

Cruel and wasteful: the introduction of prescription fees for most NZers on 1 July 2024

PAI statement July 2024

The prescription fee – a tax on sick people – costs lives and health. It means less primary healthcare for *everybody* in Aotearoa NZ – whether or not they have to pay for vital medicines.

It is equivalent to removing [around 128 fulltime pharmacists](#) from our communities, as prescription tax red tape makes admin assistants out of qualified health experts, taking them away from patients, resulting in fewer primary health services and less preventative care for everybody. The knock-on effects for health will be severe.

Universal fees-free prescriptions were one of the most popular policies ever in Aotearoa NZ; they were [wildly popular](#) including among government supporters. And for good reason: [universal fees-free prescriptions immediately and greatly improved community healthcare and wellbeing](#) – they were effective and efficient.

But now, for people without exemption or financial resources (including minimum wage workers, facing a cost of living crisis) and/or with high health needs, the tax will act as [a barrier to vital medicines](#), and put more people in avoidable pain, distress, and illness. It will create shame and anxiety for many patients – important healthcare relationships will be destroyed.

The academic research – from both [Otago](#) and [Wellington](#) - is clear: the tax means more preventable visits to our hospitals which are already at breaking point. People

could die due to the stress of this policy on the health system, and it could be anyone, even those who can afford vital medicines, or who do not have to pay.

The Prescription Access Initiative calls on the government to immediately reverse this policy to avoid preventable death, illness, shame, conflict, anxiety and other distress.

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