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MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE USE

## **Lab test charging decision imminent**

A decision by the Government is expected soon to make permanent the moratorium on laboratory test charges for private patients, according to Health Funds Association executive director Roger Styles.

In November last year the incoming National Government moved quickly to put in place a moratorium on district health boards planning to charge patients for laboratory tests ordered by private specialists, while an independent review was undertaken.

Mr Styles said today that the review had taken place over recent weeks, carried out by Health Outcomes International, and had involved discussions with DHBs, private hospitals, insurers and other health associations. An announcement was expected soon.

Wellington area DHBs started imposing the charges in 2006, although only Tairāwhiti DHB had since followed suit. Some South Island DHBs and the Auckland area health boards were considering the charges when Health Minister Tony Ryall initiated the moratorium.

If the charges were rolled out nationally, Mr Styles estimated that health insurance premiums would rise by around 3 percent to cover increased costs.

He said an earlier evaluation by the Wellington DHBs was deficient in a number of respects and he was confident that this review would be more robust.

“It is impossible not to conclude that the charges will lead to adverse health outcomes and increase total health costs,” he said.

“The administrative costs involved in implementing the charging regime do not justify the meagre savings to health boards. The sooner we can move on from this and work towards greater collaboration and a more balanced health system the better,” Mr Styles said.

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