

4 October 2021

CANGO urges Government: Stop “shrugging your shoulders” at cancer deaths

The Alliance of Cancer NGOs (CANGO) is calling on Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to urgently adopt the same hard-line, “zero tolerance” approach to cancer deaths that she is to COVID.

“Recently, the Prime Minister made it clear that a principled approach to COVID means zero tolerance for preventable deaths,” Peter Fergusson, Chair of CANGO, said. “Why wouldn’t we take the same approach to the 10,000 cancer deaths we have each year in Aotearoa New Zealand, so many of which are preventable?”

The Prime Minister’s declaration came in response to a media question during the September 23 COVID briefing about what is an acceptable level of deaths from COVID.

“I’ve always said that I don’t want a situation in New Zealand where we simply shrug our shoulders and accept that we have an infectious disease that takes lives when that can be prevented,” the Prime Minister replied. “That has been our principled approach all the way through and that hasn’t changed. And so that’s why you’ll hear, in the way that we’re talking, we want to continue to take that zero tolerance approach.”

CANGO believes that if the zero tolerance principle applied to cancer, the number of cancer deaths could be drastically reduced. “The Government will spend whatever is needed to prevent COVID causing the devastation that cancer wreaks on Kiwi families every single day,” said Fergusson. “Furthermore the learnings from New Zealand’s COVID response should be applied to cancer, specifically equitable access for Maori & Pacifica,” said Fergusson.

We’ve seen what New Zealand can do when we put our hearts, minds and budgets into it. So our hope is that the PM and Government will not shrug their shoulders, and will do for cancer what we’ve done for COVID. Let’s have the same zero tolerance approach to the 50% of cancers that are preventable, driving and investing in the early detection of cancers, which will save thousands of lives a year at substantially less cost to the Government and economy than is being spent on COVID.

The key priorities that the collective CANGO group have identified to Government are captured in the attached Manifesto (provided to the Minister of Health last year). These issues reflect a roadmap towards ensuring the world class cancer care that New Zealanders deserve.

<https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/latest-updates/covid-19-media-conference-23-september-2021/>

