

MEDIA RELEASE

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Patient organisations declare medicines crisis in New Zealand

MyLifeMatters- a collective of patient advocate organisations representing more than 1 million patients with cancers, rare disorders, diabetes, and other life limiting conditions have today launched a campaign to tackle the issue of investment and timely access to new and breakthrough medicines for the people of New Zealand.

Patient Voice Aotearoa Chair, Malcolm Mulholland says “Kiwis are one diagnosis away from having to move to Australia to access medicines that are publicly funded elsewhere in the OECD. We are in a crisis and our politicians need to act.”

Medicines are a core part of the backbone of healthcare, enabling patients to lead healthy and productive lives, however New Zealand remains at the bottom of the OECD without access to many medicines that are already part of standard international treatment regimes.

New Zealanders’ ability to access new and breakthrough medicines lags well behind other comparable OECD countries, with New Zealand dead last, ranking 32nd in a list of 32 OECD countries for public funding of medicines. The recent Medicines Landscape 2022/23 report is a stark reminder of just how big this issue is.¹

In April 2023, there were 109² applications waiting for funding on Pharmac’s Options for Investment List, with many medicines languishing for an average wait time of 7.7 years and longer. Compounding these concerns is the investment hole in the health budget that demonstrates the Government’s lack of commitment to reducing time to access new and breakthrough medicines as early as possible.

The additional funding provided to Pharmac by the Government to fund new medicines or widen access was only provided for in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 years. To maintain access the same list of funded medicines, an additional \$181 million dollars is needed, and this **does not include funding for any new medicines. This could mean no new medicines will be funded until there is a commitment from Government to do so.** The Treasury has already warned the Government twice in the Budget Economic and Fiscal Update (BEFU) about the funding which is missing from the health budget from 2024 onwards.³

The issues MyLifeMatters are highlighting need to be addressed are:

1. **Timely access to new and breakthrough medicines:** New Zealand’s Government must expedite pathways for evaluating and approving these treatments which can significantly improve patient outcomes, survival rates, and help to reduce the pressure on New Zealand’s overburdened health system.

¹ [Medicines New Zealand landscape report 2022/2023.](#)

² <https://pharmac.govt.nz/medicine-funding-and-supply/the-funding-process/priority-lists/>

³ <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-05/befu23.pdf> page 90
<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-05/befu22.pdf> page 80

2. **Pharmac's role and funding:** Pharmac plays a pivotal role in the management of medicines access, with decisions primarily driven by costs and little consideration given to societal factors. There also needs to be an urgent and clear plan to implement the findings of the Pharmac Review to address the significant shortcomings in Pharmac's performance.
3. **Financial burden on patients:** many Kiwis are struggling to privately fund the medications they need, forced to leave New Zealand, or go without the treatment they desperately need. This burden is particularly hard on vulnerable communities, leading to adverse health outcomes, and reduced quality of life.

"Our most vulnerable are suffering and dying prematurely, and the Government needs to both stop being so cost-focused around medicines, and also better value patients wellbeing and their families welfare. If the rest of the OECD can do it, so can we." says Theresa Zame, a stage-four lung cancer patient who is self-funding her medicine that she needs for a productive, better quality of life.

As the collective group MyLifeMatters is calling for:

- Increased investment and timely access to medicines to cater to the growing healthcare needs of the New Zealand population, and to keep up with the rest of the OECD.
- Patient-focused wellbeing benefits being included in decision-making processes on medicines investment by the New Zealand Government.

Together, MyLifeMatters believes it's possible to shape a future where all Kiwis have timely and equitable access to medicines as early as possible, politicians must act now.

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Media contact:

Malcolm Mulholland (Ngāti Kahungunu)
Chair
Patient Voice Aotearoa
m: 022 097 5899
e: 76mulholland@gmail.com

If you would like to speak to someone local in the community, please get in touch.
For more detailed information please refer to the MyLifeMatters media kit.

About Patient Voice Aotearoa

Patient Voice Aotearoa (PVA) is a collective of patients, caregivers, whānau, advocates and charitable organisations, campaigning together for the rights of New Zealand patients. PVA aims to provide a unified patient voice to help inform better health policy and improve access to healthcare.