

2026 election health survey: candidate responses

Ahead of the 2026 general election on 7 November, Health Action Wānaka invited candidates and party representatives to respond to a survey on health issues that are important to the Upper Clutha and wider Otago Central Lakes community.

We asked respondents to indicate their level of support for ten statements covering local, regional and national health priorities, using a scale from 1 (do not support) to 4 (strongly support), and to explain their position in their own words. Every candidate had the same opportunity to respond, using the same questions.

The responses below are presented exactly as received, question by question, so our community can read and compare each candidate's position directly.

Response status

Candidate	Party	Status
Helen Tait	Opportunity Party	Responded
Scott Willis	Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand	Responded
Damien O'Connor	New Zealand Labour Party	Responded
Miles Anderson	National Party	Declined — see note below
Sean Bemish	ACT	No response received
David Seymour	ACT	No response received
	Māori Party	No response received
	New Zealand First	No response received

Miles Anderson (National) was invited to take part but declined. In an email to HAW, Miles acknowledged the importance of the issues raised, but said he felt the questions were framed too narrowly.

1. Investment in public health services and infrastructure

Investment in publicly funded services delivered through public hospitals should be prioritised over relying on privately funded care to fill gaps in public provision.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party oppose further privatisation of our health system. This siphons desperately needed resource away from public services, and instead, into private, profit-motivated providers. We need to increase investment in public services so they can meet demand, with safe staffing levels, so all New Zealanders can access timely, quality care.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

National's approach to elective surgeries poses a direct threat to patient access and accelerates the privatisation of our health system. Labour supports investment in a strong, affordable, and accessible public health system.

While private providers have a role in our health system, entering into long-term contracts as the National-led Government has done suggests that this is not a temporary solution, but a shift to a privatised model.

Every dollar handed over to private providers is money that could instead be invested in the public system that all New Zealanders rely on. Increased outsourcing draws clinicians away from the public system, which is left to pick up more complicated and risky procedures, with less available resource. This risks burning out staff and creating even longer waitlists. This approach risks creating a two-tiered system, in which health funding goes to private health providers, leaving the public system worse off.

In Government, Labour will review these private contracts to ensure New Zealanders are being provided with the best value for money, long-term.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Sound health provision is a real cornerstone of services which should appropriately be funded through taxes

2. Dental care

Free basic dental care already exists for New Zealanders under 18. However, timeliness is a significant issue — many children and teenagers are unable to be seen early enough, leading to delayed treatment and worsening oral health outcomes.

Funding should be increased to ensure children and teenagers under 18 can access free dental care in a timely manner, without long wait times.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party strongly support increasing funding to ensure all tamariki and rangatahi are able to access free care without long wait times. This includes increasing funding for mobile dental clinics to serve more communities, and working towards providing free dental care for the general population.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

We're committed to affordable healthcare and ensuring New Zealanders can access their current entitlements, by addressing workforce shortages. Right now, too many children are currently overdue for dental care, and dental issues are both a common cause of hospital visits for children and a leading cause of avoidable hospitalisation. Labour will address this by strengthening the Community Oral Health service, with a focus on growing the dental workforce to address current staffing shortages across the country.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The whole point of having free dental care should be to pick up on any problems at an early stage. This is negated if waiting times are too long

3. Dementia | mate wareware

The Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2020–2025 was formally endorsed by Cabinet in 2021. A refreshed Action Plan for 2026–2031 has since been developed by the sector and presented to the Associate Minister of Health.

