Q3 Health targets - Communications Pack

This pack includes:

- Health NZ media release (for publication)
- Overarching key messages (not for publication, back pocket information)
- Overview of immunisation primary care indicator league tables (not for publication, context for newspaper advert in Appendix 7)
- Q&As for Minister Brown (not for publication, back pocket information)
- Social media post (for publication)

Health NZ Media Release

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

MEDIA RELEASE

TBC

Health targets: The small wins and initiatives underway to improve results

Efforts in the last quarter have led to a continued rise in immunisation rates for children under 24 months and shorter stays in our emergency departments nationwide.

"It is clear that what we are doing is working but we must keep at it to ensure strong progress right across all five health targets," Health New Zealand chief executive, Dale Bramley says.

"We know that what's behind the promising results we're reporting today is the tireless work of our staff, primary care, and our Māori and Pacific health providers," Bramley says.

"Those efforts include visiting families in south Auckland to build trust and encourage timely vaccinations and family friendly hours at immunisation clinics in Tairāwhiti.

"It includes our hospitals embedding their acute flow improvement plans and a Dunedin mobile unit PET-CT scanner reducing the need for patients to travel to Christchurch and scanning more than 100 people between December 9 and the end of February this year."

"I would like to give a special shout out to Te Manawa Taki, which has gone from being the lowest performing region last quarter in its access to cancer treatment to the best performing region.

"That's a result of; refocused prioritisation for diagnostic and interventional procedures, a new breast surgeon in Waikato, and the introduction of weekly clinical breach meetings and theatre capacity meetings in Taranaki," Bramley says. "This is the kind of progress jump from one quarter to the next we strive to see."

The areas in need of attention are both wait times for first specialist appointments (FSA) and surgeries.

"Some of the system changes and initiatives we have brought in this quarter should start to have a positive effect in the coming months," Bramley says.

"For example, in Te Waipounamu, an acuity tool was implemented across four districts (Canterbury, Nelson Marlborough, South Canterbury and Southern), which will improve visibility of patients who are waiting longer than their 'treat by' period.

"Other changes that are already having an impact include the opening of additional theatres in Counties Manukau since the start of March and increasing Saturday elective surgeries at Middlemore Hospital to further reduce the surgical waitlist." Bramley says.

ENDS

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National results for this reporting period:

Quarter 3 - 23/24 vs Quarter 3 24/25

Target	Year on year comparison		Percent change	Milestone	Target
	Q3 23/24	Q3 24/25			
Improved immunisation for children 24mth	76.9%	79.3%	+2.4%	84%	95%
Shorter wait times for FSA	59.6%	58.2%	- 1.4%	62%	95%
Shorter wait times for elective treatment	59.3%	57.3%	- 2%	63%	95%
Shorter stays in ED	70.1%	74.2%	+4.1%	74%	95%
Faster cancer treatment	83%	84.6%	+1.6%	86%	90%

Overarching key messages

- Overall, this quarter's results are encouraging and show that we're on the right track. However, the improvements must continue.
- Between 1 January – 31 March 2025 we saw improvements to three of the five targets in comparison to the same quarter last year (improved immunisation for children up to 24 months old, faster cancer treatment, and shorter stays in ED).
- However, it must be acknowledged that performance in the shorter wait times for first specialist appointments and shorter wait times for elective surgery continue to trend downwards in quarter three.
- It is clear that more collaboration and learning is required to get on top of waitlists.
- A number of initiatives are underway across the country to try and improve performance. For example:
    - Whānau Āwhina Plunket established four new vaccination clinics in quarter three, A cohort tracker, developed in March, is actively used by local teams (Health NZ and health sector partners) to identify, prioritise and immunise children nearing 24 months who have overdue immunisations.
    - an acuity tool was implemented across four districts (Canterbury, Nelson Marlborough, South Canterbury and Southern), which will improve visibility of patients who are waiting longer than their 'treat by' period,
    - there was a focus on increasing stem cell transplant service capacity, quality of care and access to timely treatment following increased investment,
    - Health NZ began the electives boost initiative, with a focus on increasing use of private sector capacity to provide an additional 10,579 elective surgeries by the end of June 2025,
    - Implementation of an ambulatory care, treat and discharge, model of care at Wellington Hospital ED is underway.
- These health targets aren't just about measuring performance of the system, they're about people. Behind every number is an individual, a family, many waiting in pain and families anxious for their loved ones to access the care that they need.

