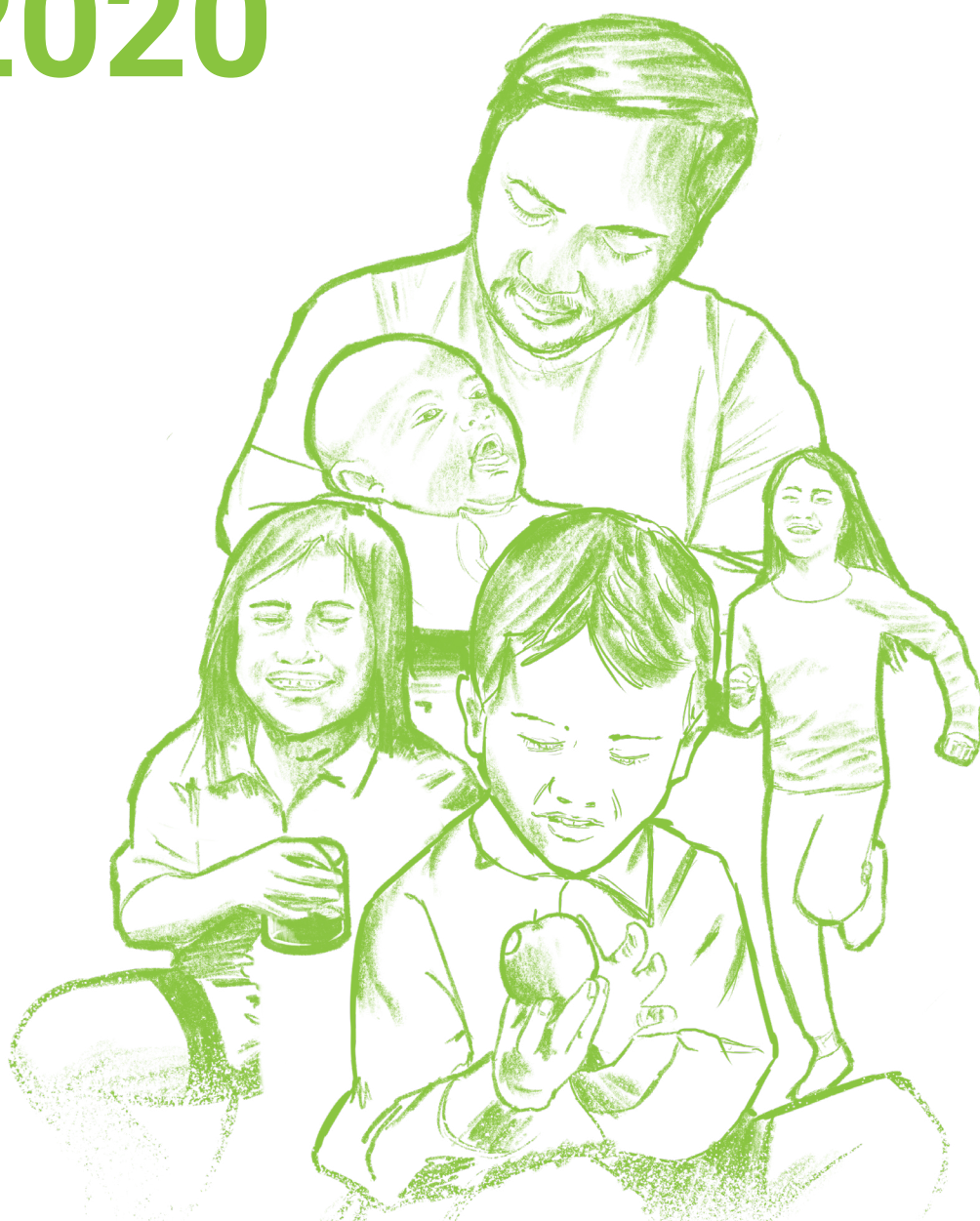




Health Coalition
Aotearoa

Prevention Brief

2020



**Better health. Fairer outcomes. Protected
children.**

The Prevention Promise

Aotearoa New Zealand can be a country in which all its citizens thrive. We can be a country where good health is expected, where whānau wellbeing is precious and all people are enabled to contribute to society throughout their life.

