

Aide Mémoire

Meeting with the Breast Cancer Foundation New Zealand

Date due to MO:	19 February 2026	Date of Event:	24 February 2026
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	H2025075245
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Heather Walker	Manager, Northern Region, Te Aho o Te Kahu	s 9(2)(a)
Clare Possenniskie	Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Te Aho o Te Kahu	

Event briefing

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About the Meeting

Purpose of Meeting	The Breast Cancer Foundation has requested a meeting with you and has provided the following agenda: 1. Innovation & Technology • The Breast Cancer Register & outcomes for the health system • Breast Cancer Screening blood test update 2. Radiology • Issues: workforce & MDMs • Opportunities: Technology AI & expanded scope of practice 3. General Business • CANGO / NFP sector medicines access election campaign • Pink Ribbon Breakfast – May 2026		
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Details of Meeting	Date:	Tuesday 24 February 2026	
	Time:	2:00 – 2:30pm	
	Venue:	Auckland Policy Office, 167b Victoria Street West, Auckland Central	

Attendees	Ah-Leen Rayner, CEO, and Justine Smyth, Chair.		
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Organisation	Breast Cancer Foundation New Zealand is a not-for-profit charitable trust whose vision is “zero deaths from breast cancer”. They promote breast awareness and early detection, and support patients recovering from treatment and those living long term with breast cancer, to improve their quality of life and extend survival.		
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Agency representatives	Heather Walker, Manager, Northern Region, Te Aho o Te Kahu		
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Attendees from the Breast Cancer Foundation



Ah-Leen Rayner, Chief Executive, Breast Cancer Foundation NZ

Ah-Leen has spent the past 25 years in a range of commercial and general management roles. She was most recently the Executive General Manager of Tourism at KiwiRail, where she developed the Great Journeys of New Zealand brand.

Ah-Leen leads the Breast Cancer Foundation NZ operations and revenue generating initiatives.



Justine Smyth, Chair, Breast Cancer Foundation NZ

Justine Smyth is a company director. Her current directorships include Chair of Spark, Director of Auckland International Airport and Chair of Breast Cancer Foundation NZ. In 2020, she was appointed a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for services to governance and women.

Justine is also owner and executive director of a clothing manufacture and wholesale business. Her background includes the roles of Group Finance Director of Lion Nathan Ltd and Partner at Deloitte.

Background

1. Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst New Zealand women. Over 3,600 women are diagnosed with, and 650 women die from, breast cancer every year.
2. Breast cancer most commonly occurs in women aged over 50 years. However, 6% of breast cancer occurs in women under the age of 40 years and around 25 men are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.
3. Māori and Pacific women have a higher incidence of breast cancer, and an increased mortality rate compared to New Zealand European women.
4. Depending on the type and stage of cancer, treatment options include surgery, radiation therapy and systemic anticancer treatments, such as chemotherapy and immunotherapy.
5. Breast cancer survival rates are among the highest of all cancers, due largely to opportunities for early detection and diagnosis, treatment advances, and ever-improving standards of care.
6. You previously met with the Breast Cancer Foundation (the Foundation) on 28 March 2025 where you discussed:
 - the collaboration between the Foundation and BreastScreen Aotearoa to improve early detection and reduce the impact of breast cancer
 - the nation-wide roll out of extended free breast screening to women aged 70-74 years.
7. You also met with the Foundation, Hei Āhuru Mōwai, Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition and the Southern Cancer Society collectively on 7 August 2025 where you discussed:
 - the challenges with Linear Accelerator (LINAC) capacity and radiation oncology services in Canterbury
 - the shortage of skilled workers across the cancer workforce, including radiology and oncology specialists.

Breast Cancer Foundation National Register

8. The Breast Cancer Foundation National Register (the Register) collects information about all pre-invasive and invasive breast cancer patients in New Zealand. The Register is a comprehensive breast cancer dataset, containing over 50,000 clinical records and has near real-time report. The Foundation has invested nearly \$12 million in the platform.
9. The Cancer Control Agency | Te Aho o Te Kahu (the Agency) contracted the Foundation to use data from the Register to develop the Breast Cancer Quality Improvement Monitoring Report, released in June 2025. The Quality Improvement report highlights unwarranted variation in breast cancer diagnosis, treatment and outcomes in New Zealand, and identifies where action could be prioritised to improve outcomes. The Agency acknowledges the completeness and high-quality nature of the data contained in the Register.

