



GUT CANCER  
FOUNDATION

# IMPACT REPORT

2023 - 2024





# Every day, 17 New Zealanders are diagnosed with gut cancer.

That's over 6,000 Kiwis every year. Gut cancers are serious. Eight Kiwis die from them every day.

Cancers of the digestive system are collectively the most common form of cancer in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

This report outlines the transformative impact of our efforts over 2023 and 2024, made possible with your support. We highlight advancements in research, crucial initiatives to support those affected by gut cancers, and the powerful role of collective action in driving meaningful change.

We are committed to positive change and creating an everlasting impact for all New Zealanders affected by gut cancers.

Thank you for your support.

Ka okea ururoatia mātou kia tū takitahi  
ngā tāngata katoa o Aotearoa e pāngia  
ana e ngā momo mate pukupuku kōpiro.

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WHO ARE WE?

Why we are here

Vision / Mission

We enable positive change for all New Zealanders affected by gut cancers. We lead innovative research, address barriers to treatment and care, and ensure people impacted by gut cancer receive the support they need.

What we do

Our Impact

We lead a gut cancer ecosystem to create change collaboratively:

- Improve outcomes for people living with gut cancer
- Address inequity
- Enable better diagnosis, care, and treatment
- Ensure people are better able to navigate the health system and manage their condition

Our pillars



Research & Innovation

We prioritise research and innovation by leading and collaborating on clinical and social studies, both globally and locally, to benefit New Zealand gut cancer patients and address the unique needs of our population.



Voice

We are the leading voice for gut cancers in Aotearoa, ensuring the needs of people living with gut cancers are understood, acted upon, and advocated for. We raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of gut cancers to promote earlier detection.



Equity

We are committed to addressing barriers to treatment and care for all New Zealanders'.



Support

We partner to deliver services to meet the needs of the gut cancer community.



Sustainability

We work with our staff and supporters to ensure future organisational and financial stability.





## PATIENT STORY

# Nyree Smith

Founder of Pancreatic Cancer Support Association

- World Pancreatic Cancer Coalition **Volunteer of the Year 2022**
- Gut Cancer Foundation **Fundraiser of the Year 2023**
- **Raised over \$300,000** for pancreatic cancer research and awareness
- Pancreatic Cancer Support Association has **funded two national awareness campaigns**, Direct to GP risks and symptoms information, IPMN pancreatic cyst study and MASTERPLAN clinical trial

Nyree was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2017 – seven years ago. She knows she is one of the 'lucky ones' by outliving survival statistics.

In the years since her diagnosis, Nyree has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of 'the forgotten patients' and raise vital funds to change the dial on pancreatic cancer.

Beginning with a tennis tournament 'Queen of the Courts' in 2018, Nyree has organised a gala, a purple morning tea, a long lunch and a garden tour with proceeds going to the Gut Cancer Foundation for research awareness and support for Kiwis with pancreatic cancer.

Gut Cancer Foundation is backed by community events and supporters. The foundation is in awe of Nyree's unwavering dedication to making a difference for patients with pancreatic cancer.

*“ I don't know why I've survived and why I am surviving...but If I can give back and if I can raise awareness, then that is what I will do. ”*



## EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

We are excited to share our inaugural impact report, showcasing the impact of our work with patients, researchers, stakeholders and communities across Aotearoa. This report reflects the beginning of a transformational journey for our organisation, only made possible by the support of our donor community.

Born from the need to fund innovative clinical research that benefits New Zealanders, GCF has grown its mission beyond research. Kiwis need support at every stage of their gut cancer journey. So we have developed a roadmap to diversify and broaden our services to address these needs comprehensively.

In July 2024, we relaunched our website, marking a significant step forward. This platform serves as a hub of information.

We strive to eliminate barriers to care, build cultural competence, and improve outcomes for Māori and Pasifika communities. As the number of Māori and Pasifika impacted by gut cancer increases, we continue to expand services to connect with whānau and communities, ensuring access to care and support.

**In 2025, we aim to establish a comprehensive pipeline of support for Kiwis, ensuring they can access vital resources throughout their gut cancer journey.**

The website is also a place to share the innovative research work we support, and this report showcases the impact of our donors

Liam Willis  
Executive Officer



contributions to date, being a leader in research and innovation to foster the best of both international and local care.