New Zealanders value fairness. We believe that all families should be empowered to make decisions around their own wellbeing. We value helping those who have had fewer advantages in their lives and we want to protect all of our children so they grow up to be healthy, happy contributors to society.

However, the playing field is not level and making healthy decisions isn't easy, especially for many poorer families who may be experiencing chronic stress. Unhealthy industries (tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food) take advantage of such families through aggressive marketing and lobbying tactics.

These families need our Government to stand up for them and shift the balance of power away from unhealthy industries and towards families, so that they can more easily make the healthy decisions for themselves.

The Prevention Promise is that stronger public health systems and tougher policies to reduce the harm from tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food will:

1. Improve health and wellbeing across the whole population.
2. Create fairer outcomes for Māori, Pacific, poorer households and other disadvantaged groups.
3. Protect children by ensuring that their environments are safer and healthier.



As we have seen with Covid-19 responses, strong Government leadership to implement evidence-based, public health interventions can save thousands of lives. As with acute crises, the same principle applies for chronic crises of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity.

A Government strongly committed to the health and wellbeing of families and children can contribute to creating health equity by strengthening public health capacity and introducing legislation that reduces the harm caused by tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food to society. We need the Government to stand tall against the strong lobbying from these industries and put people's health before corporate profits.

The specific actions outlined in this Prevention Brief 2020 will ensure that the Government:

- Achieves the Prevention Promise: Improved health and wellbeing, fair health outcomes, and protection of children
- Honours its Treaty obligations to protect Māori health
- Strengthens its Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy with concrete actions
- Reduces the pressure on already-stretched health and social care services
- Supports people to make healthier choices for themselves and their children

This Prevention Brief 2020 has been prepared by the Health Coalition Aotearoa with input from its Expert Panels.

The Coalition is an alliance of health and consumer NGOs, academics, professional associations and individuals who are experienced in public health and passionate about the wellbeing of all New Zealanders. The Brief outlines the priority actions needed to strengthen our public health systems and protect the health of our communities from harmful products.

The State of Prevention

Three commercially-available products in Aotearoa cause one third of our healthy life-years lost every year.



Tobacco



Alcohol



Unhealthy foods



One third
of preventable healthy
life years lost caused
by tobacco, alcohol and
unhealthy food



371,887
healthy life years lost
each year

Tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy food are responsible for one-third of the preventable loss of healthy life-years in Aotearoa (figure). Over 370,000 healthy life-years are lost every year due to these three harmful products.¹ In addition, alcohol contributes to major social damage by increasing the risk of family harm and other crimes.

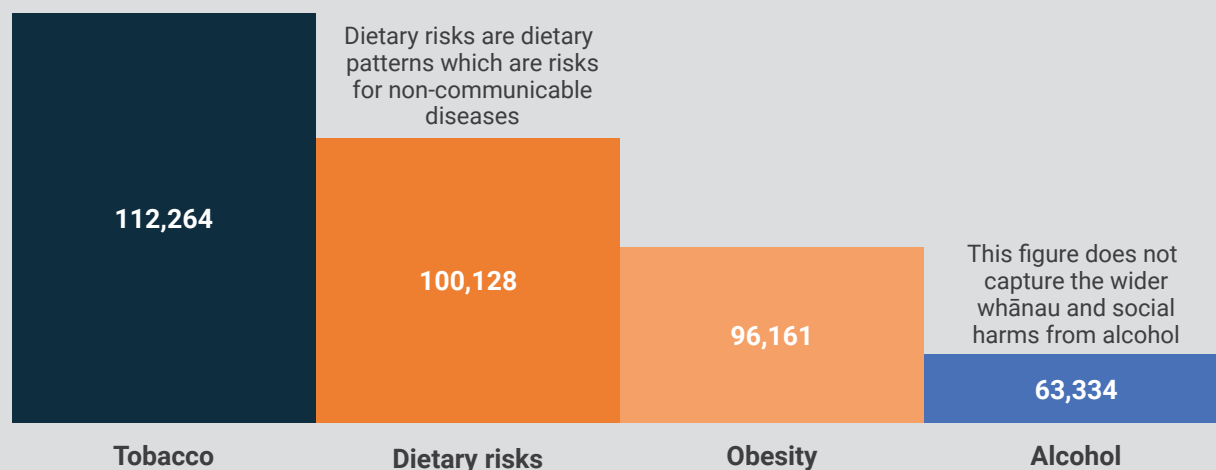
International groups, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and multiple New Zealand inquiries and reports, have recommended measures that could transform our society by creating environments that promote health and reduce the burden of disease and suffering many people experience. These recommendations are evidence-based and cost-effective. They would improve health, wellbeing and equity. Unfortunately, successive governments have shied away from introducing these changes that would foster healthier and fairer societies.

