

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Guild welcomes \$12 million rheumatic fever funding boost**

All New Zealanders will reap a benefit from the doubling in funding dedicated to fighting rheumatic fever, says the Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand Chief Executive, Annabel Young.

"Rheumatic fever is a developing world problem and we should all be embarrassed that it is a problem in this country" Ms Young says.

The boost in funding, announced under an agreement between the National and Maori parties this week, will increase the amount to be spent on fighting rheumatic fever to \$24 million over four years.

Rheumatic fever is an illness caused by a reaction to a streptococcus A throat infection. About 70% of children who get rheumatic fever will have some heart damage that can lead to rheumatic heart disease. Almost all instances of the disease are preventable, with proper treatment of a sore throat reducing the risk by about 80%.

While the Ministry of Health's Rheumatic Fever Prevention programme is already underway in Northland, Counties Manukau, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Lakes, Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay and the Capital Coast DHB regions, there has been criticism that the programme had been underfunded.

Ms Young says the Rheumatic Fever Prevention programme is ideal for the future involvement of community pharmacy.

"We should be fighting this problem on every front and community pharmacy offers one route to identify affected patients and get them to treatment. Pharmacists are the health professional that people see most often. They are accessible and perfectly placed to engage communities with rheumatic fever advice and early detection through throat swabbing."

Ms Young says she believes that using community pharmacy to deliver public health campaigns in conjunction with the Rheumatic Fever Programme is also a guarantee of quality and cost effectiveness.

"Pharmacists are saying is that, as a profession, they are an under utilised primary healthcare provider who can be employed to deliver a quality service and save the health system money."

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*Notes:*

- The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc) is a national membership organisation representing community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and we advocate for the business interests of community pharmacy.
- For additional information on the Guild and community pharmacy please go to [www.pgnz.org.nz](http://www.pgnz.org.nz).