

ELECTION 2026

Where the parties stand on kidney health

Ahead of the 2026 general election on November 7, Kidney Health New Zealand asked political parties to respond to three practical questions about the future of kidney health in New Zealand.

Chronic kidney disease affects at least one in ten New Zealanders and can progress for years with few or no symptoms. Finding and treating it earlier can slow its progression, while planning ahead for dialysis services and the renal workforce is critical to meeting future demand.

We asked each party:

- Does your party commit to earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care?
- Does your party commit to routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk?
- Does your party commit to long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce?

We asked parties to respond to each question, with additional information on how they would deliver on their commitment.

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1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

ACT's response:

ACT's Pharmacy First policy would expand services that community pharmacy could offer and this could include early chronic kidney disease detection. This is in addition to ACT's ongoing support for the appropriate funding for General Practice including the additional funding secured during this term of Government.

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

ACT's response:

By continuing to focus on primary care, ACT would encourage healthcare professionals to ensure those at higher risk are tested.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

ACT's response:

ACT believes that the Ministry of Health should be working with all health stakeholders on a 10-year workforce plan. This would include what roles and capacity is required for the renal workforce.

1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

Green Party's response: The Green Party supports earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care as part of a stronger, more preventative public health system. Early diagnosis is critical to improving outcomes, reducing avoidable harm, and addressing inequities experienced by Māori, Pacific peoples, and low-income communities. We support investment in primary and community healthcare so people can access timely, affordable, culturally safe care close to home, before kidney disease progresses to more serious and costly stages.

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

Green Party's response: The Green Party supports routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk, including Māori and Pacific peoples, people with diabetes or high blood pressure, and those with other known risk factors. Testing should be evidence-based, accessible through primary care, and designed in partnership with affected communities. It must also be matched with appropriate follow-up care, treatment, and support, so that early detection leads to better outcomes rather than placing further pressure on already stretched families and services.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

Green Party's response: The Green Party supports long-term planning for dialysis capacity and the renal workforce. Aotearoa needs a sustainable, equitable plan that addresses workforce shortages, regional access barriers, and growing demand for renal services. This should include investment in public health infrastructure, training and retention of the health workforce, and improved access to care outside major centres. Planning must also prioritise prevention and early intervention, because reducing the progression of kidney disease is essential to easing future pressure on dialysis services.

Note from the Green Party:

While our manifesto doesn't outline absolutely everything we would do in health – we are committed to filling the workforce capacity gaps and ensuring people don't have to travel so far to access essential health care, such as dialysis and other treatment.

You'll see our manifesto is very prevention focussed and includes a commitment to ensure public health care services are accessible for all with a focus on prevention and early screening, diagnosis and treatment for noncommunicable diseases, such as kidney disease, cancers, diabetes and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

Labour's response: Labour is focused on turning around the issues facing our health system with a focus on prevention and early detection, to keep people well and ease demand on our hospitals long-term. Health costs have soared under National, and too many New Zealanders are missing out on essential care. Labour is focused on ensuring healthcare is affordable: with Labour's **Medicard**, Kiwis will be able to see a doctor and pick up a prescription for free. Being able to access three free doctor's visits each year means Kiwis won't need to put off essential care, and issues such as kidney disease can be picked up and treated earlier. Labour will back our clinicians to collaborate through clinical networks and identify the best ways to improve early detection and equity across New Zealand, in line with best practice.

Without ensuring all New Zealanders have access to affordable primary healthcare, all other attempts to fix our health system will fail. And we are serious about prevention. Labour will also reverse the National Government's tax break for heated tobacco products. We are committed to achieving our Smokefree target and will reintroduce Smokefree Generation policies, to save lives and ease pressure on our health system.

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

Labour's response: In Government, Labour developed clinical networks, including the Renal National Clinical Network, to eliminate inequity, strengthen planning across regions, and improve access to care. We are committed to strengthening and developing the Renal Clinical Network to improve testing and delivery of care, in line with best practice. We want to ensure the network achieves its goals, so that New Zealanders can access the treatments and care they need earlier – before conditions worsen or require emergency care.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

Labour's response: Labour is committed to improving the quality and transparency of long-term planning across the health system. Planning for increased demand and future workforce is a priority of the Renal Clinical Network, and we will support and work with the network in achieving this.