Companies that profit from selling unhealthy products profoundly influence New Zealanders' health, particularly the health of families struggling on low incomes. They market their products as aggressively as they can and lobby hard against public health policies that are designed to promote health and protect people. This playing field is neither level nor fair. It tips people, especially those experiencing multiple chronic stresses, towards unhealthy lifestyles.

A pro-active, caring and confident Government would listen more to communities than to the commercial lobbyists and implement the policy recommendations from WHO and public health experts. The Government can level the playing field and give New Zealanders the best chance of achieving their health potential.

It is time to put people before profits.

Number of healthy life years lost per year²



¹Institute for Health Metrics <http://www.healthdata.org/>

²Numbers are disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost



Tobacco

Our country has a world-leading goal, Smokefree Aotearoa 2025, which means by December 2025 there should be minimal smoking prevalence (<5%) among all New Zealanders and minimal availability of tobacco products.

Achieving this goal will help meet our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It will eliminate one of the biggest causes of health inequities in Aotearoa and protect future generations. Most people who smoke (85%) wish they had never started.³ Nobody wants their children to grow up smoking.

Tobacco smoking continues to kill thousands of New Zealanders every year, with the adverse health effects disproportionately affecting Māori. Two in three people who smoke long-term will be killed prematurely by smoking.⁴

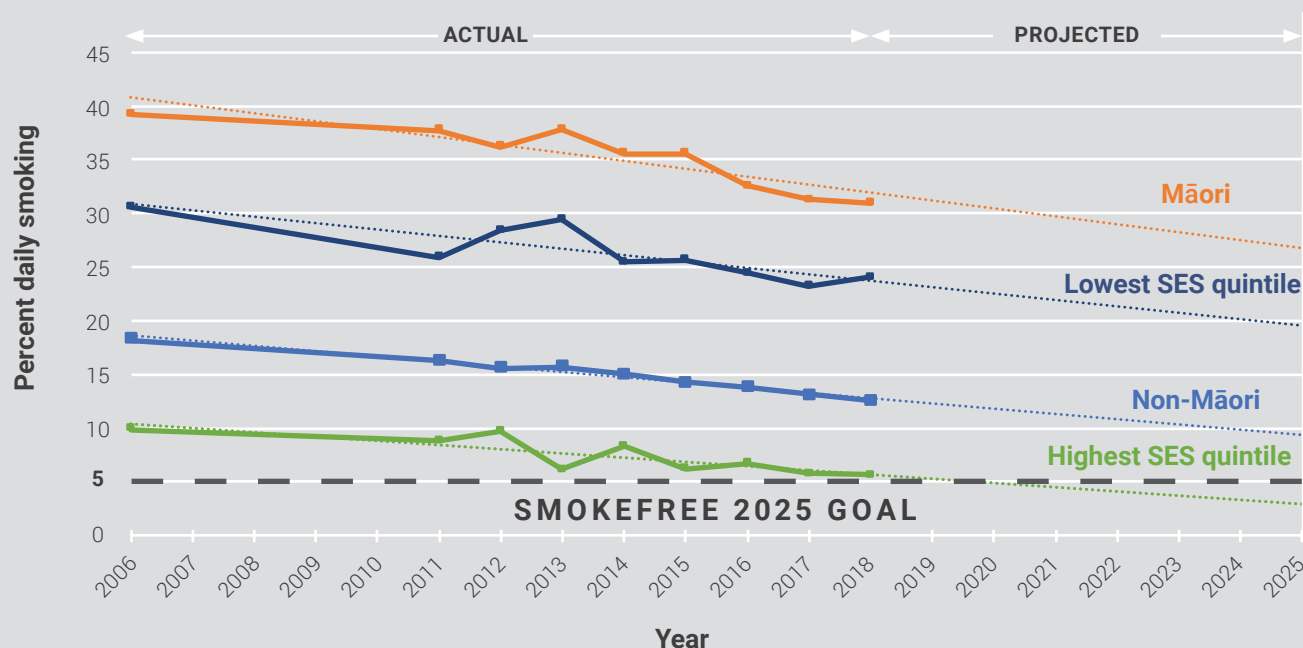
In the last 30 years, population smoking rates in Aotearoa have more than halved and in the past we have been at the forefront of introducing measures to reduce smoking. However, on current trends, reducing smoking to less than 5% will not be achieved until at least 2035 (figure) and smoking among Māori and the most disadvantaged people (lowest SES quintile) will not reach such levels for at least another 30-40 years.⁵

