

“ I feel bad [patients] have to make a choice between the prescription [fee] and food or petrol to get to hospital appointments. ”

– Pharmacist in Auckland

In Aotearoa New Zealand, people who need prescription medicines are faced with a patient co-payment (also known as “prescription charge”) when collecting subsidised prescription medicines. The co-payment is a fee that pharmacies are required to collect **on behalf of the Kāwanatanga/Government.**

The co-payment is **a barrier to hauora/health**, which can lead to diminishing the taha hinengaro/mental and taha tinana/physical wellbeing of people.

The co-payment contributes to unnecessary hospitalisations<sup>1</sup> which causes distress to patients and their whānau, and places further demands on an already over-stretched healthcare system struggling with staffing shortages.

The government should **remove the patient co-payment on prescriptions** for all subsidised medicines for all people of Aotearoa New Zealand to immediately improve health and wellbeing.

### Removing the requirement for people to pay the co-payment would encourage:

- Increased access to medicines, in particular for patients with high health needs, including Māori and Pasifika, who are disproportionately affected by the financial barrier to medicines.<sup>2</sup>
- Increased access to, and better use of, primary healthcare – whilst collecting their prescription medicines, patients also interact with and receive important advice from their pharmacists. Prescribers could also be assured that their patients’ access to subsidised prescription medicines would not be restricted due to a fee.
- Improved wellbeing - removing the co-payment would provide relief for people impacted by the current escalating cost of living crisis, which has been compounded by recent natural disasters in the upper North Island.<sup>3</sup>
- Attainment of the highest standard of hauora/health, by ensuring people are accessing and using their medicines as necessary, and by reducing hospitalisations.<sup>1</sup>
- Alleviation of pressure on the health system by ensuring people have increased access to their medicines and pharmacist advice, as well as by reducing hospitalisations.
- Self-determination in the delivery of pharmacy services.

# Pēhea tāu e āwhina ai?

## How can you help?

Our aim is to encourage the government, policy-makers and election candidates to listen and understand how the co-payment is affecting people's health and compounding existing inequities, with the ultimate aim of them realising that removal of the co-payment is in everyone's interests. You can help us by:

**Telling your family, friends, and community about the issue.**

**Contacting your local MP and electoral candidates**

and telling them you believe the co-payment should be removed for everyone.

**Sharing the issue on social media.**

## Ko wai tātau? Who are we?

The Prescription Access Initiative (PAI) is a group of passionate pharmacists in Aotearoa New Zealand who:

- care deeply for whānau and our communities;
- believe that all people should be enabled and supported to have the highest attainable standard of hauora/health and wellbeing;
- work to empower all people to exercise choice, and have access to the highest-level medicine-related care in Aotearoa.

### Prescription Access Initiative is supported by

Airport Oaks Pharmacy / All Seasons Pharmacy / Avalon Pharmacy / Avondale Kiwicheimist / Botany Superclinic Kiwicheimist / Dannevirke Pharmacy / Epsom Kiwicheimist / Frankton Pharmacy / Glenavon and Ormiston Kiwicheimist / Horouta Pharmacy Gisborne / Hutt City Pharmacy / Kaiapoi Crossing Pharmacy / Kawerau Pharmacy / Kendal Pharmacy / Liddells Pharmacy Pukekohe / Life Pharmacy Pakuranga / Life Pharmacy Rangiora / Mangawhai Pharmacy / Parkside Pharmacy

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Unichem Mt Smart Pharmacy / Unichem Pakuranga / Unichem Parkside Pharmacy / Unichem Petone Pharmacy / Unichem Royal Oak Pharmacy / Unichem Russell Street Pharmacy Hastings / Unichem Taumaranui Pharmacy / Unichem Te Kuiti / Vercoe Road Pharmacy Hamilton / Wainuiomata Pharmacy / Waipawa Pharmacy / Wairoa Pharmacy New Windsor Pharmacy

**Thank you!**

#### References

1 Norris, P., Cousins, K., Horsburgh, S., Keown, S., Churchward, M., Samaranyaka, A., Marra, C. (2023). Impact of removing prescription co-payments on the use of costly health services: a pragmatic randomised controlled trial. BMC Health Services Research, 23(1), 1-11.

2 Māori and Pasifika adults are 3.3 times and 1.1 times respectively more likely not to collect a prescription due to the cost. Ministry of Health (Nov 2022) Annual Update of Key Results 2021/22: New Zealand Health Survey; and Key Indicators. Statistics NZ (Aug 2021) National population estimates: At 30 June 2021

3 In the regions where the prescription charge is temporarily waived, patients have reported that it reduces the high stress and anxiety often associated with managing healthcare costs.