Our work has always been collaborative. We've partnered with charitable groups and organisations, industry groups, researchers, GP networks, and Kaupapa Māori organisations to amplify advocacy, research, and support services. Rather than duplicating efforts, we focus on collaboration to meet the diverse needs of patients.

**Raising awareness and being the voice for cancers of the digestive system is at the heart of our mission.**

Campaigns like Shine a Light and Give It Up for Gut Cancer have grown in strength, reaching more people each year. The stories shared by those impacted highlight the importance of our work and the Kiwis we support.

Advocacy has been a cornerstone of our work during this period. Our strengthened voice has forged connections with key stakeholders and empowered us to advocate for improved access to essential cancer treatments and care in Aotearoa.

Thank you to our supporters and sponsors, and the wider gut cancer community. Your generosity and dedication make everything we do possible, ensuring patients and whānau are central to everything we do.

**Ngā mihi nui.**



OUR PEOPLE

Staff



**Liam Willis**  
Executive Officer



**Kristin Bernstone**  
Marketing &  
Communications Manager



**Maureen Miller**  
Grants, Trusts &  
Relationships Fundraiser



**Nida Saleem**  
Supporter Care &  
Office Administrator



**Amy Lane**  
Corporate & Community  
Events Fundraiser



**Laura Stenhouse**  
Digital Marketing Specialist

Board of Trustees



**Antony Vriens**  
Co-chair



**Anna St George**  
Co-chair



**Catherine Foster**  
Board Member



**Dr Ben Lawrence**  
Board Member



**Prof. Mike Finlay**  
Board Member



**Sarah Bristow**  
Board Member



**Prof. Lorraine Chantrell**  
Board Member



OUR PEOPLE

Scientific Advisory Committee



Associate Prof.  
Sharon Pattison  
Chair



Prof. Mike Finlay  
Oncologist (retired)



Dr Iain Ward  
Radiation Oncologist



Dr Kate Clarke  
Oncologist



Dr Deborah Wright  
Surgeon



Dr Karyn Paringatai  
Associate Professor Māori  
Advisor

Thank you to Professor Jonathan Koea, and Doctor Claire Wall  
for their contribution to our scientific advisory committee in this period.

Ambassadors



Nyree Smith



Lisa Toi



Briony O'Farrell



Anne Hargreaves

For more information on our people, please visit our website at [www.gutcancer.org.nz/who-we-are](http://www.gutcancer.org.nz/who-we-are)

OUR WORK

Research and innovation

We are committed to improving outcomes for New Zealand gut cancer patients through international collaboration and a focus on research tailored specifically to our population. By facilitating access to cutting-edge clinical trials, we provide patients with innovative treatment options while working to establish a robust evidence base to guide gut cancer care and support future advancements. During the 2023 - 2024 period, we have:



7

distributed &  
committed trials



55

patients accessing  
clinical trials



280<sub>k</sub>

committed to  
three new trials





OUR WORK

New funding overview

5-F-U



- **Aim:** Identify patients at higher risk of heart issues from the chemotherapy drug 5-Fluorouracil (5-FU)
- **Method:** Continuous ECG monitoring in real-life conditions during treatment
- **Benefit:** The aim is to detect silent heart changes and evaluate the feasibility for both patients and clinicians, enabling timely intervention to prevent treatment interruptions

