

Election Manifesto 2026

Heart and lung health for this generation and the next.

We are done being quiet

Every year, thousands of New Zealanders die from heart disease and respiratory illness. Yet our health system continues to ignore the real life impact. There has been a lack of investment in infrastructure and workforce for decades, and that needs to change.

The Cardiac and Respiratory Foundation NZ was created because these two crises are not separate. They share the same risk factors, the same neglected communities, and, too often, the same patients. It is time they shared the same political urgency.

The burden we can no longer accept

Together, cardiac and respiratory disease represent the heaviest preventable health burden this country carries. And it is not carried equally. Māori and Pacific communities bear a disproportionate share of this burden because of policy failures, poverty, and decades of underinvestment in prevention.

What we need now

The Cardiac and Respiratory Foundation NZ is calling on the next New Zealand Government to make heart and lung health a national priority from day one.

The decisions made in the next term of Government will determine whether New Zealand continues to fall behind, or whether we finally invest in prevention, early intervention, and equitable access to care.

These are practical, evidence-based actions that will save lives, reduce pressure on the health system, and improve quality of life for thousands of New Zealanders.

Why these two, and why now?

The heart and the lungs do not work in isolation, and neither should the people fighting for them. Nicotine destroys both. Air pollution damages both. Poor housing accelerates both. A political system that treats these as separate problems will continue to produce separate, insufficient answers.

We ask the next government to make one clear commitment: that heart and lung health is no longer an afterthought. The cost of inaction — in lives, in hospital beds, in lost productivity — is one New Zealand can no longer afford.

Detect lung cancer earlier

- Commit to funding a targeted national lung cancer screening programme through Budget 2027
- Ensure New Zealanders aged 50–74 who have ever smoked can access risk-based low-dose CT screening
- Prioritise early detection to improve survival rates and reduce long-term treatment costs

Fix access to medicines and devices

- Create a fit-for-purpose Pharmac assessment pathway for medical devices
- Fast-track medicines and devices already recommended in international cardiac and respiratory guidelines
- Ensure New Zealand patients can access proven treatments without unnecessary delays

Strengthen protection through vaccination

RSV (nirsevimab):

- Fast-track funding for all infants under one entering winter
- All high-risk children under two — including Māori, Pacific Peoples, and those with chronic respiratory, cardiac, or immune conditions

Shingles (herpes zoster):

- Fund the vaccine for patients with cardiovascular disease or COPD, where shingles poses serious and compounding risk

Clean up the air we breathe

- Fully enforce Healthy Homes Standards through independent accredited assessments and meaningful infringement fees for non-compliant landlords
- Ban unflued gas heaters indoors
- Reduce emissions from solid-fuel home heating and industry
- Introduce real-time national monitoring of NO₂, PM2.5, and PM10 pollutants
- Require indoor air quality monitoring in all schools and workplaces

Create a nicotine-free Aotearoa

New Zealand was once a world leader on smoke-free policy. We can be again.

- Ban vape flavours
- No new specialist vape retailers (SVR)
- Remove tobacco and vape sales from dairies, petrol stations, and supermarkets
- De-nicotinise cigarettes and reinstate the sinking lid on tobacco imports
- Invest in youth vaping education, including Train-the-Trainer programmes
- Fund public health campaigns linking quitting smoking and vaping to better heart and lung health
- Set a bold new national target that covers vapes, cigarettes and snus: Nicotine-Free Aotearoa

Build the workforce and infrastructure

- Require all tertiary hospitals to assess and increase dedicated cardiac bed capacity and cath lab staffing
- Target cardiology workforce investment in the Midland and Central regions to address inequitable access to care
- Establish a nationally maintained register of cardiac staff by region, led by Health New Zealand

**Heart disease is our biggest killer.
Respiratory illness is our most underfunded burden.**

Together, they are preventable, manageable, and worth fighting for. The Cardiac and Respiratory Foundation NZ will hold the next government to account on every single one of these commitments.