Government-led actions can get us **back on track for 2025** but only if they introduce additional, innovative, evidence-based, equity-promoting policies that go beyond the 'business as usual' approaches, although these should also be intensified. Tobacco excise taxes clearly reduce smoking rates. They also raise about \$2 billion in revenue. A much greater proportion of this revenue could be recycled to support smokers to quit and intensify efforts to achieve Smokefree 2025 (currently only 1.5% is recycled).

Top three policy priorities

- Develop and implement a **comprehensive, rational and evidence-based plan** for achieving Smokefree 2025.
- Substantially **reduce the availability** for sale of smoked tobacco products.
- Greatly **reduce the appeal, palatability, and addictiveness** of smoked tobacco products.

Daily smoking rates



³Ministry of Health. Targeting Smokers: Better Help for Smokers to Quit. April 2011 <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/targeting-smokers-to-quit.pdf>

⁴Banks E, et al. Tobacco smoking and all-cause mortality in a large Australian cohort study: findings from a mature epidemic with current low smoking prevalence. BMC Med 2015 Feb 24;13:38

⁵van der Deen FS, et al. Impact of five tobacco endgame strategies on future smoking prevalence, population health and health system costs: two modelling studies to inform the tobacco endgame. Tob Control 2018 May;27(3):278-286.



Alcohol

We can create a society in which harm caused by alcohol to people's physical health, mental health and general wellbeing is minimal. Where families and the wider society are free from the destructive impact that other people's drinking has on their health, relationships, and life potential.

The Government's stewardship role means it has a responsibility to protect New Zealanders, particularly our most disadvantaged citizens, from the damage caused by alcohol. Successive governments have valued the commercial interests of the alcohol industry and retailer groups above the wellbeing of its citizens by failing to implement the recommended alcohol policies from WHO⁶ the Law Commission⁷ and the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry.⁸

Alcohol harm affects all age groups (figure). It causes cancer, liver disease and brain damage. It is a drug that exacerbates family harm and sexual assaults and is a major risk factor for suicide. It puts enormous strain on our health sector, particularly emergency services, and on our police and justice systems. The harm caused by alcohol disproportionately affects poorer families and drives inequities.

Alcohol has become progressively more affordable based on average earnings. It now takes a very short amount of time (about 10 minutes) for an average

