



More courage needed from our political parties—reviewing our election series

18 September 2023

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Summary

To make an informed decision this election, voters need to know where political parties stand on issues that impact the health and wellbeing of our population.

In this article we review our “Where do the parties stand” series, in which we put a range of public health issues to the five parties currently in parliament. We surveyed the parties about their policies on long-term planning and catastrophic risk, tax reform, water quality, Māori health inequity, and transport.

Here we summarise each of the articles as well as flagging relevant policy announcements that came after the publication of some articles.

On some of the issues there are important differences between the parties, but we generally found that the excessively narrow and short-term nature of many of the proposed policies are not up to the challenges the country faces.

Our overall verdict: More courage is needed from our political parties to address health, equity and sustainability challenges and seize opportunities to improve public health.

Our elected representatives are constantly making decisions on policy and legislation that impact the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders. To do that effectively, they need to be informed by research and evidence which drives good policy solutions.¹ The Public Health Communication Centre’s main aim is to help provide that evidence to decision-makers and the public.

Public health covers a wide range of issues, so we have kept the survey to a selection of specific topics that speak to the vision of the parties and their policies to protect the health of the people and the environment here in Aotearoa.

In some areas, new policy announcements have been made since publication. We identify these announcements in the relevant Briefing introductions below.

These issues were chosen because we think there is good evidence for change which aligns with the values of many New Zealanders around supporting health and wellbeing; improving fairness and equity; and enhancing the long-term quality and sustainability of our environment. These themes were introduced in the [Briefing series](#) we used to launch the PHCC in February and March this year.²

The overall message from the survey is that political parties are generally favouring excessively narrow, short-term policies that fail to address the full complexity of the issues the country is facing. There also seems to be a general lack of evidence-informed policymaking and an excessive defaulting to ideological positions. In the case of right-leaning parties, some proposed actions will reverse hard-won policies that aim to protect the environment, public health, and health equity.

By contrast, our expectation of Governments is that they will identify the major medium to long-term threats and opportunities for Aotearoa and adjust their policy settings appropriately.

An irony of this entire election series is that we will need to repeat it every three years, a political cycle that tends to reinforce short-term thinking. One of the reforms that would help shift us towards greater long-term thinking would be a longer election term (4-5 years).³

Our overall verdict from this election series: More courage is needed from our political parties to set Aotearoa's strategic direction toward long-term thinking on health, equity, and environmental sustainability.

ELECTION 2023

Where do the parties stand?



Where do the parties stand? - a series overview

Below we summarise and link to the articles in the series.



Long-term thinking & catastrophic risks

Will the next Government be ready for the future? In this, the first in the series, [Nick Wilson and colleagues analyse the responses](#) to our pre-election survey about policies to strengthen the country's resilience to long-term global risks and the parties' intentions to introduce legislation around global catastrophic risk management. Their conclusions:

"NZ political parties do not generally express a strong commitment to building long-term thinking into their policy-making processes."

A blog about this article had a summary of the responses in its title: "[Where do NZ political parties stand on long-term and catastrophic risk? Survey answer: nowhere.](#)"



Protecting water sources and drinking water quality

How proactive will the next Government be at protecting water sources? When nearly 800,000 New Zealanders are drinking water that is not demonstratively safe, [we asked the parties what they will do](#). Given the risks to water quality from the current intensity of land use and the additional pressure from climate change, the lack of vision from the two main parties was striking, write Marnie Prickett and colleagues.

"Protecting the quality of water for the health of communities and the natural environment requires an understanding of the interactions between land use, infrastructure, climate

change, and governance by central and regional agencies. Too narrow a focus from the incoming Government will mean more risk for communities from water-borne disease and hazardous contaminants in water."

New policy announcements subsequent to our survey

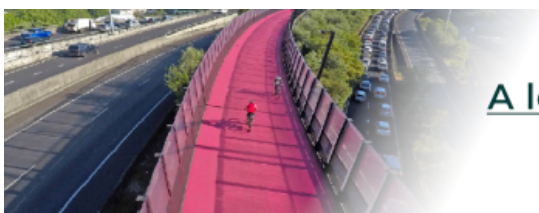
Since our initial survey of the parties, National and ACT announced further water policies that would reduce existing protections for drinking water and go against the recommendations of the inquiry into the Havelock North outbreak.

The ACT Party announced it would remove Te Mana o te Wai, a decision-making framework that requires councils to prioritise the health of waterways and drinking water, before considering commercial interests.

