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MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE USE

## **Moratorium and review of lab test charges welcomed**

National's call for a moratorium on new laboratory test charges and an independent review has been welcomed by the Health Funds Association (HFANZ).

The three Auckland district health boards are currently consulting the public on a controversial proposal to cut funding for lab tests referred by private specialists. The proposal has been hotly contested in other parts of the country, with some South Island DHBs backing off after 75% of submissions opposed the move.

The move would see more than \$5 million charged to Auckland patients, with some individuals having to pay in excess of \$2000 for tests. It has been heavily criticised by health groups and medical professionals concerned at the potential for adverse health outcomes.

HFANZ executive director Roger Styles said today the policy was a cut in services and a straight cost-shift on to patients who were already saving the public health system hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

He said National's plan for a moratorium and independent review, announced by health spokesman Tony Ryall on TV3 last week, was a sensible way forward which would enable the issue to be properly evaluated.

Mr Ryall called for a "full and independent investigation" into the effect the charges were having in Wellington and the Hutt Valley, where the scheme has been in place since November 2006.

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“There has never been a proper independent evaluation of the effects of these charges. It is important that no further DHBs put them in place until this is carried out.” Mr Styles said today.

Mr Styles said he was concerned about the timing of the consultation, during the election period, and the minimal publicity about the proposed charges. He said HFANZ was considering running public advertising next week to help ensure Aucklanders were aware of what was at stake and to encourage submissions.

Submissions close on November 14 and can be made online at [www.communitylabs.co.nz](http://www.communitylabs.co.nz) or by e-mailing [labs@ndsa.co.nz](mailto:labs@ndsa.co.nz).

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