The [Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan 2026–2031](#) should be fully funded and implemented by government.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party are supportive of the Dementia Mate Wareware Action Plan and want to see it resourced to be implemented. We support an overall greater resourced strategy for aged care, so our elderly can live comfortably when they retire, supported by a fairly paid workforce.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

In Government, Labour instated the Dementia Action Plan, and we fully support progress towards its goals. While our health system is under significant strain and facing cuts under the current Government, it's important that progress on positive initiatives such as this is not lost. When you look at health funding over decades, a pattern is clear: National cuts health, Labour invests in it.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Too many long term plans are prepared, presented and then ignored because they don't meet current political priorities. Long term plans for all aspects of health provision should drawn together and prioritised within an overarching long term plan

4. Public health and prevention

According to public health campaigners Kaitiaki Hauora, less than 2% of the health budget is currently allocated to population health which includes cancer screening, vaccinations, pandemic preparedness and health initiatives involving tobacco, alcohol, food, and physical activity.

At least 5% of the health budget should be allocated to prevention policies.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

The Green Party don't have a specific position on a percentage of the health budget for prevention activities, but we do support increasing funding for all sectors you listed to prevent people getting sick.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Prevention is at the heart of Labour's health policy. We'll turn around the issues facing our health system by keeping people well and out of hospital. We will bring back the Smokefree Generation policy. We will expand Health New Zealand's existing alcohol sponsorship buy-out programme and establish a dedicated quit vaping service.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Spending on health programmes should be regarded as an investment rather than a cost. If planned and carried out effectively it will lead to a reduction of treatments further down the track

5. National Travel Assistance Scheme

Funding for the National Travel Assistance scheme should be increased, and eligibility criteria expanded, so Upper Clutha patients who must travel to the tertiary-level hospital in Dunedin for treatment are eligible for financial assistance.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party support this initiative to ensure travel is never a barrier to accessing the healthcare people need.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

It's getting harder and more expensive for patients to access healthcare under Christopher Luxon. He promised to fix the cost of living, but his cuts have driven up costs and made things worse. In Government, Labour will review the National Travel Assistance Scheme, to make sure it is delivering on its goals, and patients are able to get the care they need.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

This should be analysed as part of comprehensive planning. The relative cost effectiveness of subsidising travel should compare with planning for the location of various levels of service, with a bottom line that access should be equitable throughout the country.

6. Maternity services

The two routine maternity scans, at 12 and 20 weeks, are not currently fully government-funded meaning women can be charged up to \$90 per scan, or up to \$180 in total for a straightforward pregnancy.

These two routine maternity scans should be fully government-funded, with no cost to the patient.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party strongly support this initiative, with further funding for one-stop-shops that provide pā harakeke wrap-around services for whānau throughout hapūtanga, after birth, first stages of life, and navigating parenthood.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Labour will fund every scan a doctor, midwife or specialist refers a pregnant woman for. After the referral, the entitlement is loaded onto her Medicard. No forms, no invoices: all a new mum will need is her Medicard, or the Medicard app on her phone. To deliver this, 24 paid trainee sonographer positions will be funded to grow the workforce.

You shouldn't have to worry about money to know you or your baby are okay. Under Labour, no mum will skip a scan because she can't afford it, helping to look after her and her baby, and easing the pressure on hospitals.

[Labour.org.nz/maternityscans](https://labour.org.nz/maternityscans)

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Another area where investing in funding early scans can help to prevent later problems and/or provide for timely treatment

7. General hospital, Otago Central Lakes

For Otago Central Lakes, Cromwell is the most equitable location for an integrated general hospital with an emergency department. Such a hospital would serve a range of communities, including those in Roxburgh, Alexandra, Ranfurly, Cromwell, Wānaka, Hāwea and Queenstown.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

The Green Party do not have a confirmed position on an integrated general hospital for Cromwell, but we are open to supporting this with more information if in Government.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Christopher Luxon's National-led Government has cut and stalled hospital builds, taking our health system backwards. In Government, Labour would ensure information on service planning was transparent and took into account the whole community, to ensure care is always affordable, and available when you need it.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

I personally support this as a sensible practical provision, but we do not have specific policy on this particular example. A general focus in long term planning should be to have services as near to the relevant communities as possible, and fairly spread through the country.

