

## Medical Students' Association applauds National's voluntary bonding scheme for graduates

The New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) today welcomed the announcement by John Key of the National party's Voluntary Bonding Scheme for medical graduates and other health professionals. "Debt relief offered during a graduate's first years in the medical workforce, in return for a service commitment to New Zealand, is something New Zealand's medical students welcome" Ms Dare stated.

The announcement follows increasing pressure for New Zealand to address its significant medical workforce crisis after the release of a WHO report in May found that 30% of New Zealand's doctors leave the country within three years of graduating from medical school. "New Zealand's high and sustained loss of medical graduates, along with its continued reliance on overseas trained doctors to man our health system has left the country in a very vulnerable position" Ms Dare says. Shortages, once confined to rural areas and certain specialties were now being seen across the board and in all parts of the country. "National's commitment to address doctor retention issues through a debt relief scheme is a significant step towards ensuring a sustainable medical workforce for New Zealand in the short to medium term."

New Zealand medical students pay some of the highest fees in the world to train as doctors. The average medical student debt at graduation is \$65 206, with 10% of doctors owing over \$100 000. In a study of New Zealand medical graduates, debt was a significant driver in pushing doctors offshore. "Debt relief, such as the Voluntary Bonding Scheme offers, will enable more of our young doctors to stay practising in New Zealand."

Debt relief was not just about remuneration however. "The voluntary bonding scheme is a means of showing our new medical and health graduates that New Zealand values their contribution to the health system, and to our communities" Ms Dare says. "This is important for ongoing recruitment into medicine and health in New Zealand."

Ms Dare did however caution against seeing voluntary bonding as a "magic bullet" for our medical workforce crisis. "This policy must be coupled with a commitment to increase funded medical school places and to promote a health workforce climate that ensures our newest medical graduates' see New Zealand as a viable place to work and train." "Ongoing longterm workforce planning is needed alongside short term relief" she said.

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