10. Other cancer advocacy groups have advocated for the development of specific registers (e.g. ovarian cancer register); however, taking a national, integrated approach is more sustainable than a series of tumour specific registers.
11. As an alternative to individual registers, the Cancer Control Agency is working to progress CanShare; a unified, standards-based platform designed to collect and analyse high-quality data for all cancer types, including breast cancer. CanShare will facilitate comparative analysis, service monitoring and integrated care delivery.

Screening and blood tests

12. BreastScreen Aotearoa is New Zealand's publicly funded, national breast screening programme offering eligible women a free mammogram every two years. The programme is close to reaching the government target of 70% with screening coverage in September 2025 at 68.8%.

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¹ Syantra is a precision biotechnology company based in Canada.

Radiologist Workforce Shortages

17. The cancer workforce is experiencing a shortage of skilled workers across professions, including radiology and oncology specialists. Demand on the workforce is expected to rise as the number of people being diagnosed with cancer grows.
18. In their meeting briefing, the Foundation highlights that the Southern Region has no public breast radiology service and relies on a single private provider. This has led to reduced specialist participation in Breast Tumour Board Multi-Disciplinary Meetings (MDM), limiting real time radiology input, and surgeons presenting imaging outside their scope.
19. The 2024-2027 Health NZ Workforce Plan includes a particular focus on strengthening the cancer workforce. This includes priority actions to:
 - a. improve national workforce planning and align it with national and regional service planning
 - b. align training volumes with the number of health workers needed in future
 - c. change how care is being delivered through new models of care and service delivery approaches
 - d. expand medical training in vulnerable specialities
 - e. establish advanced practice roles and cancer specialisation pathways.
20. Changes have also been made to fast-track and streamline recruitment for international doctors.
21. As well as improving recruitment and retention of the cancer workforce, work is also underway to better utilise the skills of the current workforce. This includes exploring artificial intelligence to improve efficiency, clinical decision-making in cancer care, surveillance, monitoring and navigation in cancer including MDM. These kinds of actions will free up clinician time to work to the top of their scope.

CANGO / Not for Profit Sector Medicines Access Election Campaign

22. The Foundation cite a New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) 2020 report, commissioned by Medicines New Zealand², "A new generation medicines policy – Improved access and equity for New Zealanders" which concludes that New Zealand's pharmaceutical funding is the lowest in the developed world.
23. The report was critical of Pharmac's processes and recommended whole-system reform. A number of the concerns regarding inequities, timeliness and transparency, were similar to those raised in the 2022 Pharmac review and are being addressed.

² Medicines New Zealand is an association representing pharmaceutical companies.

24. Pharmac is successful at providing New Zealanders with a range of treatment options within their fixed budget; on average New Zealand pays thirty percent less for the same medicines in comparable countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom.
25. The Agency believes it is important to balance the opportunities that effective cancer medicines offer, with other opportunities to improve cancer outcomes and reduce cancer inequities for New Zealanders, such as through investment in prevention and early detection activities.

Access to new cancer medicines

26. As part of the Government's \$604 million budget boost to Pharmac two new medicines for breast cancer are now available. These are:
 - a. Pembrolizumab (branded as Keytruda), which was funded from 1 October 2024 for eligible people with advanced triple-negative breast cancer.
 - b. Trastuzumab deruxtecan (branded as Enhertu), which was funded from 1 January 2025 for people with HER2-positive (a receptor which indicates more aggressive growth) metastatic breast cancer.
27. A combination product containing Pertuzumab and Trastuzumab (branded as Phesgo) was funded from 1 December 2025. Phesgo is given as a subcutaneous injection (under the skin) and significantly reduces the amount of time patients spend receiving treatment.
28. In October, the Petitions Committee received a petition asking for Pembrolizumab (Keytruda) to be funded for early-stage triple negative breast cancer; this was supported by the Foundation. Pembrolizumab for early-stage triple negative breast cancer was added to Pharmac's Options for Investment List (OFI) in September 2025.
29. Including Pembrolizumab there are currently six different breast cancer medicines on the OFI for eight different indications.

Pink Ribbon Breakfast

30. The Foundation's Pink Ribbon Breakfast 2026 campaign invites individuals and workplaces to host breakfast events throughout May 2026 to fundraise for breast cancer research, education, and patient support.
31. The initiative is a major national fundraiser, with host kits, online fundraising tools, and community engagement provided to support participants, helping to drive contributions.

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PROACTIVELY RELEASED



Nicola Hill
Acting Chief Executive
Te Aho o Te Kahu – Cancer Control Agency