

MEDIA RELEASE: November 16, 2006
**PHARMAC surplus should have been spent on
patients in need**

PHARMAC's \$20 million surplus for 2006, announced last week, should have been spent on helping more New Zealanders access needed medications, says the ATM (Access To Medicines) Coalition.

"While this year has seen a significant increase in the number of people receiving subsidised medicines and prescriptions, we're concerned that PHARMAC is running a surplus," says ATM spokesman John Forman. "This provides further evidence that current medicine policy is geared toward financial outcomes at the expense of patient care. The surplus could have been spent on New Zealanders waiting for medications."

"Healthcare is a public good, not a business," Forman continues. "We believe PHARMAC should be using every dollar at their disposal to increase the quality of life for New Zealanders needing access to medications. Coming in under budget is not something to be celebrated."

Total spending on medicines has been drastically constrained in the last decade, and ATM is concerned that a PHARMAC surplus sends the wrong message about patient need.

"Some may conclude that PHARMAC's surplus indicates patient needs are well met within the resources currently allocated, when in fact the opposite is true," Forman says. "We are concerned about the patients left out by funding

not being put to use, and we're concerned this could lead to continued budget restraints."

ATM combines the voices of 25 non-government organisations advocating for increased access to medicines in New Zealand. Members of the coalition are all disease-specific groups that provide support, information/education, health promotion or clinical services to their constituent groups.

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