



# Public health priorities in this election year

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Michael Baker, John Kerr, Adele Broadbent

**PUBLIC HEALTH**

**PRIORITIES SERIES**

# Summary

In this article we review our Public Health Priorities Series, which highlights a range of public health challenges linked by a need for decision-makers to act. These are all areas where we as a society have a choice about the path we take. In some critical areas, such as New Zealand's new smoke-free policies, we are world leaders. This illustrates what can be achieved by the wonderful fusion of public health evidence and progressive Government policy. The other issues highlight stark choices in areas such as creating a more or less fair society and a more or less healthy environment. A unifying theme is the need to radically change our framing towards long-term thinking in all areas of policy making. Our children and future generations will thank us for thinking of them.

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This is an election year. We don't know who will be in government come October. But we do know that the decisions made by those in power will have wide-ranging effects on the health and well-being of all New Zealanders and the long-term sustainability of our environment.

Highlighting research and evidence to help policymakers have a *positive effect* on public health is a key part of what the Public Health Communication Centre does, as we explain [in our launch article](#) introducing the Centre.

With that aim in mind, the PHCC has put out a Public Health Priorities Series to launch our new *Public Health Expert Briefing*. Across the series, authors lay out challenges and solutions for six key areas in public health united by the need for our decision-makers to act. The topics have been selected because they are areas where we as a society have a choice about the path we take. The list is not exhaustive; we will be covering many more public health issues in the coming months.

## Priorities series overview

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



The need for long-term thinking –  
Especially for preventing catastrophic risks

The series kicked off with Nick Wilson's article on the need for a long-term perspective to tackle public health issues and existential risks.

*"Short-term thinking leads to the neglect of multiple public health problems, particularly long-term disease prevention and mounting environmental health concerns where the burden falls on those living in coming decades."*

Nick and co-authors suggest several policy changes, including creating a new Risk

Commissioner role in government.

[Read more...](#)

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## Housing and urban regeneration in Aotearoa New Zealand

We need actions now to ensure all people have access to warm, dry, safe, affordable housing that they have reason to value. Philippa Howden-Chapman and co-authors highlight the complexity of Aotearoa's public housing system.

*"Despite the scale of Kāinga Ora's new builds and large-scale community regeneration, the housing system is now under considerable pressure, not only due to the ongoing supply shortfall, but sometimes due to the number of government organisations involved with different and sometimes conflicting institutional rules. Complicated funding and overlapping and unclear responsibilities lead to too many people struggling to find their way through the system to find a home."*

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## Breaking the inequity loop

Jason Gurney and Jonathan Koea draw key lessons from history highlighting the need for Māori leadership across all aspects of health.

*"The all-of-population approach has failed for more than a century to address Māori health inequalities. Government policy needs to accommodate tino rangatiratanga and allow Māori the resources and time to address our challenges. This includes supporting initiatives such as the Te Aka Whai Ora, the new Māori Health Authority."*

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## Smokefree Aotearoa – world-leading developments with profound public health implications

New Zealand's new smoke-free policies could inspire the rest of the world, writes Richard Edwards and his ASPIRE2025 colleagues. But only if we keep up the momentum to ensure they succeed.

*“The action plan could serve as a precedent and exemplar, thereby encouraging adoption of similar approaches in other countries.*

*“However, challenges remain as the action plan requires implementation of measures that have not been introduced at national level anywhere in the world, and the tobacco industry and its allies are likely to be determined opponents.”*

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## Tax policy reform: equity, fairness, and health

We need a far greater focus on taxing wealth if we are serious about tackling intergenerational inequalities and poverty, writes Louise Delaney.

*“Changing the tax system, in particular making use of wealth as a source of revenue, is also critical to ensuring government funding we need now and in the future, given the social, health and environmental challenges faced by Aotearoa New Zealand.”*

[Read more...](#)

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## When the first barrier fails: Strengthening protection for drinking water sources

Marnie Prickett and co-authors close the series with a call to bolster protection of our

drinking water. They highlight the preventable nitrate contamination in Waimate water last year as a clear example of how the current system is failing to keep our drinking water safe.

*“If suppliers cannot restrict land use and activities to protect source water, and there is a hands-off approach to ensuring regional councils meet their public health responsibilities, then our first barrier is failing. We need to strengthen responsibility and accountability in the system.”*

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## Wider coverage of the series

In addition to drawing several thousand readers to our new website, the articles in the series have also gained wider media attention. Selected examples of coverage include:

- Abridged versions of the series articles were republished as part of [Newsroom's Election 2023: Beyond the Soapbox](#).
- Jason Gurney and Jonathan Koea's article was [republished in full in the New Zealand Herald](#), and on [Te Ao Māori News](#).
- Michael Baker spoke with Bernard Hickey [about long-term planning on the Kākā podcast](#).
- Louise Delany was interviewed about tax policies by [Wallace Chapman on RNZ's The Panel](#) and by [Kerre Woodham on Newstalk ZB](#).
- Marnie Prickett was [interviewed by 95bfm](#) for their podcast series. Marnie's Newsroom article was also [republished in New Zealand Doctor](#).

## Looking ahead...

- *The Briefing* will publish further in-depth explainer articles that highlight opportunities to improve public health and the long-term sustainability of our environment.
- It will also publish articles about important and topical public health issues, such as commemorating the 3-year anniversary of the arrival of [Covid-19 in Aotearoa](#) and the release of the latest [synthesis report from the IPCC](#) this week. Upcoming articles will look at the emerging threat of invasive Group A Streptococcal infection and the health impact of recent flooding.
- There will also be more election-specific content to highlight where our political parties stand on critical public health issues and the choices available to voters.

## How you can be involved

- [Subscribe](#) to the Briefing
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- If you are a public health researcher or practitioner, consider [writing for the Briefing](#)

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