases like diabetes.
- **Work with Bowel Cancer New Zealand to determine how the CHALLENGE exercise programme could be made available for bowel cancer patients**, with evidence suggesting it can reduce the risk of death by 37 per cent in bowel cancer patients who have completed surgery.

Fiscal impact

The Pharmac uplift will be paid for by bringing money back home from foreign aid, with the remaining funded from future operating allowances.

Since 2017, MFAT's budget has grown from \$1.05 billion to nearly \$2 billion a year and its staff numbers have risen by more than 34 per cent. Millions of dollars have gone towards, among other things, smart agriculture systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, workshops with indigenous farmers in Patagonia, and installing livestock emissions equipment at universities in South Africa.

National will reduce New Zealand's International Development Cooperation (IDC) budget, which funds our foreign aid, and associated administration costs by 10 per cent, saving \$431.2 million over the forecast period. Aid to the Pacific, which makes up around 66 per cent of IDC funding, will be fully protected, reflecting the importance of our closest neighbours and strongest interests.

National will also make MFAT more efficient. When other government agencies found savings in the 2026 round of baseline reductions, MFAT was exempt. National will now bring MFAT into line with the rest of the public sector, catching up through a 2 per cent baseline expenditure reduction that saves a further \$45.6 million over the forecast period.

The Prevention Package will be funded through existing baseline health funding and future operating allowances. Under National, the expanded breast screening age, free cervical screening for all women aged 25 to 69, and a lung cancer screening pilot are already funded, and National is committed to protecting that funding and delivering these services for New Zealanders.

Fiscal impact (\$m)	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	Total	Capex cost (\$m)
Pharmac budget uplift	151.0	151.0	151.0	151.0	604.0	0.0
Unlocking CAR-T cell therapy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0
Bowel screening	42.2	50.9	46.7	38.5	178.3	16.5
Foreign aid reduction	(107.8)	(107.8)	(107.8)	(107.8)	(431.2)	0.0
Net cost	85.4	94.1	89.9	81.7	351.1	41.5

Independent modelling from Erasmus University Rotterdam shows how demand for bowel screening and colonoscopies changes as the programme expands. Costs rise to a peak in the earlier years and then fall because the screening age drops by two years every year until it reaches 50 in 2029, bringing hundreds of thousands of people into the programme who have not previously been screened. A person's first screen is the one most likely to find a problem that needs a follow-up colonoscopy, so the earlier years are the busiest

and most expensive. Extra colonoscopies are funded in the early years so that hospital waiting lists don't grow while more people join the programme. Over the same period, FIT for Symptomatic is being rolled out nationwide. It gives people with bowel symptoms a simple test they can do at home, which shows whether they actually need a colonoscopy. This reduces the overall need for colonoscopies, so fewer extra ones are required over time and costs fall.

Funded from baselines (\$m)	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	Total
Prostate cancer screening pilot	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	6.4