- The pertussis epidemic and recent measles case in Auckland demonstrates the importance of immunisation.
- What gets measured, gets done. Healthcare is a top priority for everyone in New Zealand.
- This Government's focus is on ensuring access to timely, quality healthcare for all New Zealanders.
- Thank you to all the hardworking healthcare workers on the front line, who continue to be instrumental in achieving these targets.

Budget key messages (Minister only)

- On Budget Day, I announced a $7 billion increase in Vote Health operating funding over the forecast period. This includes the $1.37 billion per annum increase to Health New Zealand's baseline – bringing total health spending in 2025/26 to $32.7 billion.
- These record investments will be targeted to strengthen frontline services and improve access to specialist care around the country.
- I also announced a billion-dollar investment in hospital infrastructure for Nelson and other communities. Modern reliable infrastructure will help deliver more for patients, reduce waiting lists, and ensure Kiwis can get the timely and quality healthcare they expect and deserve.
- This government has committed $164 million over four years to expand urgent and after-hours healthcare services across the country. This means 98 per cent of New Zealanders will be able to receive in-person urgent care within one hour's drive of their homes and will reduce pressure on emergency departments and improve outcomes for patients.
- In March, I announced that Health New Zealand will be delivering an increase in elective procedures by partnering with private hospitals to make use of all available operating theatre capacity.
- All of these announcements will play an important role in lifting our health target performance across the country.
- There is always more work to be done, and I will continue to be laser focused on achieving our health targets. I hope to see further improvements in next quarter's results.

Faster Cancer treatment

- Cancer treatment is critical, and everyday counts.
- Our target is to ensure 90 per cent of cancer patients start their treatment within 31 days of deciding on a treatment plan. Starting treatment early gives patients the best chance of recovery and improves outcomes.
- We're making sure treatment starts sooner by addressing variation in access to care, improving infrastructure, data and digital tools and strengthening the cancer workforce.
- During quarter three, there was a focus on increasing stem cell transplant service capacity, quality of care and access to timely treatment following increased investment.
- Regions have developed delivery plans for the 30 new funded cancer medicines
- Four districts met the target this quarter, with Lakes on 96.7%, Tairawhiti on 96%, South Canterbury on 93.5%, and Taranaki on 90%
- Te Manawa Taki was the lowest performing region in the country in quarter two but has improved to be the best in quarter three following a range of initiatives such as refocused prioritisation for diagnostic and interventional procedures, a new breast surgeon in Waikato, and the introduction of weekly clinical breach meetings and theatre capacity meetings.

Immunisations

- Vaccinations are a critical tool in protecting children from serious, preventable diseases. Our goal is to ensure 95 per cent of children are fully vaccinated by the time they are 24 months old, setting them up for a healthy start in life.
- Immunisation is the most effective way to keep your child and others in our communities safe.
- While Immunisation has been on a downward trajectory since 2014, the percentage coverage for children at 24 months has increased for the second consecutive quarter. To improve childhood immunisation rates, Health NZ is implementing initiatives across five action areas:
    - Increasing targeted and opportunistic immunisation for priority populations.

- Enabling best practice immunisation efforts
- Increase whānau and community engagement
- Increase workforce capacity and capability
- Improve data technological capability.

- Whānau Āwhina Plunket established four new vaccination clinics in quarter three (Hamilton (2), Taumarunui (1) and Kaikohe(1)), bringing the total number of clinics to five. Since the pilot began in December 2024, 85 children have had 230 vaccines.
- Canterbury is leading the way in this target at 89.9%, with Capital and Coast not far behind, at 88.9%
- Te Manawa Taki region had the lowest childhood immunisation rates this quarter, and a number of initiatives have been put in place to improve performance. This includes targeted outreach services, supporting additional vaccination clinics, and following up with those unvaccinated.