Health spokesperson Dr Ayesha Verrall writes:

As Minister of Health, in 2023 I approved the funding of 50 new medical students at Otago and Auckland Medical Schools. The current Government has added another 50, and there will also be a further 120 graduates from Waikato Medical School students coming on-stream. So, from 2029 there will be expanding cohorts of doctors ready to work in our health system. Our medical workforce provides immense value to New Zealand and life-changing care to patients. We're committed to working alongside our medical schools and colleges to expand the pathways available to graduates, ensuring they are sustainable and meet the needs of New Zealanders.

1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

National's response:

National recognises the importance of early detection and management of chronic conditions, including chronic kidney disease, to improve patient outcomes and reduce pressure on the health system. The Government has invested heavily in strengthening primary care, including more funding for primary and community care initiatives, increased funding for general practice, expanded access to urgent and after-hours care, and measures to grow the primary care workforce. Health New Zealand's Primary Care Tactical Action Plan specifically includes expanding access to tests that support earlier disease detection and improving management of long-term conditions in the community. National is committed to continuing this work.

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

National's response:

National supports evidence-based approaches to prevention and early intervention. Decisions regarding testing and screening programmes should be guided by clinical evidence and expert advice.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

National's response:

Yes. National recognises the need for effective long-term workforce and infrastructure planning to ensure health services can meet future demand, including for renal and dialysis services. We are committed to strengthening workforce planning and investing in the health system to support growing patient needs.

1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

New Zealand First response:

Yes. New Zealand First strongly supports prioritizing early detection of chronic conditions within primary care. The party views health as a critical investment in human capability rather than merely a balance sheet line item.

NZ First's health strategy emphasizes shifting focus from treating late-stage illness in hospitals to proactive primary care prevention and early intervention.

By bolstering General Practice capitation funding, expanding mobile health services, and supporting routine health checks, NZ First aims to catch chronic conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular risk before they progress to irreversible kidney failure.

[See NZ First's latest announcement The Plan to "Make NZ Healthy" here >](#)

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

New Zealand First response:

Yes. New Zealand First supports targeted health screening and early diagnostic testing for high-risk populations based strictly on clinical need.

Recognizing the epidemic of preventable chronic diseases, the party advocates for national screening strategies, routine diagnostic checks, and expanded primary health assessments to identify vulnerable patients early.

To ensure high-risk Kiwis including those in rural or isolated communities have equitable access to testing, NZ First supports funding rapid diagnostic technology, mobile health buses, and expanding free primary care visits for seniors and vulnerable groups.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

New Zealand First response:

Yes. New Zealand First supports long-term workforce and service planning to meet growing healthcare demands.

The party proposes to address medical workforce shortages by fast-tracking immigration for critical health professionals, expanding medical training places, and exploring bonding schemes for New Zealand graduates. Additionally, NZ First opposes hospital bureaucracy in favor of ring-fenced frontline funding, regional healthcare infrastructure investment, and developing specialist centres of excellence.

This will guarantee long-term capacity for essential specialized treatments like dialysis across regional and urban New Zealand.

Note from New Zealand First:

Please note as a disclaimer that for a lot of areas, the party has yet to finalize its policies. The questions answered draw inspiration from publicly announced policies for the upcoming elections, party principles and past party policies - which may or may not be part of NZ First Election Manifesto for 2026.

1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care
2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk
3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