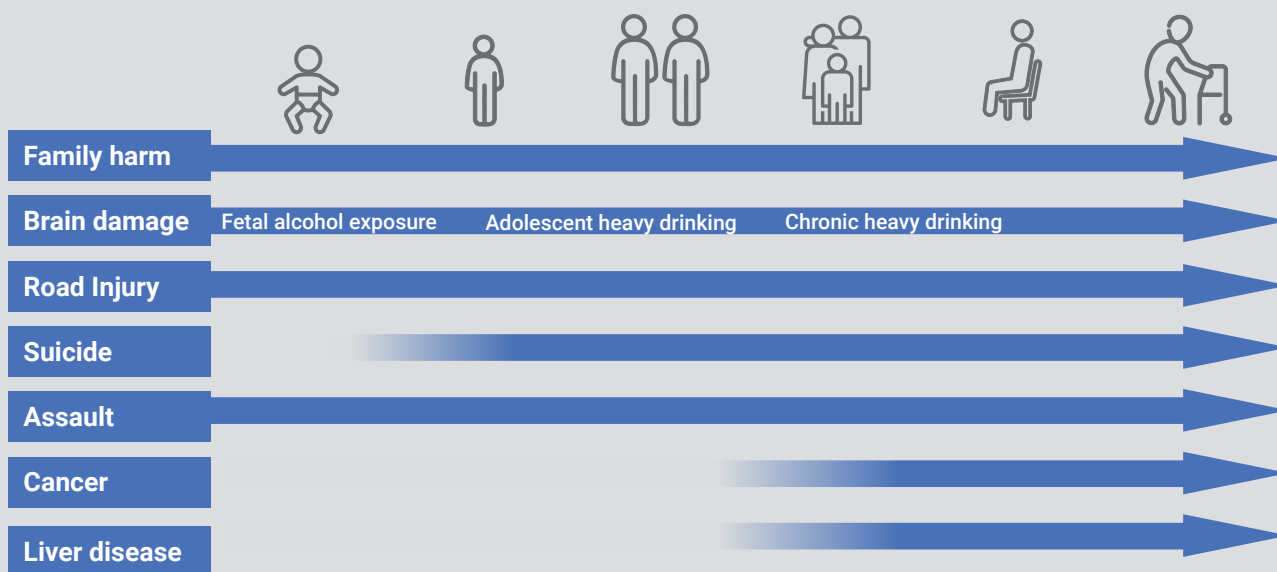
worker to earn enough to buy sufficient cheap alcohol to put themselves and others at risk of injury and harm.⁹ Every year more than 800 lives are lost and tens of thousands more are damaged due to alcohol.¹⁰

In addition to supporting Māori and other community initiatives, the Minister of Health needs to lead the development of **effective legislation**, which would include the unimplemented recommendations from the above-mentioned reports.

Top three policy priorities

- **Increase alcohol taxes** to reduce consumption.
- **Ban all promotion (marketing) of alcohol** including: in digital media, branding of sports and cultural events, educational initiatives and charitable works.
- **Reduce legislated trading hours** and strengthen community input into alcohol licensing by removing the appeals process from Local Alcohol Policies.

Alcohol harm affects all ages



⁶World Health Organisation. SAFER, a new alcohol control initiative. 2018 https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/safer/en/

⁷Law Commission. Alcohol in our lives: curbing the harm. 2010 <http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/>

⁸He Ara Oranga. Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction. 2018 <https://mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz/inquiry-report/>

⁹Health Promotion Agency. Trends in affordability of alcohol in New Zealand. 2018 <https://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/trends-in-affordability-of-alcohol-in-new-zealand>

¹⁰Connor JL, et al. The burden of disease and injury attributable to alcohol in New Zealanders under 80 years of age: marked disparities by ethnicity and sex. NZMJ 2015;128(1409):15-28



Unhealthy foods

As a major food producer, Aotearoa can be a place where all families can access affordable, culturally appropriate, healthy foods. We can be a country that puts the wellbeing of our children first by ensuring they have the right food to fuel their healthy growth and learning years.

Unfortunately, this is not currently the case, particularly for our poorer families. Ultra-processed foods and beverages high in sugar, salt, fat and additives are specifically designed to be hyper-palatable, priced to be affordable (and often on special), more available and aggressively marketed to families and children.

