



2026 Election Manifesto

**Cancer is our
biggest killer.
But it doesn't
have to be.**



1 in 3

New Zealanders will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime

The cost of cancer to our communities, our economy and our health system is growing. But a third of cancers cases can be prevented, and many can be detected early enough to treat successfully.

The evidence is clear. The solutions are ready. This manifesto sets out five actions that will save lives, reduce inequity and ease pressure on the health system.



The scale of the challenge

Cancer affects most families across Aotearoa New Zealand (New Zealand) at some point — as a diagnosis, a loss, or months of uncertainty through treatment. It is our country's biggest cause of death and one of the largest and fastest growing burdens on our health system. Understanding its scale is the first step to addressing it.

81 people will be diagnosed today. Around 10,500 New Zealanders will die from cancer this year. Without action, new diagnoses are projected to rise from over 30,000 in 2025 to more than 45,000 by 2044.

These are not abstract numbers. They are parents, partners, grandparents and friends in communities across New Zealand.

And yet — around a third of all cancer cases in New Zealand could be prevented. The tools exist. The evidence is there. Acting on that evidence is also sound economic policy: prevention and early detection cost far less than treating cancers caught late. Every dollar invested in the right place today reduces pressure on hospitals, specialist services and families further down the line.

Cancer does not strike equally. Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, those living rurally and those in communities of high deprivation bear a disproportionate burden. This is because of inequity — in access, opportunity and the systems designed to protect us all. Every recommendation in this manifesto is designed to help address that, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi through genuine partnership and systems built to support Māori hauora.

New Zealand is falling behind countries that have chosen to act. Australia is on track to eliminate cervical cancer by 2035. Australia spends significantly more on skin cancer prevention campaigns alone — around five times as much on a per-person basis. Bowel screening in Australia is available from age 45; England and Australia are rolling out national lung cancer screening programmes. The gap is widening and it shows in our survival.

New Zealand has five clear opportunities to change this trajectory over the next three years. Each opportunity is evidence-based, publicly supported and with clear next steps. Each will save lives, reduce inequity and makes economic sense.

81

people diagnosed every day

10,500

deaths each year

1:3

cases are preventable

Our five key actions

1.

Fully fund cervical screening and deliver on the 90% HPV immunisation target by 2030

Cervical cancer is now preventable. Australia is on track to eliminate it by 2035. With the right investment over the next term, we can eliminate cervical cancer too.

2.

Invest \$5.5 million a year to deliver a national skin cancer prevention and early detection programme

New Zealand has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the world. More than 90% can be prevented and nearly all are treatable when detected early. Every dollar invested returns \$11.90 in savings.

3.

Fund a lung cancer screening programme. Begin rolling it out over the next three years

Nearly half of lung cancers in New Zealand are identified through emergency admissions – this is too late. Screening reduces mortality by more than 20%.

4.

Lower the bowel screening starting age

Caught early, nearly 90% of people survive bowel cancer. Caught late, survival drops to 10–15%.

5.

Protect children and families from the commercial drivers of cancer

Reduce nicotine in tobacco. Restrict unhealthy food and drink marketing to children. Remove alcohol marketing from all media.



Eliminate cervical cancer

“I want a future for my teenage daughters where no one in New Zealand dies from this now preventable cancer. Eliminating cervical cancer is achievable and an amazing opportunity that we should take advantage of. It’s within easy reach and seems like a no-brainer, why wouldn’t we do this?”

ALICE HYATT, 45, CERVICAL CANCER SURVIVOR, NELSON

Alice speaks for many. The Cancer Society hears from cervical cancer survivors and their whānau regularly — they want to know why, in 2026, we are not on track to eliminate cancer. The gap between what is possible and what is happening – is a gap in investment and commitment. We have the tools to close the gap.

New Zealand has committed to the World Health Organization’s global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer. Australia has already reported zero cases in women under 25, showing high HPV immunisation coverage works.

The HPV vaccine is one of the world’s first cancer prevention vaccines. With it we can protect today’s children from not only cervical cancer, but five other types of cancer (vaginal and vulval cancers, anal cancer, throat cancer, penile cancer).

We are falling well short: only 59% of New Zealand children 15 and under are fully immunised, against a target of 90%.

Cervical screening is the only national cancer screening programme not fully funded in New Zealand. A fully funded programme would cost approximately \$21 million a year. For context, HPV-related cancers cost approximately \$35 million per year in treatment alone. Preventing cancer is not only the right thing to do — it is demonstrably cheaper than treating it at a later stage.

This is a cancer we can eliminate in our lifetime. The tools exist. The evidence is clear. What is needed now is the commitment to act.