FSA

- Getting to see a specialist quickly can make all the difference. Our goal is for 95 per cent of people to have their first specialist assessment within four months. This helps people get answers sooner and start any needed treatments without long delays.
- Reducing the number of missed first specialist assessments is critical to achieving our health target.
- Although results are trending downwards in this target, Lakes performed particularly well this quarter, with a result of 96.3%
- We have seen a decrease in longest waiting patients between quarters two and three, with 52 per cent fewer patients waiting greater than two years for an FSA and 87 per cent fewer patients waiting greater than three years for an FSA.
- In quarter three, the focus was on increasing FSA delivery, reducing the number of long-waiting patients, validating waitlists, improving the consistency of how waitlists are managed and how patients are booked for appointments
- In Te Waipounamu, an acuity tool was implemented across four districts (Canterbury, Nelson Marlborough, South Canterbury and Southern), which

will improve visibility of patients who are waiting longer than their 'treat by' period,

Elective treatment

- Elective treatments, like planned surgeries, can improve people's lives. This is why the Government has put a focus on outsourcing and insourcing to increase the number of procedures.
- We're working to ensure 95 per cent of people have their elective treatment within four months. This means less waiting and faster relief, helping people get back to doing what they love.
- We have also seen a decrease in our longest waiting patients between quarters two and three, with 77 per cent fewer patients waiting longer than two years for elective treatment and 89 per cent fewer patients waiting longer than three years.
- In quarter three, the focus was all about ramping up delivery, improving internal theatre productivity, reducing the number of long-waiting patients, validating waitlists, and improving consistency to the way they are managed
- Health NZ began the electives boost initiative, with a focus on increasing use of private sector capacity to provide an additional 10,579 elective surgeries by the end of June 2025. Early indications from quarter three show delivery has ramped up significantly and the majority of referrals for outsourcing are long-waiters, which is anticipated to improve health target performance through the next quarter.
- Examples of initiatives in the districts include additional insourcing in Auckland and Counties Manukau, and additional outsourcing for ophthalmology, cardiothoracics, general surgery, gynaecology, orthopaedics, plastics and specialist paediatrics, and additional theatres opening at Counties Manukau from the start of March and an increase in Saturday elective procedures at Middlemore Hospital from 25 to 42 until June.

Shorter stays in ED

- Emergency department presentations are increasing over time. Presentations are largely increasing in urgent triage categories and decreasing in less urgent triage categories. An increasing proportion of

presentations are older, complex patients, who are more likely to stay in the emergency department longer and subsequently be admitted to hospital.

- People shouldn't have to wait for long periods of time to be seen, assessed, or treated.
- Our aim is to have 95 per cent of patients to be admitted, discharged or transferred from an ED within six hours.
- A +4.1% improvement was made in this target, in comparison to the same quarter last year.
- West Coast and Tairawhiti performed particularly well this quarter, with results of 96.3% and 93.6% respectively.
- A number of initiatives have been deployed at Capital and Coast (our worst performing district this quarter) to help improve performance in this target. For example:
    - Implementation of an ambulatory care, treat and discharge, model of care at Wellington Hospital ED is underway. This will lift performance for non-admitted patients (approximately 65 per cent of all ED presentations), and in turn lift overall performance in this measure.
    - 48 additional rest home and hospital-level care beds have become available in Wellington, and 10 hospital-level care beds in Pahiatua
    - The new Wellington Regional Hospital High Dependency Unit (HDU) received its first patients on 31 March. The additional eight beds increase the hospital's ICU/HDU capacity to 32 beds. Four further beds will be added later this year.

Publication of immunisation primary care indicator league tables

The league tables are currently published quarterly on the Health NZ website https://www.tewhatuora.govt.nz/for-health-professionals/data-and-statistics/primary-care/primary-health-organisation-performance

From Q3 the tables (see Appendix 7) will be printed in the five major newspapers. The planned print date for Q3 is 18 June (day after health target results are released).

A letter has been drafted from Nick Chamberlain to go to PHOs about immunisations and Q3 reporting. The letter also notes that publication in newspapers, in addition to the online publication will commence this quarter.

The following is draft positioning for the rationale for the newspaper print. We are likely to get questions both internally and from media about the reasons for doing so and why the spend is justified.

- High profile, publicly consumed media placements reflect the importance of immunisations as a health target.
- Placing the advert in a news context grounds the league tables, lending them weight, credence, and relevance.
- Publishing across the motu contributes to a national public conversation about the importance of immunisations – especially at a time when measles and pertussis remain an ongoing concern.
- We wish to publicly recognise those who are doing well at contributing to increasing immunisations rates, whilst acknowledging that there is room for improvement in other areas.

Q&As for Minister Brown

Why do we have health targets?

