

Training more doctors

National will train more doctors so that Kiwis don't have to wait as long to see their GP, be treated at hospital or have their surgery.

New Zealand does not train enough doctors to meet the demands of our growing and aging population. To address this, National will establish a third medical school at the University of Waikato, with satellite training centres in regional areas.

Based at Waikato, the new medical school will have clinical training alliances with other universities and medical facilities around regional New Zealand – a model that will deliver more doctors committed to serving in provincial and rural parts of the country.

National will also increase the number of medical school placements at Auckland and Otago by a total of 50 from 2025. This will be in addition to the 50 extra places already funded at Budget 2023 (for a total increase of 100 more than these schools are currently training).

Together, this will see New Zealand graduating 759 doctors a year by 2030, a significant increase from the 539 we graduate today.

Why we need to train more doctors

New Zealand is training too few doctors to meet the needs of its growing and aging population and to accommodate the expected pattern of retirement of our existing health workforce. This lack of domestically trained doctors leads to longer wait times for treatment, particularly in rural and provincial parts of the country.

According to GenPro, a collective of 1000 General Practices, 45 per cent of patients must wait a week or longer to see a doctor.¹ Data from Health New Zealand shows that around a quarter of patients must wait longer than four months for their first appointment with a specialist, and last year almost 300,000 patients spent longer than six hours in a hospital emergency department.²

Why we need a third medical school

Despite being relatively large by international standards, the Auckland and Otago medical schools don't produce enough doctors to meet New Zealand's health workforce demands. According to the Medical Council of New Zealand, over 40 per cent of doctors in New Zealand were trained overseas, including 46 per cent of GPs, 54 per cent of rural hospital doctors, 58 per cent of emergency medicine doctors and over 64 per cent of psychiatrists.³

New Zealand currently has one medical school for every 2.6 million people. That compares to one for every 2.1 million people in the US, one for every 1.5 million people in the UK, and one for every 1.2 million people in Australia.⁴

How the third medical school will work

The new school of medicine will operate a graduate entry only model, admitting students who have already completed a degree and allowing them to undertake four years of medical study (rather than the five required for undergraduates). Initially, the school will enrol 120 students, starting in 2027.

¹ [One News](#): Doctors say long wait times at GPs are becoming unsafe for patients and practitioners.

² [Health New Zealand](#)

³ Medical Council of New Zealand: The New Zealand Medical Workforce in 2022, [link](#)

⁴ Population [World Bank](#), [US](#) med schools, [UK](#) med schools, [Australia](#) med schools

The programme will involve training at Waikato University for the first year and at training centres located in regional hospitals and larger community medical centres for the remaining three years. This model of training-in-place in the provinces will ensure a sustainable supply of primary care doctors committed to serving provincial, rural, and high-needs communities.

Increasing the number of medical training places available will help New Zealand retain students who are currently unable to secure placements at Auckland or Otago, leading them to pursue medical education offshore. The shorter training duration of the graduate medical school will also be attractive to older applicants and individuals with family commitments, for whom a six-year basic training programme can be challenging.

Cost

Operating (\$M)	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26	FY 2026-27	FY 2027-28
Training places at Auckland & Otago	\$1.1	\$3.2	\$5.4	\$8.5
Training places at third medical school	-	-	\$2.6	\$7.7
Third medical school setup costs	\$1.0	\$4.0	\$5.0	\$10.0

The capital establishment cost is expected to be \$380 million, with the Crown contributing up to \$280 million (pending a final business case) and the remainder being raised by Waikato University.

FAQ

Is New Zealand too small to have a third medical school?

Compared to other countries, New Zealand has a relatively low ratio of medical schools to population. For example, the Republic of Ireland, with a similar population to New Zealand, has six medical schools compared to our two.

Didn't the Government already increase doctor training places?

The Government announced funding for an additional 50 training places at Auckland and Otago from 2024. This is not sufficient to meet existing or future demand and reduce our overreliance on overseas-trained doctors. National's plan will see a further 50 training places added from 2025, and another 120 places from the third medical school based at Waikato from 2027.

How can students train as doctors if they don't have undergraduate degrees in health science?

The proposed training model for the third medical school is based on one operated by New York's Mt Sinai, one of the world's elite medical schools. It has shown that non-medical students perform on par with those with science degrees and are more inclined to pursue primary care specialties like general practice and psychiatry.