WHAT WE’RE CALLING FOR

- **Fully fund the national cervical screening programme**
- **Commit to fund and implement the National Cervical Cancer Elimination Action Plan**
- **Switch to a single-dose HPV immunisation schedule as soon as legislation allows — WHO recommends it and research shows it is equally effective**
- **Increase funding for HPV immunisation awareness campaigns**



59%

children immunised
(target: 90%)

\$21M

cost of fully funded screening
programme per year

6

cancers could be
prevented or eliminated

Fund a national skin cancer prevention and early detection programme



“Sunburn, and the future cancer risk it brings, is preventable, and at relatively low cost compared to the cost of future cancers.”

ROB, CONSULTANT RADIOLOGIST AND CONCERNED PARENT

Rob’s experience as a Consultant Radiologist and a parent captures a wider truth: sun safety in New Zealand is inconsistent, and young people bear the consequences. Sunburn rates remain above 80% among young adults each summer. New Zealand has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the world, and the economic cost is substantial — nearly \$500 million a year in treatment, projected to reach \$700 million by 2050.

More than 90% of skin cancers are preventable, and nearly all are treatable if caught early. We are spending enormous sums treating a disease we could prevent.

An investment of just \$5.5 million a year would avert 418,000 skin cancers and save up to \$700 million in treatment costs over 25 years.

This investment returns \$11.90 for every dollar spent. The Skin Cancer Primary Prevention and Early Detection Strategy 2024–2028 provides a ready roadmap — it simply needs funding.

87% of New Zealanders support a comprehensive sun safety programme. The public is ready. Government commitment and investment is what is missing. New Zealanders should be able to enjoy the outdoors without paying for it with their health.

WHAT WE’RE CALLING FOR

- **Establish a coordinated national skin cancer programme modelled on Australia’s evidence-based skin cancer prevention approach**
- **Fund and deliver a sustained annual summer public awareness campaign**
- **Sustainable investment in the SunSmart Schools Programme**
- **Establish and fund a mandatory national training programme for GPs in skin cancer early detection**

Fund a lung cancer screening programme

Begin rolling it out over the next three years

“My mother had been to the doctor multiple times, yet her symptoms were never fully understood. If our whānau hadn’t pushed for her to be seen by a specialist, she wouldn’t be here today. She has carried the lifelong effects of lung cancer, losing a lung, and the harsh toll of treatment. Her experience shows why a strong lung cancer programme is essential; catching it earlier could have made a profound difference to her life and to ours.”

PANIA COOTE, WHĀNAU MEMBER AND CANCER SOCIETY
MANA WHAKAHAERE

Stories like this are not uncommon. Nearly half of all lung cancers in New Zealand are diagnosed through emergency admissions, by which point the disease is often advanced and treatment is far less effective. Screening changes this.

Lung cancer is New Zealand’s deadliest cancer, claiming around 1800 lives each year.

For Māori, the inequity is significant: Māori are more than three times as likely as Non-Māori to develop lung cancer, and 30% more likely to die from it once diagnosed.

Wāhine Māori have the highest lung cancer incidence of any group in New Zealand. International evidence shows screening among people at high risk can reduce lung cancer mortality by more than 20%. England and Australia are rolling out national programmes.

The research to inform a New Zealand model is underway, the groundwork is there.

WHAT WE’RE CALLING FOR

- **Fund a lung cancer screening programme and begin a staged rollout for all eligible people by 2028**
- **Integrate smoking cessation support into the screening programme**
- **Ensure equitable access to diagnosis and high-quality treatment across all populations**



20%

reduction in mortality
with screening

NEARLY

50%

of cases identified via
emergency admissions

Lower the bowel screening starting age

The stage at which bowel cancer is caught is one of the most important determinants of outcome.

Detected early, nearly 90% of people survive bowel cancer. Detected late, survival drops to 10–15%. Screening will improve those odds.

New Zealand has one of the world's highest bowel cancer rates. It is our second most diagnosed cancer and second biggest cause of cancer death. Yet screening currently begins at age 58 — well behind international best practice.

Catching cancer early is not just smart — it is an act of equity. Lowering the screening starting age to 50 means more New Zealanders, especially Māori and Pacific peoples, get the chance to have their cancer found early.



Protect families from commercial drivers of cancer



A. Reduce nicotine in tobacco products to non-addictive levels

Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in New Zealand resulting in over 2000 cancer deaths each year. Smoking causes at least 16 types of cancer.

Nobody starts smoking intending to become addicted to nicotine. This is not about telling people how to live — it is about removing the addiction that traps them.

Modelling shows that if denicotinisation and other smokefree measures were implemented, Smokefree status would have been achieved by 2025 for non-Māori and 2027 for Māori, and by 2040 around 8,000 lives would be saved.

