

Concluding the Public Health Solutions Series

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Co-editors: Cristina Cleghorn , Caroline Shaw



Over the last five weeks, Public Health Expert blog has published ten invited blogs on the best public health interventions the Government can put in place to reduce pressure on the health system.

As highlighted in the media this week, the health system “remains under massive strain” and with the relaxing of covid rules this issue is unlikely to ease in the near future. The ongoing demands of Covid-19, long covid and deferred routine care will continue to place untenable pressure on the health system. A health system which is also experiencing health workforce shortages. It is easy to see how this ongoing strain on the health system will lead to worsening health and widening health inequities. Policies that are designed to prevent ill health and reduce health inequities are more important than ever.

This Public Health Expert blog series has illustrated that there is much we could do to reduce the demand for healthcare in Aotearoa. These blogs have presented evidence of policies that can improve overall health and wellbeing with impact in the short to medium term. They have outlined policies that affect alcohol, unhealthy food and tobacco consumption, transport behaviour, access to adequate housing, injury prevention, mental health, cancer and infectious diseases with one blog focused on policies for children.

This is a broad view of public health and provides dozens of complementary policies for the Government to consider. Policies identified by the authors that would have immediate impacts on demand for healthcare include low traffic neighbourhoods; applying pandemic

infrastructure to address other infections; lifting income support; reformulation of processed food; improving building standards; drug and alcohol legislation reform, alcohol taxes, and policies included in the Smokefree Bill, among others.

The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated that the Government can act quickly and decisively in a crisis. The Omicron peak has passed and it is now time to refocus on public health policies that prevent wider ill-health, reduce inequities and preserve our healthcare system and workers.

Finally, we wanted to thank all the authors who enthusiastically contributed to this blog series, to Luke Pilkinton-Ching and others for the images used and to Julie Cooper for all her work getting these blogs published.

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Image by Luke Pilkinton-Ching, University of Otago Wellington

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