



STROKES WILL COST NEW ZEALAND \$1.1 BILLION THIS YEAR

Strokes will cost New Zealand \$1.1 billion this year according to a report released today by the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand. The research completed by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) confirmed strokes have a significant impact on life expectancy and quality of life and at current rates are likely to cost New Zealand \$1.7 billion by 2038.

Research published in 2018¹ forecast a 40 percent increase in the number of strokes in New Zealand over the next decade. “But the NZIER research shows a 24 percent increase in stroke numbers in the last three years already,” says Mark Vivian, CEO of the Stroke Foundation. The report estimates 11,169 New Zealanders will experience a stroke this year.

The Stroke Foundation is concerned that very little is being done to prevent strokes.

“I’m appalled that the annual financial cost to this country is so high, yet even conservative research indicates 75 percent of strokes are preventable. The government is doing so little in the prevention space,” says Mr Vivian.

The New Zealand government spends less than three percent of its health budget on public health prevention services. “The Stroke Foundation committed 13 percent of our budget last year to stroke prevention initiatives. We call on the next government to increase its commitment to disease prevention to 5 percent by 2023, to reduce the heavy social and economic burden of stroke to New Zealand.”

High blood pressure is the biggest preventable risk factor for stroke. In the last year, the Stroke Foundation provided almost 24,000 New Zealanders with a free blood pressure check. About one percent of those tested had a result so high on the day that they were referred to a medical service for immediate follow up. The Stroke Foundation estimates that this alone saved \$2.25 million in health costs.

Mr Vivian explains: “We receive no government money to support our stroke prevention programmes and yet if we were funded to provide 50,000 free blood pressure checks a year, we estimate this would save \$10 million in health costs.”

While 75 percent of strokes occur in people aged over 65 years, for Māori and Pacific people, nearly 60 percent of strokes happen between the ages of 15 and 65. “There’s no doubt that prevention initiatives targeted at Māori and Pacific people will more than pay for themselves while reducing the burden of stroke in these communities,” says Mr Vivian.

¹ The New Zealand Medical Journal (2018), <https://www.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/projected-stroke-volumes-to-provide-a-10-year-direction-for-new-zealand-stroke-services>

In this last financial year, the Foundation had total operating costs of \$5 million.

The Stroke Foundation summary report can be found [here](#).

The full NZIER report can be found [here](#).

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NOTES TO EDITOR

Other key findings:

From the Stroke Foundation's summary report

- The Stroke Foundation invests \$1.4 million each year into its Community Stroke Advisor (CSA) service, of which funds are raised through the generosity of donors and supporters. The Stroke Foundation received \$84 in government support per new referral in the financial year 2018-2019. Based on the \$1.1 billion cost of stroke in 2020, the government's investment represents around just 0.03 percent. To meet the growing need and increase the Stroke Foundation's CSA service by 40 percent, this will cost a further \$886,600 per year.
- Through the Stroke Foundation's Return to Work service, it costs \$3,172 per person to help a stroke survivor return to employment. A conservative calculation suggests a saving of at least \$57 million in benefits of the lifetime of participants on the programme.

From the full NZIER research report

- Research shows that the number of people living with the effects of stroke will increase from 55 to 60 percent by 2038.
- 25 percent of all hospitalised strokes occur in people of working age with 75.2 percent in paid employment prior to their stroke. NZIER estimates that the total income loss will be over \$125 million in 2020.
- Most strokes are preventable, and beyond prevention, management of a stroke can significantly improve outcomes. It is important to consider that although interventions to improve stroke outcomes may increase costs to the health system, if these interventions improve functional outcomes, they may nevertheless be good investments from a societal cost-benefit perspective due to the potential for improved quality of life and reduced employment impacts.

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About the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand

The Stroke Foundation is the only national charity in New Zealand focused on the prevention of and recovery from stroke. For 40 years we have actively promoted ways to avoid stroke and dedicated ourselves to working closely with stroke survivors across the country. The generosity of New Zealanders enables us to help thousands of stroke survivors every year; providing them with critical services to ensure the best possible outcomes - not just for themselves, but also their family/whānau and carers too. Three quarters of strokes are preventable, so we will continue our vital awareness campaigns and health promotion programmes - saving thousands of lives. To find out more about the important work the Stroke Foundation does go to www.stroke.org.nz