



Media Release – 28 February

Making Exercise More Affordable Could Transform Health in Aotearoa

A new report reveals that reducing the cost of exercise facilities could significantly increase physical activity levels in Aotearoa, delivering major health and economic benefits. The 2024 HFA-Portas Price Elasticity Report identifies affordability as the primary barrier preventing more New Zealanders from joining gyms, despite clear evidence of the health benefits of structured exercise.

Physical inactivity is a growing public health crisis, contributing to preventable chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. Alarmingly, the report finds that 53.5% of New Zealanders fail to meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended physical activity levels, placing an increasing strain on the healthcare system. Childhood and adolescent obesity rates have also reached unprecedented levels, elevating the risk of lifelong health issues.

Key Findings from the Report:

- 67% of non-gym members cite affordability as their main reason for not joining.
- Gym users are 54% more likely to meet WHO exercise guidelines than non-users.
- A 10% reduction in membership fees could encourage up to 291,000 more Kiwis to join structured exercise facilities.
- Increased participation could:
 - Prevent 7,600 cases of chronic disease annually.
 - Save 1,600 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).
 - Generate \$148 million in annual health savings.
 - Improve life satisfaction for 35,000 people and enhance community trust for 33,700.
 - Stimulate \$209 million in additional consumer spending.
 - Create 4,500+ new jobs in the exercise industry.

Richard Beddie, CEO of ExerciseNZ, says the findings present a compelling case for affordability initiatives to boost participation. “New Zealanders recognise the benefits of exercise, but for many, cost remains a barrier. This report shows that even a modest reduction in gym fees could profoundly impact our nation’s health, economy, and social wellbeing. Exercise facilities must be recognised as critical health infrastructure and supported accordingly.”

The report’s release coincides with ExerciseNZ’s upcoming ‘Fit for Office’ initiative, where New Zealand MPs will have their physical activity levels tracked via heart rate monitors and displayed on a competitive leaderboard. “This initiative highlights that everyone, including busy MPs, can stay active and benefit from exercise,” says Beddie.

ExerciseNZ urges policymakers, industry leaders, and community organisations to collaborate on improving affordability through potential subsidies or membership incentives. This is about more than just gyms—it’s about improving public health, reducing healthcare costs, and fostering stronger communities.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact Richard Beddie at richard@exercisenz.org.nz or P: 0800 66 88 11, M: 027-520-5744.