Health Targets measure and set goals for improving the performance of publicly funded health services.

Behind every number is an individual, many waiting in pain, and their families, anxious for their loved ones to access the care that they need. The targets keep us focused and measure our progress.

Are you happy with the quarter's results?

Overall, we're seeing positive results in three of the five targets - improved immunisation for children up to 24 months old, faster cancer treatment, and shorter stays in ED. However, it must be acknowledged that wait times for first specialist appointments and elective surgery have not been improving in the same way. We need to do more, and recent announcements about more elective surgeries being provided through the private system will help us to get on top of this.

Our focus will remain on ramping up elective treatment delivery by improving theatre productivity, reducing the number of long-waiting patients, validating our waitlists, and by improving the consistency of how our waitlists are managed and how patients are booked for elective treatment.

I look forward to seeing next quarter's results.

Do you expect to see improvements in these two targets next quarter?

Some of the changes and initiatives commenced in quarter three should start to have a positive effect in the coming months.

For example, in Te Waipounamu, an acuity tool was implemented across four districts (Canterbury, Nelson Marlborough, South Canterbury and Southern), which will improve visibility of patients who are waiting longer than their 'treat by' period.

Other changes that are already having an impact to reduce surgical waitlists include the opening of additional theatres in Counties Manukau since the start of March and increasing Saturday elective surgeries at Middlemore Hospital.

Why are results for the FSA and elective treatment wait time targets continuing to go down and what is being done to address this?

FSA

There has been a decrease in longest waiting patients between quarters two and three, with 52 per cent fewer patients waiting more than two years and 87 per cent fewer patients waiting more than three years for an FSA.

Use of the musculoskeletal pathway, which sees patients being referred to specialist physiotherapists who can order appropriate tests for their FSAs rather than surgeons, continues to increase with 1,797 FSAs provided through the pathway nationally, an increase of 1,345 (almost 300 per cent) on the previous quarter.

Regions are validating FSA and elective treatment waitlists across the five biggest services (ear, nose and throat, orthopaedics, gynaecology, general surgery and ophthalmology) focusing on patients waiting more than four months. The validation work will be completed by 30 June 2025.

The newly endorsed and released national outpatient waitlist management guidelines have established agreed standards for how waitlists should be managed, bringing together 20 different sets of operational processes into a single national approach. This is an important step in helping to reduce district variations in how referrals and waitlists are managed.

Elective treatment

While Health NZ's total volume of elective treatments delivered each year has remained relatively stable over the last five years, demand has continued to increase which means the waitlist grows. Although performance in this measure has declined over the last two quarters, we have started to see a decrease in the size of the overall elective treatment waitlist for the first time in several years.

We have seen a decrease in our longest waiting patients between quarters two and three, with 77 per cent fewer patients waiting longer than two years for elective treatment and 89 per cent fewer patients waiting longer than three years.

Examples of key initiatives to improve our performance in this measure include:

- Additional theatre time added in the Auckland and Counties Manukau districts (through opening more theatres and extending weekend shifts),

and additional outsourcing for ophthalmology, cardiothoracics, general surgery, gynaecology, orthopaedics, plastics and specialist paediatrics.

- Introduction of the +1 booking model (adding one more procedure booking to each days theatre list) in specialities with habitual early finishes (finishing more than 60 minutes early), such as plastics and gynaecology at Counties Manukau. Early evidence shows an average increase of 36.5 hours of operating per week (23 per cent increase).

- Te Waipounamu has been working with private providers to maximise available capacity to treat public patients. While several services have outsourced appropriate patients, the largest volumes have been general surgery, orthopaedics, and cataract procedures. Between 17 February and 30 March, 791 additional outsourced treatments had been delivered by the private sector.

What positive results are you seeing in the regions?

We've seen some regions improve their results from the previous quarter. For example, for the faster access to cancer treatment target, Te Manawa Taki has gone from being the lowest performing region in quarter two to the best performing region. That's a result of refocused prioritisation for diagnostic and interventional procedures, a new breast surgeon in Waikato, and the introduction of weekly clinical meetings focused on wait time breaches and theatre capacity meetings in Taranaki.

I would like to see this momentum continue and hope it serves as motivation to other regions across the country.

How will recent budget announcements help drive better results?

Infrastructure funding

As part of the Government's $1 billion boost to hospital infrastructure, Nelson Hospital will get a major redevelopment and be the country's first hospital to receive a new temporary inpatient unit while construction is underway.

