

The Role of Health Insurance

The New Zealand health insurance industry provides a much valued backstop for New Zealand families, ensuring coverage and early access to healthcare when the public system doesn't. There are a number of health insurers in the New Zealand market which provide a considerable level of choice for the consumer. Around 1.35 million New Zealanders have health insurance to ensure peace of mind in times of difficulty. While the public health system focuses on acute (emergency) services, private health insurers are able to cover the cost of many semi-urgent procedures. The health insurance industry complements the public health system by 'bridging the gap' between what the public health system can sustain and what the public want. Private health insurance provides people with alternative healthcare options to the public system so they can access treatment and advice when they need it – taking away the uncertainty of future health care.

Medical practitioners, such as GP's, are usually the first point of contact if you're not well. The medical practitioner would refer you to a specialist if they can't diagnose or treat your condition. Specialists are experts in a particular area of medicine, such as orthopaedics, paediatrics, gynaecology or urology etc. If you are very ill or require acute treatment, you'd visit A&E or a public hospital where you will receive immediate attention.

The New Zealand public healthcare system will look after your acute needs and a public no-fault accident insurance scheme (ACC) that covers you for accidental injury. If you do not require immediate treatment (non-acute or elective surgery), require a specialist consultation or a diagnostic procedure (e.g. MRI), the public system will put you on a waiting list where you will go through an assessment process and qualify – a process which could take months, even years.

If you don't qualify for publicly funded surgery you will need to consider paying for surgery yourself in a private hospital which can be costly, this is where health insurance can help.

Private healthcare in New Zealand includes specialist services, primary care and private hospitals which provide non-urgent and elective treatments that complement the public health service's focus on urgent and essential treatments. Surgeons who work in the private system must also work in the public system.

There are also many private accident, emergency and medical clinics that operate in the private sector, often providing services outside the usual hours of doctors and clinics in the public system.

Having health insurance gives you the peace of mind that you can get the treatment you need, when you need it. The benefits of which are; faster access to treatment by avoiding public hospital waiting lists, less financial stress by reducing your costs of private treatment and time off work and more choice over when you receive treatment.

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