



The New Zealand Medical Students' Association

PRESS RELEASE

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Proposed Government policy reduces likelihood of New Zealand doctors for New Zealanders.

As Medicine is an undergraduate degree, usually expected to take at least six years of study, the changes proposed by the Minister of Tertiary Education could have a significant impact both the diversity of students studying medicine and on the choices they make after graduation.

“Medical students already carry a large burden of debt, and these changes will place even more pressure on young doctors to pay off their loans quickly. I am very concerned about the effect this will have on the New Zealand health workforce” says the New Zealand Medical Students Association (NZMSA) President Elizabeth Carr.

Fees Cap:

On average medical students will graduate with around \$80,000 of debt and nearly 90% will have a student loan.

NZMSA President Elizabeth Carr says, “There is tremendous public support to improve our health workforce, particularly in primary care. While the Government promised 200 extra places for medical students, it now expects those same students to carry a greater burden of debt. Students will look to pay off this debt by working for higher salaries in Australia, becoming locums or specialising faster. Research has repeatedly shown that a larger debt at graduation is one of the strongest factors that drive young doctors towards seeking higher wages overseas. The New Zealand public will lose out in this scenario.”

Since the abolishment of the Step Up and Bonded Merit scholarships in last year’s budget, those students without access to financial support may be less likely to consider training in medicine. This will particularly affect Māori and Pacific Island students and exacerbate the shortage of practitioners from these communities. The effects of these changes would seem incompatible with the Government’s stated policies regarding the desirability of New Zealand doctors for New Zealanders.

We want more New Zealand doctors for New Zealanders and these changes will make that a harder goal to achieve.

Length of Undergraduate study:

Medical school is a minimum of six years, with many students doing an additional research honours year. Postgraduate medical students, which are a significant and valuable portion of the medical student body, will have completed three-to-four years of prior study before entering medical school.

Clearly a lifetime cap on the length of undergraduate study would have to take into account the expected duration of study, and have some ability to appeal special cases. If not, we could see a significant impact on medical education and the diversity of the medical workforce.

Without access to a student loan scheme, students would have to front up with \$11, 545 dollars per year at Auckland Medical School and \$11,695 per year at the Otago Medical School for some people, for example those with families or those whose parents can't spare the cash, this is simply not feasible.

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Further information:

- New Zealand is currently facing a medical workforce crisis. It is particularly severe in certain localities and specialties of training
- 36-42% of doctors in NZ are foreign-trained, many of whom stay for only short periods.
- By the third year after graduation, 30% of doctors have left New Zealand, representing a loss of \$14 million worth of training
- 2007 saw ~12% of newly graduated doctors leave before entering the New Zealand workforce
- According to an NZMSA survey, average expected debt for medical students is \$75,752 in 2008
 - 37% believe it will influence their career choice
 - 41% believe it will influence their choice of location of work within New Zealand
 - 60% believe it will influence their choice of location of work in the world
- The government has already scrapped the step up scholarships and bonded merit schemes so it is becoming increasingly difficult for students to find any access to extra funds if they need them.