The National Party, under its agricultural policy, would remove or minimise a number of policies introduced to reduce the impact of farming practices (like intensive winter grazing) on waterways. It also announced it "will amend the proposed National Environmental Standard for drinking water to avoid excessive compliance requirements for small providers of 30 connections or fewer".

Strengthening the National Environmental Standard for Drinking Water was a recommendation of the Havelock North Inquiry. Among highlighting other weaknesses in the standards, its report read, "expert panel and submitters were adamant that the size of a drinking water supply should not determine the level of first barrier protection. The Inquiry firmly accepts this view. All consumers should have the benefits and protections of the NES Regulations."

Read more in this [update from Marnie Prickett on Newsroom](#).



A low carbon, healthy transport system

How will the next Government address the challenge of moving to a low-carbon healthy transport system? [Caroline Shaw and colleagues looked at the party responses](#) to questions on e-bike subsidies for low-income adults, half-price fares for public transport and policies to move to more sustainable and health-promoting transport.

"While some parties have policies that represent a good start at addressing transport harms and promoting healthy, equitable and low carbon transport, other parties are promoting policies that are harmful to population and planetary health and will widen inequity."

New policy announcements subsequent to our survey

The National Party will end funding for Labour's 'Community Connect' programme of additional public transport subsidies in Budget 2023. This effectively means it will revoke funding free public transport for children under its tax plan while doubling the price of fares for youth under 25. National's [Transport for the Future](#) policy announcement includes new roads and a rapid transit network for Auckland while scrapping the Let's Get Wellington Moving programme in Wellington in favour of a new Mt Victoria tunnel.

The Labour Government released a [10-year transport plan](#) for consultation prioritising 14 new roads and public transport links

The ACT Party says as part of its [transport plan](#) it will get rid of the Clean Car Standard, scrap the Emissions Reduction Plan, reverse speed limit reductions, and build more roads with public/private partnerships.



Addressing Māori health inequity

What will be the fate of Te Aka Whai Ora (the Māori Health Authority) and other policies to address Māori health inequity under the next Government? Māori health expert Teresa Wall [puts the survey responses from the parties into context](#) following the two major reviews of our health system laying out Māori health inequity.

"It is disquieting to note that all of the political parties' responses to addressing the enduring and unacceptably large inequities that Māori experience appear to be very light on detail."



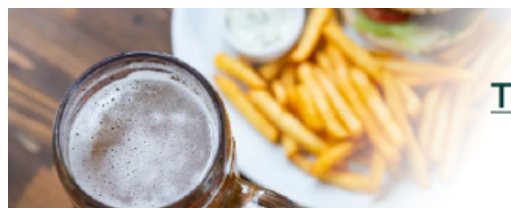
Taxes to protect health and reduce inequity

What will the next Government do to make our tax system fairer? [Nick Wilson and colleagues look at the responses](#) to our survey which they point out, only touches the surface of a large and complex topic.

"Potentially large income tax reductions for low-income New Zealanders are being proposed by only two parties (Te Pāti Māori and the Greens)."

And in terms of taxes on pollutants:

"While all parties support an element of polluter pays for addressing climate change (eg, the Emissions Trading Scheme), there was mixed support for reform around this scheme and very little consideration of other polluter pays taxes to protect health and the environment."



Tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food

Our colleagues at Health Coalition Aotearoa (HCA) also [conducted a political survey](#) on the priority prevention for tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, and public health infrastructure.

Tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy food are responsible for almost a third of Aotearoa New Zealand's health burden. HCA rated political parties' support for the 12 prevention priorities to reduce harm identified in its [Prevention Brief](#). Boyd Swinburn and colleagues analyse the results.

"In general, the politically left-leaning parties were supportive or very supportive of the HCA's prevention policies, whereas the right-leaning parties were unsupportive – from equivocal to strongly unsupportive. This survey has shown how support for strongly evidence-based and expert-agreed policy priorities is heavily overridden by political ideologies."

Further analyses of political party policies

For more on where the parties stand, check out these additional resources examining party policy in the lead-up to the election.

- The Science Media Centre has conducted an election Q&A with political parties. In the public health space, they ask the parties questions about [climate change](#), [drinking water](#) and [Covid-19](#).
- [RNZ has collated party policy statements](#) across a range of sectors, including health and disability, transport, housing, tax, and climate.
- Stuff.co.nz has conducted a comprehensive survey of party positions [on 15 separate climate-related issues](#), such as electric vehicles, managed retreat, and international obligations.

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Public Health Expert Briefing (ISSN 2816-1203)

Source URL:

<https://www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/more-courage-needed-our-political-parties-reviewing-our-election-series>