



17 September 2020

Launch of National Party Health Policy

The New Zealand Rural General Practice Network hosted National Party Spokesperson for Health Dr Shane Reti on Wednesday to announce the [National Party's health policy](#).

The Network's Chief Executive Dr Grant Davidson said choosing to host this announcement in our offices was a positive acknowledgement of the crisis that exists in the rural health workforce and the inequities in health outcomes for rural people, especially Māori.

Dr Reti announced a number of health sector policies, costed at \$788M over four years, which the National Party believes will improve health outcomes across New Zealand including cancer treatment, surgery wait times and access to medicines. Dr Reti believes these policies will help all New Zealanders “live well and access world class healthcare regardless of income background or postcode”.

Despite rejecting the idea of establishing a separate Māori Health Authority, Dr Reti confirmed that National will require DHBs to have a Māori Health Strategy which they report against to show how they are working to reduce inequities.

The Network is specifically interested in gauging the launched policies against its [rural health manifesto](#) which has a focus on three key areas of concern: workforce development, sustainable funding, and digital / connectivity.

Careful analysis of Dr Reti's announcement showed that National had been listening to advocates of rural health but as usual, in terms of impact in rural areas, the devil will be in the detail of implementation.

Under workforce development, Dr Reti committed \$192m to establishing a primary care navigator in every General Practice in New Zealand and commented that “primary care navigators will support General Practitioners by providing the additional time to talk to patients who need help accessing the right services”.

National also propose to establish a third graduate entry medical school which focuses on the training and retention of doctors in rural areas. The lack of detail about funding suggests that this will have to come from the education budget.

National will also support increase in scope for primary care practitioners allowing them to provide treatment in areas currently reserved for hospital specialists and with funding following where the work is actually done.

Unfortunately, while pharmacy is highlighted in this document, there is no mention of the need for increasing training for other health professionals such as the nursing workforce

and allied health to meet rural needs.

There was little mention of the critical shortage of funding for primary care, with many rural general practices struggling to survive under the current regime. The only budget allowance is \$5m per year promised for revising the payments for the very low income clients scheme. The provision for practices to increase co-payments for patient visits, to those able to pay the increased costs, is also being considered.

Digital and connectivity was identified as an opportunity, with a focus on an increase in funding for rural infrastructure and to provide support for care through video consultations and other technology. There was no specific extra money allocated for this in the health budget.

Dr Davidson commented “we would prefer to see more evidence of a concerted rural health plan, connected across Government Departments, to deal with the massive inequities for rural communities and the higher proportion of Māori in these”.

“After yesterday’s announcements from Dr Reti, we are keen to see the health policies from other political parties and extend the invitation for them to release these at the Network offices”.

“We have a wealth of specialist health knowledge among our membership. Our rural health professionals would be more than willing to work with any party to revise policy for better rural health outcomes and ensure that a rural proofing lens is applied”.

The Network has an opportunity for our members and others who are interested to join in our [Rural Health Political Panel](#) webinar on 29 September at 7:30pm. In this live webinar, health spokespeople from the four main political parties will present and debate how their parties will work to create healthier rural communities.

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