70% of people who smoke or recently quit support this measure.

B. Protect children from unhealthy food and drink marketing

New Zealand children are exposed to unhealthy food and drink marketing an average of 68 times a day. This is not accidental but the result of deliberate strategies that target children before they can make informed choices, shaping their eating behaviours and preferences.

Socioeconomic conditions, food insecurity, and environments that normalise unhealthy food make a healthy diet or weight difficult and inequitable for many children.

Maintaining a healthy weight across the life course is critical, as obesity causes at least 13 cancers in adulthood, including breast and bowel cancer.

We must pass a law that protects children from unhealthy food and drink marketing. Countries such as Norway, Chile and the United Kingdom are already putting children's wellbeing before profit. New Zealand must do the same.

C. Remove alcohol marketing from all media

Alcohol is New Zealand's most harmful drug and there is no safe level when it comes to cancer. Alcohol causes at least seven types of cancer and was responsible for an estimated 1250 cancer cases in New Zealand in 2018.

Children are exposed to more than five alcohol advertisements a day. The more children are exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to start drinking earlier and heavier. This puts them at risk of cancer in adulthood.

We must commit to supporting young people to live healthy lives by putting children's health and wellbeing before industry profits. This means strengthening the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act to remove alcohol marketing from all media.

Strong national and international evidence shows that addressing alcohol marketing is one of the most effective ways to reduce how much people drink and lower alcohol-related harms like cancer.

What the Cancer Society brings to this work

The Cancer Society is New Zealand's leading non-governmental organisation working to reduce the incidence and impact of cancer.

We work across prevention, early detection, patient and whānau support, research and advocacy — from our national office to local offices embedded in communities across the country.



Our five key actions are informed by health experts, our sector, researchers and communities affected by cancer. This manifesto is deeply grounded in driving down the incidence and impact of cancer in New Zealand working towards a future free from cancer. This is why we have focused on prevention and early detection asks.

We recognise decision-makers are weighing many competing priorities in a fiscally constrained environment. That is precisely why these actions have been chosen: each has a strong evidence base, a clear economic case and meaningful public support.

These recommendations are not the limit of our ambitions. We believe everyone with cancer should have access to timely, high-quality care and support.

The Cancer Society is deeply concerned about the state of cancer treatment and care in New Zealand. We continue to provide support in our communities as well as advocating for better services including National Travel Assistance and access to medicines. We are working in all areas of the cancer continuum at both national and local levels.

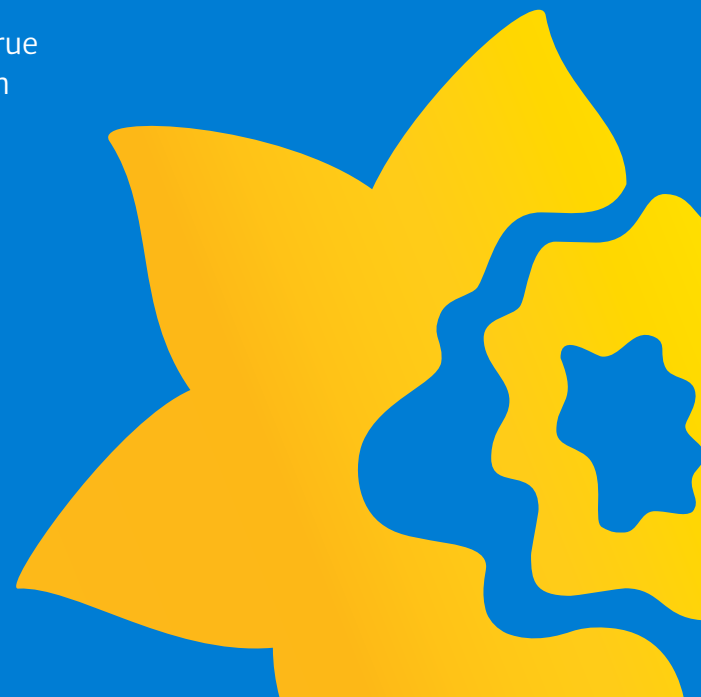
The five actions outlined here present clear near-term opportunities to reduce cancer's toll on New Zealanders and the health system.

The evidence is clear.

The solutions are proven.

The economic case is sound.

What is needed is bold leadership, unwavering focus and meaningful investment. By acting now, decision-makers will save lives, reduce health inequities, and ease pressure on the health system. This is a chance to deliver a true legacy – taking us closer to a future free from cancer for all New Zealanders.



Our vision

Working together towards a future free from cancer

Te mahi tahi mō te anamata mate pukupuku kore