

Manifesto 2026 – responses from political parties

Dr Sharon English, Chair of the Aotearoa New Zealand National Committee, invited each party's health spokesperson(s) to respond to RACS' request for three priority commitments. The responses received (listed in order of receipt) are presented below under each of the College's three priorities, enabling Members to compare the parties' respective proposals and commitments. RACS members are welcome to use the *Manifesto* in communications and advocacy to influence candidates and opinion leaders over the next few weeks. The information from political parties can also support your local advocacy with electoral candidates and in exercising your own electoral choices.

1. Workforce

RACS priority:

Commit to planning, growing, and retaining a surgical workforce capable of meeting current and future need for safe, effective, and timely surgical care within an adequately resourced health system.

New Zealand Labour Party

Labour would reinstate transparent and collaborative workforce planning to ensure patients receive the care they need. It would also seek to ensure the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 includes workforce objectives.

Green Party

The Green Party supports long-term workforce planning, including training more health professionals locally, improving placement and supervision capacity, and creating conditions that retain experienced staff in the public system. Its response also identifies adequate funding, safe staffing, fair pay, Māori and Pacific health workforce pathways, and practical support for rural and regional services as priorities. The Greens also support working with RACS and others to ensure training, recruitment, retention and wellbeing initiatives respond to evidence and future demand.

ACT Party

ACT supports the Ministry of Health working with health stakeholders to develop a 10-year workforce plan, including identifying the roles and training required for the surgical workforce.

The Opportunity Party

The Opportunity Party proposes a 10-year Health Plan with funded workforce projections, published and reported annually to Parliament. The plan would provide longer-term funding certainty so colleges and districts can determine training intakes and fund supervision. Its first priority for new funding would be retaining clinicians already in Aotearoa, expanding training places, and registering overseas-trained health professionals.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports planning, growing and retaining the surgical workforce and proposes an additional \$1 billion annually for health workforce development, alongside increased training opportunities for the Māori health workforce. It would also explore a full student loan write-off for people who work in Aotearoa for five years to encourage health professionals trained here to remain in the health system.

2. Needs-based equitable healthcare

RACS priority:

Commit to making evidence-based decisions on the allocation of resources to address unmet need for surgical care whilst achieving needs-based equitable access to safe, effective, and timely surgical care for our diverse communities.

New Zealand Labour Party

Labour supports universal access to care and improving data and digital systems to better serve patients. Over the longer term, it proposes developing ways to measure unmet need and support well-informed decisions about prioritisation.

Green Party

The Green Party supports directing resources towards people with the greatest unmet need for surgical care, supported by better data on unmet need, waiting times, outcomes and barriers to access. It specifically identifies Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, older people, and rural and regional communities. The Greens also support transparent decision-making, stronger public health planning, and investment in prevention, diagnostics, primary care and hospital capacity.

ACT Party

ACT supports needs-based healthcare for all New Zealanders and greater use of clinical evidence and cost-effectiveness in healthcare funding decisions, particularly within Health New Zealand.

The Opportunity Party

The Opportunity Party proposes measurable equity goals with public reporting, alongside obligations to meet Te Tiriti commitments. Rural access would be treated as a specific outcome measure, with Health New Zealand allocating resources within the funding envelope established through the proposed Health Plan.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports evidence-based allocation of resources to address unmet surgical need and achieve equitable access. Its proposed measures include re-establishing Te Aka Whai Ora, investing in marae-based clinics and mobile health units, and lowering screening ages to reflect health inequities. It considers these measures would support earlier and more equitable identification of surgical need across communities.

3. Accelerate investment in infrastructure

RACS priority:

Commit to planning and accelerating investment in better data, digital, physical, and sustainable infrastructure to support the public healthcare system so we can meet current and future demand for surgery.

New Zealand Labour Party

Labour supports working with RACS to identify practical and effective investments to increase long-term capacity in the public health system. Its response highlights investment in data and digital upgrades and hospital infrastructure.

Green Party

The Green Party supports sustained public investment in health infrastructure, with long-term capital planning that is transparent, evidence-based and aligned with current and projected population need. It also supports reversing Data and Digital job cuts at Te Whatu Ora to strengthen digital health infrastructure and meet future demand.

ACT Party

ACT highlights the potential for new technologies, including artificial intelligence, to improve health productivity and supports pathways for the quicker adoption of new medical technologies into the health system.

The Opportunity Party

The Opportunity Party proposes long-term infrastructure planning supported by legislation, with published projections covering infrastructure, demand, workforce and costs. Its proposed approach would prioritise maintenance of existing assets and hospitals, while on the digital side it would seek to

connect and complete existing systems through national interoperability standards and records that follow patients.

Te Pāti Māori

Te Pāti Māori supports increased investment in physical health infrastructure and improved data collection that upholds data sovereignty and provides a more accurate picture of the health issues affecting communities. It also commits to strengthening environmental sustainability and protecting te taiao in the development of new infrastructure.
