

Aide-Mémoire

Business NZ Health Forum March 2026

Date due to MO: 27 March 2026 Date of Event: 30 March 2026

Security level: **IN CONFIDENCE** Reference: H2026080431

To: Hon Casey Costello, Associate Minister of Health

Consulted: Health New Zealand: ☐

Proactive release: This **title** is proposed by the Ministry of Health for proactive release: ☒

Contact for telephone discussion

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About the Event

Purpose of Event: For you to speak at a Business NZ Health Forum and then participate in a question-and-answer session.

Details of Event: Date: 30 March 2026
Time: 1700-1830
Venue: Lady Norwood room, Sofitel, 11 Bolton Street, Wellington

Attendees

- The event will be attended by 40-50 people from a range of sectors such as banking, tobacco and alcohol, aged care, medical products and emergency services.
- Biographies of key attendees are attached as Appendix Two.
- No other Ministers have been invited to attend.

Organisation: The Forum is hosted by Business NZ, a policy and advocacy group representing thousands of businesses across the country.

Ministry representatives: Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor, will be attending the Health Forum.

Other information: Talking points for your speech were provided to your Office on 25 March 2026.

Comment/Summary:

- Your speech relates to your delivery of Coalition Agreement promises, and other deliverables since receiving your Ministerial warrant. It covers smokefree; repeal of the Therapeutic Products Act and development of the Medical Products Bill and a regime for natural health products; aged care; women's health, maternity and early years support; and emergency services.
- This aide mémoire provides supportive material and is to be read alongside your speech.
- Appendix One provides a run sheet for the event. Appendix Two contains biographies of key attendees.

Further information about the Business NZ Health Forum

1. The forum is designed for large businesses operating in the medicines and health sector, focusing on changes to legislation relating to Pharmac, health sector reform, medicines and disease treatment, mental wellbeing, and corporate health and safety.
2. Katharine Rich, CEO of Business NZ, will meet you and lead the Health Forum.

You are being introduced by Michaela Lion, AbbVie

3. You are being introduced by Michaela Lion from AbbVie. AbbVie is an international business that discovers and delivers innovative medicines and solutions that address complex health issues and enhance people's lives. Areas of focus include oncology, immunology, neuroscience, eye care, aesthetics and other areas of unmet need.

Topics relevant to your portfolio and their risks

Smokefree

4. This Government is committed to the Smokefree goal of daily smoking rates of less than 5% across all population groups.
5. Illicit trade in tobacco is a risk that is being monitored, with intelligence being gathered via a range of sources. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
6. Youth vaping rates are declining, likely in part due to recent regulatory changes. The current focus is on compliance and enforcement, with most retailers complying and continued controlled purchase operations targeting sales to minors.
7. Cabinet has agreed in principle to allow reduced harm tobacco and oral nicotine products, subject to safety standards and youth access controls. Legislative change is required, and timing depends on space in a packed legislative programme.

Medical Products Bill

8. The Medical Products Bill is a complex and significant bill that is intended to replace the Medicines Act 1981. It is intended to be introduced after the next election, with some provisions commencing soon after passage and most elements phased in around 2030 to allow industry transition.
9. Core elements of the Medicines Act 1981 will remain (including Medsafe approvals and medicine classifications). Direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines will continue, new statutory decision timeframes will be introduced, and tailored pathways will support innovation (e.g., gene therapies).
10. A risk proportionate regulatory regime will be introduced for medical devices that addresses current gaps and harmonises with international practice.
11. In the meantime, improvements are being made to the current system. For example, the law has been changed to allow more medicines to be promoted at medical conferences and trade shows. The Rule of Two has also been introduced to allow quicker approval of medicines already approved overseas.

12. Businesses who are awaiting enactment of the Medical Products Bill are likely to express concern about delays to the Bill's introduction. s 9(2)(g)(i)
- The Ministry of Health will continue to communicate and engage with industry to keep them abreast of developments.

Natural health products

13. Work continues under the Food Act for dietary supplements, particularly exports. Broader reform of natural health products is progressing more slowly while the Medical Products Bill is prioritised.
14. The natural health products sector is varied and has diverse views. Large export businesses that innovate are frustrated by outdated legislation for natural health products and have advocated for immediate change to meet international settings. Others, including importers and many small businesses manufacturing a wide variety of low volume products support low regulation. s 9(2)(g)(i)
15. The Ministry of Health continues to support the Ministry for Primary Industries in making improvements to the current system for dietary supplements, while considering options for further change.

Aged care

16. Longstanding issues in aged care include outdated funding models, a lack of system integration, inconsistent and inequitable access to services, and growing demand from an ageing population.
17. Aged care businesses may raise that it has taken too long to make needed changes, and delaying action will lead to aged care facilities closing.
18. Any changes need to be carefully considered. A Ministerial Advisory Group has been set up to provide independent, expert advice on building a sustainable aged care system, taking a bipartisan and long-term approach. It began work in January 2026 and is expected to report in mid-2026.
19. The Group is drawing on prior reviews and inquiries and has sought information from a range of organisations that represent providers and workforces in aged care. Further sector engagement is expected as part of regular parliamentary processes after recommendations are considered by Ministers.