8. Mental Health

Funding for crisis-level mental health support in the Otago Central Lakes region should be increased to support a local dedicated mental health crisis team and assessment facility.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party support expanding free mental health services to all communities so everyone can access support when they need it. This includes expanding youth services like Piki, Mana Ake and Youth One Stop Shops throughout Aotearoa, Asian Family Services and dedicated support for postnatal mental health.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Our focus is on prevention and early intervention, so people can get support before they reach crisis, alongside properly resourced specialist and acute services for those who need them.

Children and young people are a particular priority. This is where some of the greatest long-term gains can be made: intervening early can change the trajectory of a young person's life, rather than waiting until distress has become entrenched or they reach crisis.

That means investing in mental wellbeing and resilience from the earliest years, ensuring support is available in schools and communities, and making sure young people can move quickly into more intensive care when they need it.

Prevention is not only better for people and whānau; intervening earlier also reduces pressure on hospitals, crisis services and other parts of government over the longer term.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Again an area where options should be evaluated based on effectiveness and timeliness.

Having decisions based on sound information and experience is critical in ensuring that plans are followed through.

9. After-hours/unplanned urgent care

A permanent, after-hours and overnight urgent care service in Wānaka should be funded, with a cost per appointment comparable to larger centres such as the Dunedin Urgent Doctors and Accident Centre.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

The Green Party do not have a specific position on this issue, but we are supportive of greater funding for urgent care, particularly in underserved areas.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Health costs are soaring under National: doctor's fees are up 21% and the cost of after-hours care is out of reach for many New Zealanders. Right now, coverage and staffing are inconsistent, meaning care is not always available or reliable. In Government, we will review gaps in services, to understand how we can ensure care is affordable and accessible across the country.

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Yet another area where placement of services should be determined based on clear data as to cost effectiveness. It would certainly be desirable, but needs to be prioritised alongside the relative importance of other services

10. Primary care funding

Population growth in Wānaka has led to a shift in the town's rural classification under the GCH (Geographic Classification for Health) tool — a tool that was never intended to be used as a funding formula. This reclassification will result in a decrease in funding to local medical practices, without accounting for Wānaka's distance from hospitals and other health services.

Wānaka medical practices should be able to apply for an exemption from the GCH classification model, based on their particular local circumstances.

Scott Willis Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

The Green Party are supportive of Wānaka Medical Practices being able to apply for an exemption from the GCH model based on these circumstances. Overall, increased, not decreased funding for primary health is desperately needed to ensure people can access quality, timely care and not end up in emergency departments with acute conditions that could have been prevented.

Damien O'Connor New Zealand Labour Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 4 — Strongly support

Doctor's fees have increased because primary care has been underfunded for too long, and the current model is broken. Labour will fix this by establishing a new Independent Pricing Authority will set an evidence-based capitation rate for practices that reflects real costs and patient need. When the rate goes up, Health NZ will be

required to fund the increase the following year. This will make sure funding for GPs is more sustainable, fair and transparent. GPs will no longer have to rely on increasing fees for patients to keep their doors open. No practices will be worse off under this model.

This is part of our plan to provide every New Zealander with three free doctor's visits a year through the new Medicard, paid for by a simple, targeted tax on profit from the sale of investment property. Labour will introduce a simple, targeted 28% tax on the profit made after 1 July 2027 when a commercial property or residential property (excluding the family home) is sold. Fully exempt are the family home, farms, KiwiSaver, shares, business assets, inheritances and personal items.

Every dollar raised will go directly to our health system.

[Labour.org.nz/medicard](https://labour.org.nz/medicard)

Helen Tait Opportunity Party

■ ■ ■ ■ 3 — Support

Rather than exempting Wanaka from a shift in classification, it would seem to be appropriate to examine how the definitions are arrived at and applied. If fairness and consistency nationwide are prioritised, an amendment to classification rather than an exemption from them might provide better long term certainty.

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