This behaviour of the ultra-processed food industry, including supermarkets and the fast food industry, is unregulated and it is undermining the ability of families to access healthy food for their children. As a result, Aotearoa has the second highest rate of childhood overweight and obesity (39%) in OECD and EU countries (figure).¹¹

Sugary drinks also severely impact on dental health. Over 8700 children have hospital operations under general anaesthetic to remove rotten teeth each year.¹²

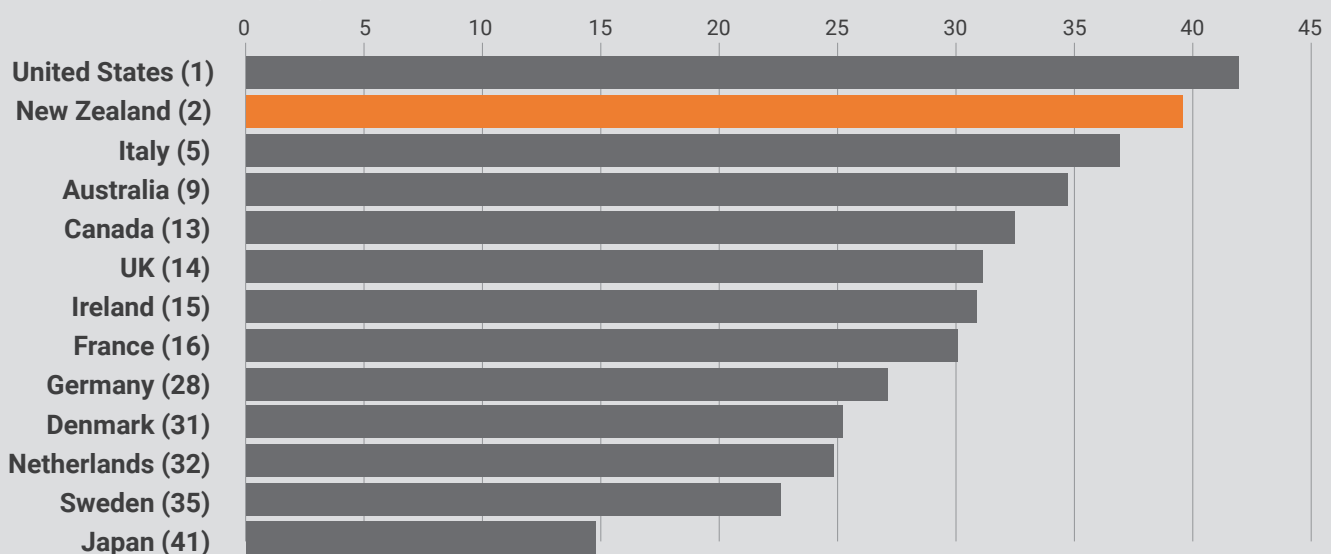
Our high obesity rates show the deregulated, 'trust-the-markets' approach to unhealthy food has failed. Stronger Government stewardship to protect public health would involve strategic, effective regulation and taxation. It would need to stand up to the lobby groups for processed food, such as the Food and Grocery Council. This will level the playing field for parents who are trying to provide healthy food for their children.

The Government needs an overarching **National Food and Nutrition Policy** incorporating the recommendations from WHO¹³ and successive groups of New Zealand public health experts.¹⁴ This should also ensure all aspects of the complex food system are addressed including health, equity, food security and environmental sustainability.

Top three policy priorities

- Regulate all **unhealthy food marketing to children**.
- Require and support **schools and early childhood education services** to develop food policies which ensure healthy foods are available and promoted.
- Introduce a substantial (eg, 20%) UK-style **soft drink industry levy** on sugar-sweetened beverages to reduce consumption.

Overweight and obesity in children in 41 OECD and EU countries (ranking)



¹¹UNICEF. The State of the World's Children. 2019. Children, Food and Nutrition: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children-2019>

¹²Ministry of Health. National Minimum Dataset (NMDS). Data extract 30 May 2019

¹³World Health Organisation Commission to End Childhood Obesity 2016 <https://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/en/>

¹⁴INFORMAS. Food Environments Policy Index. 2020 <https://www.informas.org/modules/public-sector/>

Public Health Investment

New Zealand can have a world-class public health prevention and response system that keeps us healthy and safe from the myriad hazards we face, be they infectious diseases, environmental pollution or harmful, commercial products like tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food.

Strong public health systems create healthy environments, such as clean air and drinking water, safe roads and workplaces, and the safe disposal of human and industrial waste. They improve our quality of life, help our children thrive and reduce human suffering and unfair health outcomes. Public health systems are like the ground crew at the airport – your safety is their top priority.

