

Investing in Better Outcomes for Women, Babies and Whānau

2026 GENERAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

The New Zealand College of Midwives | Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa has identified five practical priorities that together will strengthen maternity care, improve equity, and support better outcomes for communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

01

INVEST IN AND STRENGTHEN MIDWIFERY CONTINUITY OF CARE

Protect and strengthen New Zealand's internationally recognised continuity of midwifery care model.

Continuity of care from the same midwife throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period, is proven to result in improved maternal and infant outcomes and reduced intervention rates. New Zealand's maternity system is built on this model, yet it is increasingly threatened by workforce shortages, underfunding and an outdated contractual framework.

Better outcomes and fewer interventions, reducing pressure and costs across the health system.

02

ENSURE ALL MATERNITY SERVICES ARE SAFELY STAFFED BY MIDWIVES

Investment in the midwifery workforce is critical to safe, accessible and sustainable maternity services.

Maternity services cannot operate safely without sufficient numbers of midwives across community, primary, rural and hospital settings. Persistent workforce shortages are affecting service access, sustainability and staff wellbeing. The College continues to advocate for workforce growth, education opportunities and retention initiatives.

A sustainable workforce that can meet the increasing needs of women, babies and whānau.

03

ACCELERATE ACTION TO REDUCE SUDI

Eliminate preventable infant deaths and address persistent inequities.

Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) remains a significant cause of infant mortality, disproportionately affecting Māori and Pacific infants and communities experiencing socioeconomic deprivation.

Midwives play a critical role in prevention, but reducing SUDI requires a coordinated and adequately resourced response across health, social and community services.

Targeted support will reduce preventable infant deaths, improve equity and support progress towards the national SUDI target.

04

FULLY FUND MATERNITY ULTRASOUND SERVICES

Remove cost barriers to clinically necessary maternity ultrasounds.

Many women and whānau continue to face personal costs for essential pregnancy ultrasound scans. These costs disproportionately affect lower-income families, rural communities and those already experiencing inequities in access to care.

Fully funded maternity ultrasounds will remove cost and location barriers and provide timely, equitable access to essential care.

05

IMPROVE ACCESS TO MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Ensure timely access to support for women experiencing mild to moderate maternal mental health concerns.

Many women experience anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges during pregnancy and the first year after birth. Services for those with mild to moderate concerns remains inconsistent across New Zealand.

Early support improves outcomes and helps prevent concerns becoming more serious.

01

Priority actions:

- A modernised funding and contract model for Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) midwives.
- Funding that reflects the true cost of providing continuity of care.
- Sustainable support for rural and remote midwifery practice.
- Reduction in unnecessary administrative burden.
- Investment in community-based maternity services that enable continuity of care.

02

Priority actions:

- Increased investment in midwifery education and clinical placements.
- Expanded support for graduate midwives entering practice.
- Targeted recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Ongoing investment in Māori and Pasifika midwifery workforce development.
- Commitment to safe staffing standards across all maternity services.
- Long-term workforce planning aligned with population need.

03

Priority actions:

The national rate of SUDI remains above the national target at a rate of approximately 0.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.

- Adequate resourcing and support for the reset and implementation of the National SUDI Prevention Programme across the health sector, including increased access to safe sleep devices and practical support for priority whānau.
- Universal access to consistent, evidence-based safe sleep education.
- Sustained investment in kaupapa Māori and culturally responsive approaches, supported by stronger coordination across maternity, primary care, child health, housing and community services.
- Strengthened smoking and vaping cessation support before, during and after pregnancy.

04

Priority actions:

- Full public funding of all clinically indicated maternity ultrasounds.
- A nationally consistent funding model across all regions.
- Timely access to ultrasound services regardless of location.
- Investment in rural and community ultrasound capacity.
- Support for innovative models of care, including expanded access to point-of-care ultrasound in appropriate settings.

05

Priority actions:

- Equitable access to publicly funded maternal mental health services for women with mild to moderate needs.
- Timely access to counselling, psychological therapies and peer support during pregnancy and the postnatal period.
- Fully resourced, consistent maternal mental health screening and referral pathways across all regions.
- Better integration between maternity, primary care, mental health and community services.
- Increased investment in culturally responsive services for Māori, Pacific and other priority populations.
- Investment in support services those who have experienced birth trauma



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