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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chamber backs National's commitment to fund third medical school at Waikato University

The Waikato Chamber of Commerce applauds National's major policy announcement today to back a third medical school at the University of Waikato if the party wins this year's election.

Chamber CEO Don Good said he was thrilled to see National's commitment to addressing the country's dire shortage of doctors, particularly GPs and those practicing in rural outposts – something that would be addressed by the University's proposed graduate model.

"We simply aren't training enough doctors to meet the needs of our population and to accommodate the anticipated pattern of retirement of our existing health workforce," Good said.

A Royal NZ College of General Practitioners 2022 workforce survey shows more than two-thirds of GPs are intending to retire within the next decade.

New Zealand currently graduates 550 new doctors each year, but 750 are needed per year to meet health workforce demand. By the time the Waikato Medical School could graduate its first doctor (seven years from a decision on establishment) New Zealand will need 800 new doctors per year.

"Establishing a third medical school will, without doubt, contribute enormously to addressing our country's health crisis. It's not a silver bullet, but it's certainly a game changer for our health system and our medical practitioners who are at breaking point.

"We know that the shortage of primary care doctors in provincial and rural centres and hospitals increases costs to the health system as a whole because patients don't seek treatment early, they have more advanced conditions requiring more medical intervention and they often use the emergency department as a general practice.

"The University of Waikato's model will play a significant role in terms of the training of primary care doctors in rural and provincial clinics as part of their training."

The University's model is a graduate entry medical school and is based on the proven success of international models of community-engaged graduate entry-only medical schools. These schools select students who have already completed a three-year undergraduate degree and provide them with four years of intensive, practical medical education, as opposed to six years at Otago and Auckland – the majority of whose students are school leavers.

The University of Waikato's medical school is expected to be based in Hamilton with satellite training centres based in regional New Zealand.

Good called on Labour and other parties to also commit to establishing a medical school at the University of Waikato.

"Labour's 50 additional training places at Auckland and Otago from 2024 is simply not sufficient to meet existing or future demand.

"A third medical school at the University of Waikato stacks up anyway you look at it, whether it's through a social, economic, or cultural lens. Establishing a medical school in Hamilton is good for the city, the region and our country as a whole."

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Additional notes:

- New Zealand is heavily dependent on international medical graduates – more so than any other OECD country.
- Of the doctors currently registered in NZ, 40% are international medical graduates who immigrated here to fill our workforce shortages. Before the pandemic we were importing 1100 doctors, most of whom stay for a short time. Only 25% are still here 3 years after their arrival.
- The doctors we're training are largely **not** choosing primary care specialties and are practicing in main metropolitan centres, leaving provincial and rural communities short of doctors, and largely reliant on international medical graduates for the doctors that they do recruit.
- Compared to other countries, New Zealand has a relatively low ratio of medical schools to population. For example, Ireland, with a similar population to New Zealand, has six medical schools compared to our two.