However, for years governments have been eroding the investment in public health and now it is woefully inadequate for the huge job it needs to do. Overall, only about 2-3% of the health budget is invested in all public health prevention services with a tiny 0.4% invested in the prevention of harm from tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food.¹⁵ These products collectively cause one third of the health problems (figure).¹⁶

Current Government priorities for Child and Youth Wellbeing, and reducing inequities need strengthened protection measures against the harms from tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food to succeed. Controls to manage commercial conflicts of interest are also necessary to prevent public health policies being derailed in their development phases by commercial lobbying.

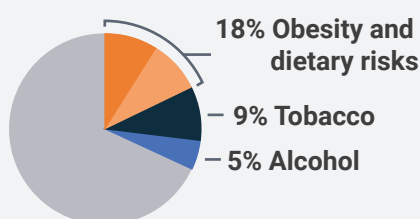
The value of robust public health systems has been amply demonstrated in the efforts to eliminate the Covid-19 virus. A full capacity prevention and protection system and a proactive Government willing to act in the public interest are essential for successful health outcomes. The same urgency and tenacity is required to eliminate long-standing health

inequities and protect our people against the chronic epidemics of diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases, dental diseases, and mental health problems.

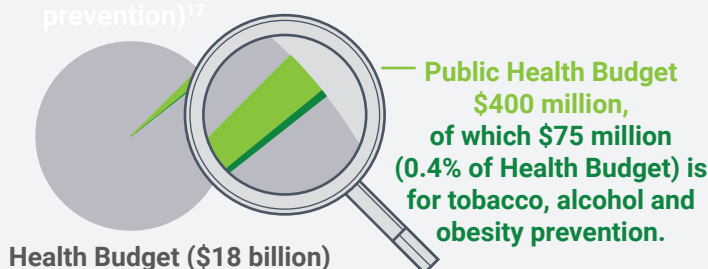
Top three policy priorities

- Increase investment in public health.** By 2023, progressively increase the investment in public health to 5% (currently 2-3%) of the Health Budget, including a progressive increase in the proportion of tobacco and alcohol excise taxes that are recycled into health promotion action to 5% (currently <1.4%).
- Strengthen public health capacity and capability by:**
 - increasing the public health capacity within the Ministry of Health, restoring the public health medicine training scheme to full strength, and creating a robust 'ecosystem' of public health expertise across government agencies, academic institutions, professional associations and NGOs.
 - implementing the Simpson Report, including the 'Alternative plan' for a strong Māori Health Authority
 - mandating and funding a public health agency with authority to address the societal determinants of health, including health impacts of all government policies.
- Strengthen the management of commercial conflicts of interest.** Crown entities need clear guidelines from the State Services Commission to ensure that organisations with vested commercial interests do not unduly influence policy development.

Health burden (% of Disability-adjusted life years lost.)¹⁶



Government investment in public health (and tobacco, alcohol and obesity prevention)¹⁷



¹⁵Vote Health. The Estimates of Appropriations 2019/20 - Health Sector B.5 Vol.6 2019 <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/est19-v6-health.pdf>

¹⁶Institute for Health Metrics <http://www.healthdata.org/>

¹⁷The Treasury NZ. Vote Health- The Estimates of Appropriations 2019/20 - Budget 2019. 2019 <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/est19-v6-health.pdf>



Health Coalition Aotearoa

Health Coalition Aotearoa is an alliance of health and consumer NGOs, academics, professional associations and individuals working together for greater health and equity for all New Zealanders through reduced consumption of harmful products and improved determinants of health.

Our core values



The Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi



Equity and protection for disadvantaged groups



Evidence and expertise to guide actions



Ambition for change

Health Coalition Aotearoa aims to provide support to Government by coordinating the sector, providing collated evidence, and designing effective policies to improve health and wellbeing, especially for children and disadvantaged populations.

Visit our website www.healthcoalition.org.nz

Find out about us, become a member, donate to the cause.

Member organisations



All members support the mission and goals of the Health Coalition Aotearoa but maintain their independent voice on the details of recommended actions.