Health Coalition Aotearoa

Health Coalition Aotearoa Inc
c/o School Population Health
22 Park Avenue
Grafton, Auckland

www.healthcoalition.org.nz

19 October 2026

AN OPEN LETTER TO:

Hon Nicola Willis, Hon Erica Stanford, Hon David Seymour, Jenny Marcroft, Hon Barbara Edmonds, Hon Willow-Jean Prime, Lawrence Xu-Nan, Qiulae Wong, Tākuta Ferris

REGARDING:

Permanent Funding for Healthy School Lunches

We the undersigned thank parties who have supported a Healthy School Lunches programme, Ka Ora, Ka Ako in your policy announcements.

HCA and its partners request all parties commit to **permanent funding of an enhanced Healthy School Lunches programme, through Vote Education,** so every child in Aotearoa can learn and thrive.

Currently, we have 160,000 children living in material hardship, almost 50,000 more than three years ago (Budget 2026 Child Poverty report). Only 40 percent of children in food-insecure households receive free school lunches.

1 in 5 children

live in households where food runs out sometimes or often due to lack of money.

Source: *NZ Health Survey 2024/2025*

Research shows children cannot learn on an empty stomach: The Auditor General's report, tabled 30 June, found only half of lunches delivered in 2025 met nutrition standards, and the current model could not show value for money.

2-4 years behind

Students who go hungry even once a week are two to four years behind their peers academically.

Source: *McKelvie Sebileau P, Swinburn B, Seymour J. Frontiers in Education Jan 2025.*

A long-serving South Auckland school principal has seen firsthand the transformative power of healthy school lunches.

> ***"The Healthy School Lunches programme is one of the most important investments in education I have seen in my 21 years as an educator in Aotearoa."***

Pete Jones, *principal of Manurewa High School*

An equity issue, not only a cost issue

A well-run school lunch programme benefits all students, but those who are food-insecure benefit the most. Te Tiriti provides a foundation for ensuring all tamariki have a chance to learn and thrive.

A sustainable future for Ka Ora Ka Ako

Among comparable high-income countries, government-funded school meals are typically treated as standing social infra-structure, legislated and budgeted for on a multiyear or ongoing basis, not re-approved annually as a discretionary programme.

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Professor Boyd Swinburn and Jason Alexander
Co-chairs Health Coalition Aotearoa

Dr Sally Mackay and Sande Mareroa-Gates
Co-chairs Health Coalition Aotearoa Food Expert Panel

What we are asking

1. Secure ongoing baseline funding for an expanded Healthy School Lunches programme, Ka Ora, Ka Ako within Vote Education.
2. A funding level that allows providers across local and regional bases to supply meals that meet at least 25 percent of children's daily energy needs and achieve dietary guidelines.
3. Flexibility for schools to choose between school-based, iwi-led, community and centralised delivery models, reflecting the Auditor General's finding that community and school models produced less waste.
4. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that targets are met and to drive continuous improvement.

The immediate value is relief of suffering and engagement in learning and the long-term benefit is giving our children healthy and fulfilling futures.

Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) | Auckland Womens Health Council | Bangladesh New Zealand Friendship Society (BNZFS) | Child Poverty Action Group | New Zealand Principals' Federation | NZ Breastfeeding Alliance/ Baby Friendly Aotearoa | NZEI Te Riu Roa | Open Forum for Health Information | Opunake High School | Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua (PPTA) | Pūtahi Manawa | Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists | Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand (SPANZ) | Toi Tangata