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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **280,000 New Zealanders waiting for surgery, wait times up**

Independent research shows the number of New Zealanders waiting for elective surgery remains at 2013 levels, despite increases to both public and private health funding.

The research by TNS New Zealand, commissioned by the Health Funds Association (HFANZ) and the Private Surgical Hospitals Association (NZPSHA), found 110,000 New Zealanders were on official waiting lists, but a further 170,000 had not been placed on waiting lists despite being told they required elective surgery.

These numbers were consistent with the findings of a similar 2013 study, although higher than figures cited recently by the Ministry of Health.

HFANZ chief executive Roger Styles said the new TNS research gave a better picture of overall unmet surgical need because it counted both referred and un-referred need, whereas official figures don't yet count people who need surgery but haven't been referred by their GP.

"Of particular concern is the increase observed in overall waiting times – particularly for those who have yet to have their surgery. These are up by 80 days to an average 304 days, with virtually all of these waiting for public surgery," he said.

For those who had had surgery, when split between public and private there was a big difference in average wait times. Those having private surgery faced a 76 day wait, while those having public surgery waited 177 days.

Styles said it was important that there was good information on actual waiting list numbers and times, and was confident that official estimates could be improved in time to provide a more reliable picture.

When it came to solutions to growing surgical need, Styles said there was no silver bullet, and simply spending more public money was not the answer.

"We need to be thinking smarter about how we use both public and private resources to get the best healthcare outcomes. We know that with the right framework, we could be getting more out of private healthcare, and this in turn would free up public resources to better meet health needs."

He said the private healthcare sector already funded and delivered more than 150,000 elective surgeries each year, with the capacity to increase this significantly.

“The private healthcare sector is keen to engage with Government on making healthcare funding more sustainable. There are opportunities to deliver significant health benefits which need not involve fiscal cost, and may even save government money,” Styles said.

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**Note to editors:** The research: *“Assessing the demand for Elective Surgery amongst New Zealanders”* was conducted by TNS New Zealand in January this year. It involved 1800 people and has a margin of error of 3 percent. The research was funded jointly by Health Funds Association of New Zealand (HFANZ) and New Zealand Private Surgical Hospitals' Association (NZPSHA). HFANZ is the industry body representing health insurers. In 2015, health insurers covered around 29 percent of New Zealanders, and funded over \$1 billion in healthcare claims. NZPSHA is the industry body representing private surgical hospitals. In 2015, its 37 member hospitals provided around half of all elective surgery in New Zealand.