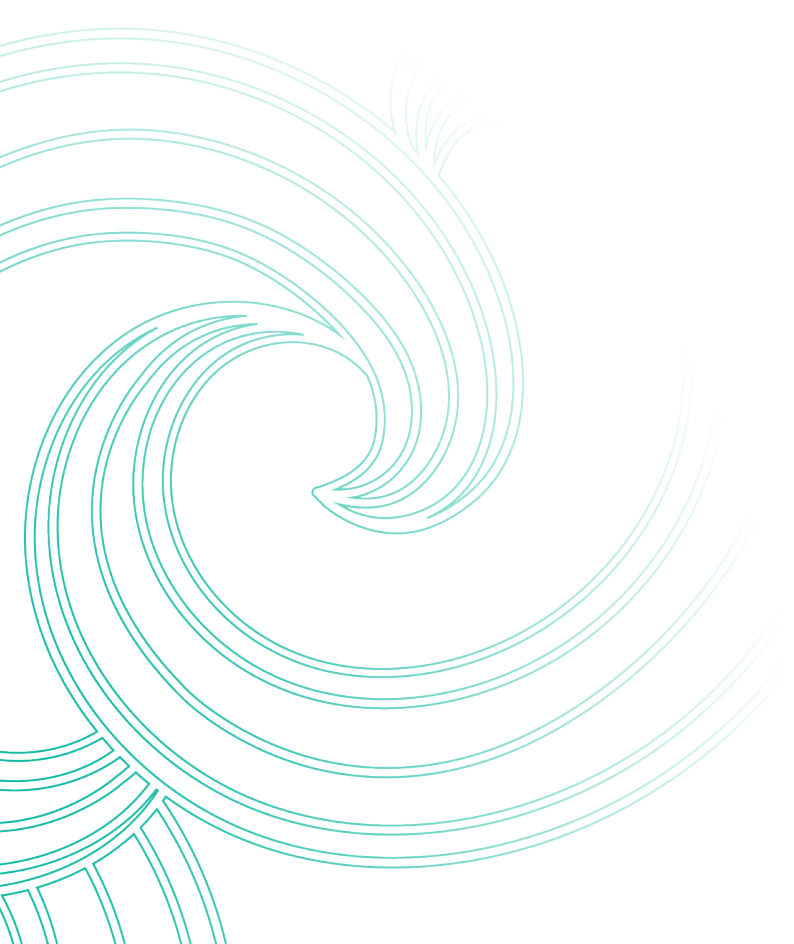
Opportunity's response:

We fully support Kidney Health NZ's three priorities of:

- Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care.
- Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk.
- Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce.

Our approach is to secure a 10-year cross party plan for health, backed by substantially increased funding tilted towards primary and community care. We expect the plan, informed by experts and evidence, will correctly identify chronic kidney disease as a growing source of largely preventable ill health and health inequity.

Please see our policy for more details: [Healthy People - Opportunity Party](#)



1. Earlier detection of chronic kidney disease in primary care

Te Pāti Māori response: Yes. Te Pāti Māori commits to earlier detection of chronic disease in primary care. Improving access to primary care is an important building block to ensure that we can detect chronic kidney disease as early as possible. That is why Te Pāti Māori will make primary care more affordable and accessible for whānau by investing in free primary care for all, as well as Marae-based clinics and mobile health units. We will also ensure that doctors and nurses are obligated to offer kidney function tests to high-risk patients.

2. Routine or targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk

Te Pāti Māori response: Yes. Te Pāti Māori commits to routine, targeted kidney testing for people at higher risk. We know that Māori and Pacific peoples are three times more likely to experience chronic kidney disease compared to the rest of the population. Te Pāti Māori supports the establishment of a national, community-based, kidney screening programme that targets high risk areas.

3. Long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce

Te Pāti Māori response: Yes. Te Pāti Māori commits to long-term planning for future dialysis capacity and the renal workforce. We are committed to investing \$1 billion annually into health workforce development, and we will expand the Māori workforce and training opportunities. We also support the adoption of a Dialysis-Free by 2050 plan for Aotearoa.

Why Kidney Health New Zealand is asking

Chronic kidney disease can progress for years without obvious symptoms, meaning many people do not know they have it until significant damage has occurred. Kidney Health New Zealand wants CKD recognised as a priority long-term health condition, with kidney testing better integrated into primary care so people at higher risk are identified and treated earlier. We are also calling for long-term planning for future dialysis demand and the renal workforce.

These priorities are echoed by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology, which is also calling for greater priority to be given to chronic kidney disease, investment in screening and early detection in primary care and long-term planning for dialysis capacity and the renal workforce.

Kidney Health New Zealand does not endorse any political party or candidate. This information is published so New Zealanders affected by kidney disease and their whānau can see what political parties have told us about their kidney health commitments.