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# Labour's health pledge recognises massive underfunding in primary care

An election pledge by the Labour Party that it will cut fees for doctors' visits and boost funding for GP practices and training is welcome news, however there needs to be more detail about the specific benefits for rural communities, especially where training is concerned, says New Zealand Rural General Practice Network Chief Executive Dalton Kelly.

"This announcement recognises overall that primary care is dramatically underfunded and that supported primary care ultimately saves money by keeping people out of hospitals, which is extremely positive," says Mr Kelly.

"But while the funding announcements are hugely beneficial, we would like to see more detail around where the extra millions for training will be directed.

"I must reiterate that there are longstanding issues around workforce and training, and the need to address difficulties recruiting and retaining GPs, nurses and other health professionals in many rural communities," says Mr Kelly.

"One unintended consequence of the extra funding for low income or Community Service Card holders will be more administrative work and we need to know that practices will be resourced or assisted to do this."

For comment contact NZRGPN Chief Executive Dalton Kelly on 027 231 0067.

Note to editors: New Zealand Rural General Practice Network represent the interests of health workers across rural New Zealand involving more than 2000 GPs, nurses and practice managers.

Labour has pledged to reduce doctors' fees for those on low incomes by \$10 giving half of all New Zealanders free visits or fees of less than \$8. Fees for non-low income earners will also drop by \$10 from \$42 to \$32 on average. GP practices will get a further \$46 million over and above the funding – a five percent increase on current funding - to reduce the fees. Labour has also pledged to invest \$30 million over three years to train more GPs, boosting the number of training places to 300 a year.