

# Reducing GP fees

**Our families' health is our greatest treasure and the GP is our first port of call when our families are sick. We need to be able to get the healthcare we need, when we need it. Yet the price of going to the doctor is rising beyond the reach of many New Zealanders.**

In the last year, over half a million New Zealanders did not visit the doctor when they were sick because they couldn't afford the cost. For non-Very Low Cost Access practices, the average adult fee has gone from \$29 in 2008 to \$42 today, a 44% increase. This increase has happened because government funding for GPs hasn't kept up with their cost pressures, so they've had to pass more of the cost on to their patients.

Labour has committed to reversing National's underfunding of health, and budgeted an extra \$8b of investment for the health sector in the next four years. Over a billion dollars of this will go into primary care.

▶ **From 1 July 2018, Labour will lower the cost of GP visits by \$10 through:**

- Lowering the VLCA fee cap by \$10 to \$8 for adults and \$2 for teens (under 13s are already free), with a funding increase to VLCA practices to cover this
- Increasing government funding for all practices that lower their fees by \$10, lowering the average non-VLCA fee from \$42 to \$32 and the maximum fee from \$69 to \$59
- Increasing funding for GP training places, taking the intake to 300 per year
- Carrying out a review of primary care funding to further reduce barriers to primary care and ensure the financial sustainability of practices.

VLCA maximum	Current	Labour
0-12	\$0	\$0
13-17	\$12	\$2
18+	\$18	\$8

Non-VLCA average	Current	Labour
0-12	\$0	\$0
13-17	\$30	\$20
18+	\$42	\$32

This investment of \$259m per year will mean New Zealanders are better able to get treatment when they need it. To meet extra demand and cost pressures, \$46m of this will be additional funding to GP practices over and above the funding for fee reductions – a 5 per cent increase on current funding. Funding for extra GP training places will be \$30m over three years.

By making it easier for people to get early treatment, medical conditions will be addressed before they worsen, avoiding expensive hospital stays and complex care. Investing in primary care reduces costs through the rest of the health system, and keeps people healthier.

As part of this policy, the Very Low Cost Access fee cap will be extended to 600,000 more New Zealanders who hold Community Services Cards but aren't enrolled at VLCA practices, including 350,000 New Zealanders who will become eligible for the CSC.

**Let's do this.**



This policy delivers much more to more New Zealanders than National's policy. Rather than narrowly targeting 600,000 New Zealanders, this policy delivers lower fees across the board:

- It reduces fees for all New Zealanders whose visits are not already free, whether they are in a VLCA or non-VLCA practice. National's only reduces fees for non-VLCA patients with Community Services Cards – 16% of the population
- As with National's policy, it extends eligibility for the Community Services Card to 350,000 more people and gives VLCA fees to all Community Services Card holders but, rather than leaving the VLCA fee cap at \$18 for adults and \$12 for teens, it cuts them to \$8 and \$2, respectively
- It supplies extra funding for GPs over and above the fee reduction to recognise the extra costs GPs face
- It allows for the cost of extra nurse consultations, which National's policy does not
- It funds training of more GPs, which National's policy fails to do.

This initiative will be a bridging measure while a review of the primary care system is carried out with the objectives of better matching subsidies to patient incomes than the Very Low Cost Access scheme currently does, ensuring the financial sustainability of practices, and addressing other barriers to access. This review will keep zero fees for under 13s and look to further reduce average fees for others.

After years of underfunding and fee hikes, Labour's plan will reduce the cost of going to the doctor, and make sure New Zealanders can get the healthcare they need, when they need it.

**Let's do this.**

