



20 May 2026

Dr Lester Levy CNZM
Board Chair
Health Research Council of New Zealand

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Dear Lester

We are writing to set out our expectations and priorities for 2026/27. As you are aware, this Government is committed to improving health outcomes by providing New Zealanders with timely access to high-quality services, delivered by a financially sustainable health system. We want the health system focused on putting patients first in every decision.

Our key areas of focus continue to be:

- getting Health New Zealand (Health NZ) back to basics;
- delivering all health targets, including driving shorter stays in emergency departments and getting on top of the elective surgery backlog;
- enabling faster access to primary care;
- delivering a long-term health infrastructure programme; and
- streamlining accountability mechanisms, statutory and regulatory settings to drive performance.

We know that you and the Health Research Council of New Zealand (the HRC) will support us in ensuring that these areas of focus are strongly positioned in the HRC's work programme.

Our overarching expectation is that we are relentless in our pursuit of the delivery of more and better health services for New Zealanders. In doing so, we expect the HRC to put patient need at the heart of every decision it makes and to prioritise care based on clinical need, not race.

Our system must deliver the best mix of outputs and services possible within current budgets, with a focus on optimising productivity and efficiency. Each entity must play its part for the system to perform as a whole. Where possible and useful, individual entities need to partner with others to find synergies and efficiencies which will help achieve this aim.

We expect the HRC to ensure these priorities are clearly reflected in its planning, investments, and engagement with the wider health and research system. The HRC occupies a critical position between the health system and the science, research, and innovation sectors.

We expect the HRC to use this position to:

- **Deliver public value:** We expect the HRC to work with Health New Zealand and other health services to drive research that maximises the benefit for healthcare delivery. Specifically, we would like the HRC to prioritise research that supports new models of care and treatments, and promotes innovation and efficiencies, to improve outcomes for patients and maximise value for public investment. We are keen that research is targeted on improving our health system and directly addressing known issues and does not duplicate research already undertaken overseas.

We ask that the HRC consider how our priorities are clearly demonstrated in investments from the Health Research Fund. We would also like the HRC to continue to consider measures that would expedite the processes of its ethics and regulatory committees, ensuring timely advancement and implementation of crucial health research projects, while maintaining robust ethical standards.

- **Facilitate research investment opportunities:** We expect the HRC will prioritise research that has a pathway to commercialisation. This will ensure the HRC is well placed to respond to the science system reforms and contribute to growing the economy.
- **Foster innovation:** The HRC should continue to take a leadership role in fostering innovation in healthcare, including facilitating the widest range of research partnerships. Aligned with improvements to the delivery of timely, quality health services, the HRC should highlight where innovation and technology can shift inefficient and ineffective healthcare models and practices to those that lift and strengthen the performance of the health system. It will also need to build stronger connections between researchers and innovators to support our efforts to address the health challenges we face now and in the future. We also expect the HRC to support the uptake of advanced technologies that can improve productivity, enable more efficient models of care, support more timely access to services, and improve outcomes and experience for patients.
- **Importance of clinical research:** While the HRC has a role to develop the health research workforce, it needs to pay particular attention to the enhanced development of clinician researchers, including to support building and maintaining a national clinical trials network and developing a learning health system. We must play our part in ensuring we have the necessary structures in place in New Zealand to contribute to high-quality, internationally recognised clinical research. We expect the HRC to work closely with Health New Zealand in developing the wider research workforce and building a learning system.
- **Strengthening engagement with clinicians:** We expect the HRC to strengthen its engagement role with clinicians regarding opportunities for medicines to be used more effectively to deliver better outcomes for patients, particularly for cancer treatments.
- **Reflecting my expectations in your accountability documents:** Our overarching expectation remains that all health entities are relentless in the pursuit of the delivery of better outcomes and value for New Zealanders. Our expectations should form the basis for the development of your accountability documents for the coming financial year. As you prioritise your work programme, please advise us early to discuss any proposed trade-offs that would impact on the full delivery of any of our expectations. Please ensure regular progress updates are provided through your performance reports. We expect you to ensure timely responses continue to be provided to information requests made by the Ministry of Health (Ministry) and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), as your monitoring agencies. We expect you to advise us, the Ministry, and MBIE early if you have any concerns about progress.
- **Focus on clinical trials:** We expect the HRC to take a more active role in growing New Zealand's clinical trials ecosystem, with a particular focus on cancer, and blood cancers, working alongside other agencies to support the development of a nationally coordinated clinical trials network, improving patient access to trials across regions, and enabling faster trial start-up through streamlined regulatory and ethics processes. We would like the HRC to prioritise partnerships with Health New Zealand, international research institutions, and industry to attract and deliver high-quality trials in New Zealand, ensuring patients gain earlier access to innovative therapies. The HRC should also consider how its investment settings can better support clinician-led trials and translational research, so that discoveries are more rapidly brought from bench to bedside, improving outcomes for patients with the highest unmet need.

With the potential passage of new legislation, we anticipate significant reforms in the Science, Innovation and Technology (SI&T) landscape. As you are aware, should the legislation be enacted, the HRC will be disestablished, and its critical functions will be redistributed across the future SI&T system and the Ministry. While a specific date for this transition is still under discussion, it is imperative that we prepare for these changes proactively. We expect the HRC Board to prepare the organisation for disestablishment and support a smooth transition. This preparation involves proactive engagement with the Ministry, MBIE, and other stakeholders to ensure alignment with the evolving SI&T and health priorities.

It is important that the HRC maintains its current functions slated for transfer until the new legislation comes into force. This will ensure a seamless transition and prevent any disruption in services. The continuity of services during the transition period is essential.

We expect the HRC to maintain a strong relationship with the Ministry and MBIE and, where appropriate, to align its priorities and systems with the SI&T system to ensure the profile of health research is maintained. From 1 July 2026, all investments are expected to align with the Science Investment Plan and once published, with the Health and Society Pillar Investment Plan. We expect the HRC to engage with MBIE officials to confirm how it will give effect to these plans, including how they will be embedded into investment processes and applied consistently across funding decisions.

We understand that these changes come with challenges, but with collaborative effort and clear communication, we can navigate this transition successfully. Your dedication to the wellbeing of New Zealanders through health research is invaluable, and we appreciate your continued commitment during this period of change.

The HRC has an important role in influencing the quality of care. We would like to continue to receive regular reports on the impact of HRC's work to improve quality across the health system. We encourage you to continue to work with the Ministry and MBIE on your reporting of progress. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your work to date, and we look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to improve health outcomes for all New Zealanders.

Yours sincerely



Hon Simeon Brown
Minister of Health



Hon Penny Simmonds
Minister of Science, Innovation and Technology

cc Lynne Bjarnesen and Stacey Pene, Co-Chief Executives, Health Research Council of New Zealand, LBjarnesen@hrc.govt.nz, Spene@hrc.govt.nz

Audrey Sonerson, Director-General, Ministry of Health, Audrey.Sonerson@health.govt.nz

Nic Blakeley, Chief Executive, Ministry for Business, Innovation & Employment, nic.blakeley@mbie.govt.nz