

22 October 2025

Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health  
CC: Hon Penny Simmonds, Minister for the Environment  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160  
New Zealand

By email

**Subject: Request for Government Leadership on Legacy Lead Exposure**

This week is the World Health Organisation's [International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week](#); "No safe level: Act now to end lead exposure". This is a timely and urgent reminder of the continued and preventable threat that lead exposure poses to public health in New Zealand.

This time last year we called on the government to prevent lead poisoning and address legacy lead issues.<sup>1</sup> We received no response despite current government promises to prevent harm.<sup>2</sup> We now write to you with renewed clarity, supported by further research and evidence<sup>3</sup>, to urge the government to take coordinated and decisive action. New Zealand continues to face significant public health risk due to historic and ongoing sources of lead. These risks disproportionately affect children, low-income families, and those residing in older housing stock.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the [Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027](#) (GPS on Health) we respectfully request your leadership in addressing this urgent matter through a coordinated whole-of-government response. We draw your attention to the following policy priorities on Health:

**1. Cross-section Coordination and System Leadership**

The GPS on Health encourages "stronger cross-agency partnerships to address the broader determinants of health." Lead exposure cuts across multiple sectors, including housing, occupational health, environmental regulation, and public health. We recommend a lead agency, ideally Health New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora), coordinates a national response in collaboration with key agencies such as the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), WorkSafe, and Kāinga Ora.

**2. Prevention and Early intervention**

The GPS on Health prioritises investment in "early intervention and prevention to reduce long-term harm." The long-term neurodevelopmental, behavioural, and physical impacts of lead exposure, especially in young children, are well-documented and entirely preventable. Proactive measures today mitigate substantial future costs to the health system and society at large.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix B: WasteMINZ Open Letter to the Minister of Health, Minister of Education and Minister for the Environment, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> The Government Policy Statement on Health 2024-2027 states one priority area for action is Prevention<sup>2</sup>, and that it will "prioritise investment in children" and "reduce future avoidable health costs".

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A: Addressing Residential Lead: Evidence and Policy Considerations for Government Action

<sup>4</sup> Thorstenson, R., Montgomery, J., & Klimas, C. (2025). What's in your soil? A city-wide investigation of the importance of soil lead for predicting elevated blood lead levels in Chicago. *GeoHealth*, 9, e2025GH001572.

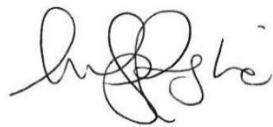
<https://doi.org/10.1029/2025GH001572>.

There is no level of exposure to lead that is known to be without harmful effects. It is scientifically and ethically imperative that New Zealand acts decisively to eliminate preventable lead exposure and associated harms.

We are ready to support any new policy or project initiatives and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter further.

On behalf of the Residential Lead Working Group, WasteMINZ<sup>5</sup>

**Michelle Begbie**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Begbie", with a stylized, cursive script.

**Chair of the Residential Lead Working Group**

[Michelle.Begbie@waikatoregion.govt.nz](mailto:Michelle.Begbie@waikatoregion.govt.nz)

**Appendices:** A: Addressing Residential Lead: Evidence and Policy Considerations for Government Action, with reference to additional supplementary material.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix Q: "WasteMINZ Residential Lead Working Group Position Statement".