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**Ethical principles must come first
in medicines strategy**

Ethics must be put before finances to ensure that New Zealand achieves parity with other OECD countries in accessing medicines, says the Access To Medicines Coalition (ATM).

The umbrella lobby group, a coalition of more than 25 health-based non-government organisations, says it is clear the present system is not working for many New Zealanders, and has outlined its key principles for a new long-term medicines strategy at its AGM in Wellington this week.

“The government is responsible for adhering to ethical principles, and we’d like to see those principles develop a vision statement for the adequate provision of medicines,” says ATM spokesman John Forman. “We need to reduce the delays in listing new medications on the pharmaceutical schedule, as well as increasing the number of new medicines listed so we can achieve parity with other OECD countries.”

Development of a long-term medicines strategy was announced by Associate Health Minister Peter Dunne in April, and a Ministry of Health report is due to be submitted to Cabinet towards the end of this year.

ATM says strong guiding principles such as equity, justice, duty of care, standards of care, and reduction of disparities in health status, should underpin any medicines strategy that is developed.

“Instead, the current system has a simple direction to do the best with the money available, and that’s just not good enough,” says John Forman. “The lack of ethical guidance and vision for the health of New Zealanders through medicine use is a significant omission from New Zealand’s impressive range of health strategies.”

ATM says it is looking forward to meaningful participation in the consultation process for the new medicines strategy.

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