

DYING WELL: A Palliative Care Policy for Aotearoa

Why are these changes necessary?

Dying well is essential to human dignity

Just as our health system supports us at birth, through illness and in achieving wellness, it should uphold dignity, compassion, and cultural values at the end of life.

Hospice makes dying well a reality

When specialist palliative care teams are available whether from community hospices or in hospital, it means people can live their final days at home, in aged care or in hospital supported emotionally, socially and spiritually, relieved from suffering and according to their values and cultural traditions.

Need is growing, we must adapt

- Despite a substantial, targeted funding uplift from Health NZ, and even with strong community backing, hospices still need long-term sustainable funding to meet growing demand.
- While 11,471 people received hospice support last year, we believe between 13,000 – 17,000 New Zealanders would – and in fact, should – have benefited.

We need to invest in Workforce

- Lack of pay parity continues to discourage experienced and specialty trained nurses and other clinical staff from working in community palliative care.
- Many specialist palliative doctors are nearing retirement and there is limited training of new specialists to ensure succession.
- According to research, NZ has only a quarter of the specialist palliative care doctors needed to meet growing future demand.
- Nurses, doctors and allied health professionals lack consistent palliative care training.

Access to quality palliative care remains patchy

- More has to be done to address the postcode lottery for palliative care. For example, people living in many rural locations face greater barriers accessing the full range of quality palliative care services. We can do better.
- Additionally, availability of 24/7 palliative support is variable from region to region. This is a basic standard in most countries and where NZ really falls short.

Our global standing is quickly slipping

- NZ's palliative care ranking has dropped to 15th in 2025, down from 3rd in 2015, as other countries invest and progress, while our palliative care development has stalled and even gone backwards. The recent Health NZ investment in paediatric palliative care services will help, but more work is required to improve NZ's ranking.



Immediate actions to take

We know this can't all happen at once. The following actions are, however, urgent and fully deliverable within your first year of government:

1. Progress implementation of the new National Model

- Fully implement the new National Model for Integrated Adult Palliative Care.
- Involve hospice in planning, costing and decision making.
- Ensure any new funding is firstly directed to service gaps.
- Require that implementation is reflected in the New Zealand Health Plan.

2. Invest in Workforce

- Fund pay parity to enable hospices to pay the same as Health New Zealand. The same rates for the same roles.
- Develop and fund a National Palliative Care Workforce Strategy to retain, grow and enhance the workforce.
- Create incentives to attract and retain specialist clinicians, especially in rural areas.
- Make compulsory a standard of palliative care education in medical, nursing and allied health undergraduate training and ongoing professional development.

3. Ensure children and young people can access the care they need

- Fully implement the National Model for Paediatric and Adolescent Young Adult Palliative Care, ensuring services are equitable, accessible and sustainable.
- Ensure access to 24/7 specialist paediatric palliative care advice when required.
- Ensure specialist paediatric palliative care access regardless of where the child/young person lives.
- Ensure ongoing bereavement services for children and parents according to need.
- Involve hospice and the Paediatric Society in planning and decision making.

4. Make equitable access a national priority

- Commission Health NZ and Hospices to deliver an assessment of unmet palliative care need, so communities with the greatest gaps can be prioritised in future funding.
- Ensure appropriate 24/7 support at end of life is available no matter who you are or where you live.
- Embed *Dying Well* as a National Health Priority.

Why announcing these policies will help your party

A clear, values-aligned win

Palliative care embodies a vision of fairness, dignity and caring for every New Zealander.

Deliverable in the first year

Targeted, modest investments produce visible improvements quickly, reinforcing your party's commitment to improving the public health system.

Fiscally responsible

The immediate investments are affordable within a health system context and there is an opportunity to increase the return for every dollar invested.

Aligned with highly respected local organisations

Hospice is widely loved by communities. This is politically sound, emotionally resonant territory, and provides an opportunity for electorate MPs to engage positively locally.

A chance to correct inequity

Fixing postcode access disparities and underfunding shows a party that is serious about rebuilding essential community services, not just hospitals.

A future-focused policy

Sustainable funding alongside workforce development and specialist training, demonstrate a plan to prepare for the future, provide the care our people deserve and lift NZ's global standing.