Women's health, maternity and early years services

20. Women's health, maternity and early years services are a critical foundation for long-term health, social and economic outcomes. Supporting women and their babies has been a strong focus for the Government.
21. The Government supports a statutory entitlement to up to three days of postnatal inpatient care, reflecting coalition commitments and responding to concerns about early discharge. The Three-Day Postnatal Stay Amendment Bill is due to be read a second time in Parliament, following a report back from the Health Committee.

22. Options are currently being considered to ensure safe rollout, sufficient capacity, and workforce sustainability, without creating unmanageable pressure on maternity services.

23. s 9(2)(g)(i)

24. At the system level, Health New Zealand is improving maternity and Well Child services, with new models of care being developed to improve access for whānau, better integrate services, and respond to ongoing workforce pressures, particularly in midwifery and early years services. These changes are intended to support more flexible, community-based care while maintaining safety and quality. However, ensuring changes are implemented in a way that is sustainable and does not exacerbate workforce shortages will be critical.
25. The Government also committed to considering funding for Whānau Āwhina Plunket and additional supports are underway, including access to immunisation services. This service is being piloted through Whānau Āwhina Plunket's community-based clinics and home visits. These services help reach families who may otherwise face barriers to accessing care, including those in rural and regional communities.
26. Finally, there continues to be strong uptake of cervical screening, through self-testing. While this has improved access for many, there is a risk of uneven implementation across regions. Ensuring rural, Māori and Pacific communities benefit equitably will require ongoing monitoring and adjustment.

Emergency services risks

27. Health NZ and ACC funding for Hato Hone St John has increased by more than \$80 million in the past three financial years for all services in the contract. This includes investment in ageing IT systems. In addition, further funding this financial year is anticipated for additional frontline staff and targeted investment into ageing IT systems.
28. The fuel crisis has resulted in the Government monitoring the fuel situation at a strategic level. Ambulance services remain fully operational and there have been no requests for support. The National Fuel Plan prioritises emergency services' access to fuel if supply becomes constrained.
29. Growing demand from an ageing population is a key challenge as already over half of ambulance patients are aged 65 and over. Opportunities include better integration with aged care and adoption of new technologies to improve efficiency, patient information flow, and triage.

Precision Health and Genomics

30. The Government supports safe, evidence-based access to innovative therapies and technologies. Genomics is a growing area of industry investment, especially precision medicine. Industry will be interested in how New Zealand is integrating genomics into healthcare.
31. The Ministry of Health is leading a genomics work programme focused on enabling access to genomic innovations, including the development of personalised vaccines and

targeted therapies, such as CAR T-cell cancer therapy. The Ministry genomics work programme includes exploring strategic partnerships with industry.

32. In 2025, Cabinet agreed that the Medical Products Bill will enable tailored and appropriate approval pathways for innovative medical products (eg, gene therapies and AI-enabled medical devices with a therapeutic purpose). The Ministry of Health will be working with researchers and industry as part of developing the secondary legislation required to enable these pathways.

John McGrath
Director, Priority Projects
Strategy and Policy Group

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Appendix One: Draft run-sheet

Time	Details	Minister's Office notes
1700	Arrive at Lady Norwood room, Sofitel, 11 Bolton Street, Wellington. Minister Costello will be met by Katherine Rich CEO of Business NZ.	
1705	Katherine Rich to welcome guests and introduce Michaela Lion from AbbVie.	
1707	Michaela Lion from AbbVie to speak and introduce Hon Casey Costello.	
1710	Minister Costello addresses Business NZ.	
1730	Question and answer session. Katherine Rich to moderate.	
1750	Katherine Rich to thank Minister Costello, close formalities and invite guests to stay and network.	
1800	Canapes and drinks to be served in pre-function area.	
1825	Guests to start departing.	
1830	Event Ends.	

Appendix Two: Key Attendees

Below are brief biographies for the key attendees.

	Katherine Rich, Business NZ Chief Executive Katherine brings experience from both politics and industry, having served as an MP from 1999 to 2008 and led the New Zealand Food and Grocery Council from 2009 to 2023. She is a former APEC Business Council member. Katherine holds degrees in Marketing and Economics from the University of Otago, and her career spans public and private sector.
	Phil Love, Business NZ Deputy Chief Executive and General Manager Phil leads commercial partnerships, member engagement, and key policy forums at Business NZ, including the Major Companies Group's CEO Forum. He is Business NZ's representative on the Regional Entrepreneurial Advanced Programme with MIT Boston and the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum. His background includes roles in shareholder and media relations at Telecom (now Spark), and earlier work as a business editor and sports journalist.
	Michaela Lion, Head of Market Access and Government Affairs, AbbieVie New Zealand Michaela leads the company's engagement on medicines access, reimbursement, and health policy settings in New Zealand. Her role involves working with government agencies, sector stakeholders, and the wider health system on issues related to the funding and availability of medicines. Michaela has a background in health economics and market access, with experience across the pharmaceutical sector and public health system interfaces.
	Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor, Ministry of Health. Dr Ian Town has worked across both the health and education sectors during his 30-year career. A physician by training, he has published extensively in respiratory medicine. Much of his research has been implemented through evidence-based guidelines for the management of common conditions such as asthma, COPD and pneumonia. At the Ministry, Dr Ian Town is working to implement the New Zealand Health Research Strategy 2017-2027 in partnership with MBIE and the Health Research Council.