The redevelopment, which was announced as part of Budget 2025, will deliver a significant upgrade to health infrastructure in the region, with a new five-storey inpatient unit providing 128 overnight adult inpatient beds. This includes 41

additional beds, bringing the total number of overnight medical/surgical inpatient beds across the hospital to 125, up from the current 84.

Fit for purpose infrastructure will see more people supported through the health system.

Urgent care funding

The Government has announced significant investment to maintain existing urgent and afterhours care services, and to deliver new and improved services where they are needed.

Health New Zealand is working with providers and the workforce to ensure that these services can be delivered. We're targeting new funding to where it's needed most — for extended hours, improved clinical tools, or filling gaps so patients have access to timely, quality healthcare. This is about putting patients first — whether they live in a small rural town or a large city. These will be tailored services based on local need and workforce availability.

What are you doing to address issues in ED?

Improvement continues as hospitals across the country embed their acute flow improvement plans. The 2024/25 milestone has been achieved nationally, and in Te Waipounamu and Te Manawa Taki regions.

Central remains the lowest performing region and all districts in the region are focused on implementing actions set out in their 90-day plans to lift performance. Actions include:

- implementation of an ambulatory care, treat and discharge, model of care at Wellington Hospital ED
- 48 additional rest home and hospital-level care beds in Wellington and 10 hospital-level care beds in Pahiatua
- increased frontline positions at Wairarapa Hospital, with the addition of two new roles (triage nurse and senior doctor/nurse practitioner
- implemented an electronic medication management system, MedChart, at MidCentral to streamline workflows, improve patient safety, and enhance efficiency reducing administrative workload.

More than 3,000 patients have been through North Shore Hospital's transitional lounge since October. Nineteen hospitals throughout the country have a dedicated transit or discharge lounge.

Permanent 24/7 ED security guard positions were filled at each of the eight priority EDs - Waitākere, North Shore, Auckland City, Middlemore, Waikato, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Ensuring safety in EDs remains a priority to reduce incidents of violence to better protect staff and patients, which will improve timeliness of care provided and contribute towards performance in this health target

We continue to work closely with our primary care and urgent care partners to manage flow across the health system.

At this time of year especially, we plan for an expect a surge in demand for our emergency departments and in-hospital services. We want to reassure people needing urgent hospital-level care that they will always receive it.

How will partnering with private help to address wait times?

Partnering closely with the private sector is enabling Health New Zealand to get on top of waitlists, and this is a clear example of how beneficial and successful public-private partnerships can be.

For example, Taranaki Base Hospital used all of its available public resources and engaged with private providers to manage a recent backlog in radiology x-ray reports and reduce wait times. Outsourcing continues to meet current demand and ensure the people of Taranaki have ongoing access to timely radiology results.

Are you concerned about how these results will affect staff morale?

This quarter's results have been largely positive, which is down to the tireless efforts of our staff, primary care partners and Māori and Pacific providers.

We value the hard work and dedication of our staff in every corner of the country who continue to turn up day in and day out to deliver timely quality healthcare.

Social media posts

Latest quarterly results for health targets show improvements in three out of five targets compared to the same quarter last year - faster access to cancer treatment, improved immunisation rates for children, and shorter stays in emergency departments.

At a national level, the results for quarter three are:

- Faster cancer treatment: 84.6% of patients are currently receiving cancer management within 31 days of the decision to treat. The 24/25 milestone is 86%
- Improved immunisation for children: 79.3% of children are fully immunised at 24 months of age. The 24/25 milestone is 84%
- Shorter stays in emergency departments: 74.2% of patients are currently admitted, discharged, or transferred from an ED within 6 hours. The 24/25 milestone is 74%.
- Shorter wait times for first specialist assessment: 58.2% of patients are currently waiting less than four months for a first specialist assessment (FSA). The 24/25 milestone is 62%.
- Shorter wait times for treatment: 57.3% of patients are currently waiting less than four months for elective treatment. The 24/25 milestone is 63%

Overall, these results are encouraging and show that we're on the right track. There remains work to be done to address variations in performance between districts.
[link to HT page]

The visuals on the following pages will also be published on Health NZ social media channels.

For Facebook and LinkedIn:

For Instagram:

For X and Bluesky: