



Draft Recommendations of the Independent Electoral Review

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATION
CENTRE SUBMISSION

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About the Public Health Communication Centre

The [Public Health Communication Centre](#) (PHCC) is an independently funded organisation dedicated to increasing the reach and impact of public health research in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Centre has a range of public health and science communication experts, and the Director is Prof Michael Baker.

We are hosted by the Department of Public Health at the University of Otago Wellington.

The PHCC identifies and promotes opportunities to improve public health, equity, and sustainability, and communicate these ideas effectively to the public, media, and decision-makers.

The PHCC plays a key role in highlighting new evidence and important scientific advances in public health.

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Our submission looks at five draft recommendations from the Independent Electoral Review.

- **R10. Holding a referendum on the parliamentary term, supported by a well-resourced information campaign (including dedicated engagement with Māori communities and leaders).**
- **R17. Lowering the voting age to 16.**
- **R53. Permitting only registered electors to make donations and loans to political parties and individual candidates.**
- **R55. Limiting the total amount a registered elector may give by way of donations and loans to each political party and its candidates to \$30,000 per electoral cycle**
- **R56. Reducing the amount that can be donated anonymously to \$500.**

Supporting moves to encourage long-term thinking in policy-making

The PHCC strongly supports the recommendations to:

- **hold a referendum on the parliamentary term,**
- **lower the voting age to 16.**

Governments need to strengthen long-term thinking. Both these recommendations would help governments look more to the future. They would lengthen politicians' horizons, enable them to focus more on major policy areas that are less amenable to short-term fixes, and motivate them to work harder to develop policy that protects those living in decades to come.

Short-term thinking and policymaking leads to the neglect of multiple critical policy areas with major long-term implications for society (e.g., climate change, housing provision, responding to changing demography). These policy areas include important public health problems particularly long-term disease prevention and

mounting environmental health concerns where the burden of health impacts falls on those living in coming decades (Wilson, 2023).

Short-term policy horizons also undermine NZ's capacity to respond to the threat of catastrophic and existential risks, including those from nuclear war, pandemics from bioengineered organisms, ecological degradation, out-of-control artificial intelligence (AI) and climate change.

A disproportionately high amount of our present three-year term is typically focused on electioneering by politicians rather than work on policy development. This reduces the amount of time available to explore complex issues and develop robust policy. This is particularly likely for long-term issues where the results of policy implementation are unlikely to manifest over the short term. The result is less effective policy development and drafting of Bills, often with a lack of implementation planning and focus on evaluation.

We note that NZ is a relative outlier amongst OECD countries in its short three-year electoral term.

Lowering the voting age to 16 should also encourage a longer-term horizon to political decision making. Young people, particularly in New Zealand, are likely to be more interested in addressing longer term issues that have major implications for their future such as climate change (Prendergast et al., 2021). Lowering the voting age will mean younger New Zealanders have more influence on elections and political decision-making and make safeguarding their futures more salient when politicians are making decisions.

In addition new research from Scotland shows young people given the vote from age 16 are not only more likely to continue voting as they get older, but do so in higher numbers which means a positive long-term consequence for turnout and engagement (Eichhorn, 2023).

If the voting public is engaged and representative of the electorate, this will hold government and politicians to account and lead to better democratic outcomes for all New Zealanders for years to come.

Supporting fairer and more transparent political financing

The PHCC strongly supports the recommendations that support transparency in political financing.

- **Only enrolled voters should be able to make donations to politicians (not companies, unions, and other groups that can't vote), the amount that a person can donate to each party and its candidates should be capped at \$30,000 per election cycle, and the amount that can be donated anonymously should be lowered.**

There is evidence internationally that large donations from individuals or corporates “pose a risk to democracy because they may allow the giver to obtain undue influence over the political process” (Leong, 2017).

In our areas of expertise (including products that harm health such as tobacco, alcohol and junk food), we are well aware the impact of corporate power and its ability to influence political decision-making, both internationally and in NZ. This undue level of influence is undemocratic and can even be a form of soft corruption or “trading in influence” (Rashbrooke, 2022, p. 16). Some of these issues are well covered in the literature (eg, (Garton et al., 2022)) and this NZ piece by the [Health Coalition Aotearoa](#) (Health Coalition Aotearoa).

New Zealand is “increasingly an outlier” with its weak regulation of political donations. Nearly three quarters of New Zealanders distrust the present system of funding political parties (Rashbrooke, 2022). It is time for a change to make political financing transparent.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit.

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