PALEO



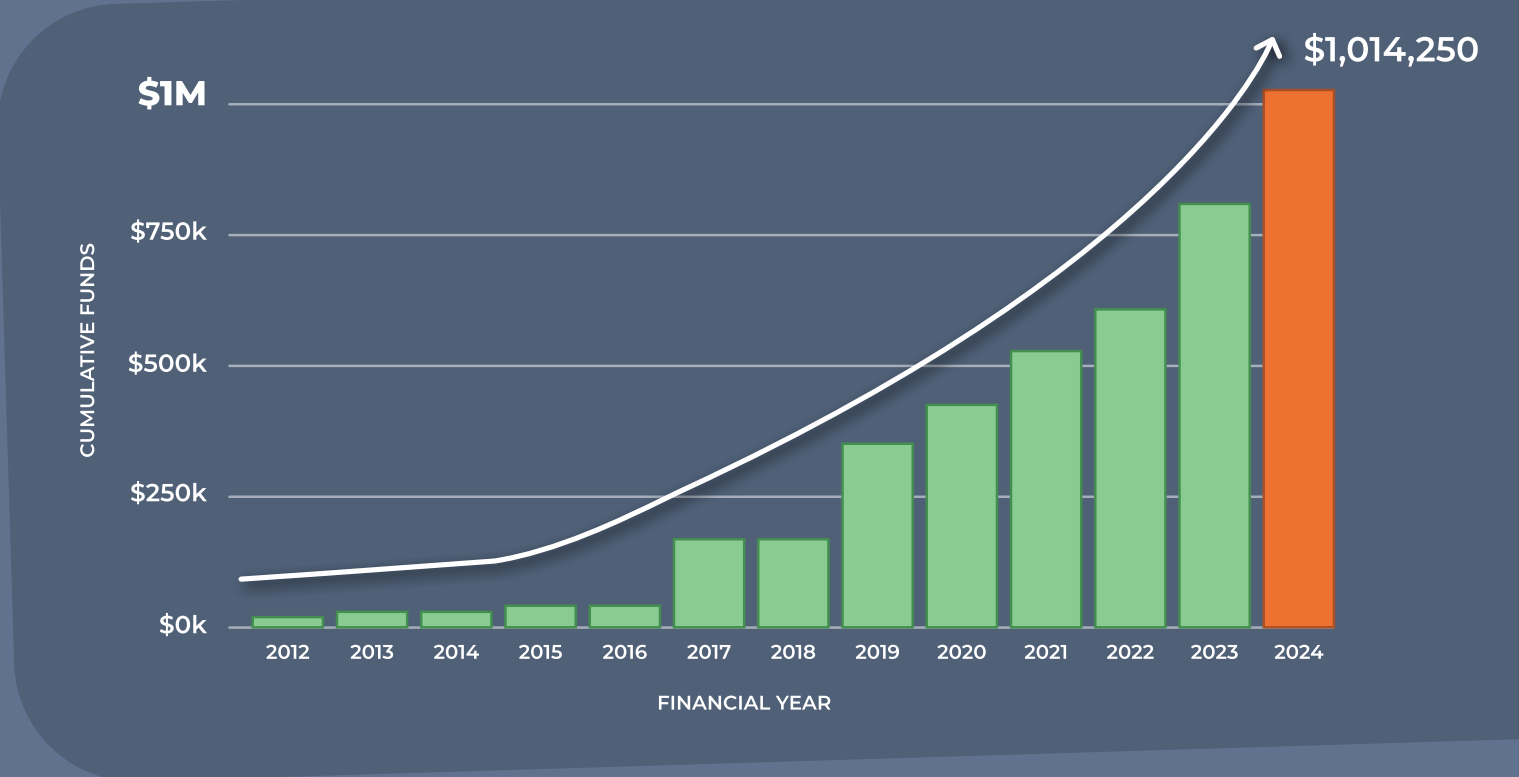
- **Scope:** International trial for oesophageal cancer patients with swallowing difficulties
- **GCF Commitment:** Funded shipment of investigational treatments and committed to 6 patients
- **Progress:** This trial aims to improve swallowing, help patients eat normally, control tumor growth, and maintain quality of life. As of 2024, 9 patients have been recruited in New Zealand, all receiving access to these unfunded immunotherapy drugs

STOMA GUARD



- **Objective:** Test custom 3D-printed stoma guards for parastomal hernia management, a common issue after bowel cancer surgery
- **Benefit:** Improve quality of life, reducing pain, and lowering the need for surgery
- **Status:** Recruitment ongoing, with redesigns based on patient feedback happening concurrently

Cumulative Research Commitment reaches over \$1M in 2024!



Helping people live better

Masterplan (Pancreatic Cancer)

A key component of MASTERPLAN is the use of SBRT - not commonly used in the New Zealand public health system. Bringing this trial to New Zealand allows for the upskilling of the public health workforce and has a wider reaching impact than the pancreatic trial it is being established for.

“ We have commissioned some new imaging functionality on our linear accelerator, have got our immobilisation established, and as a result of preparing for MASTERPLAN have been able to treat a patient with an isolated nodal metastasis from colon cancer – proof that it is not just trial patients that benefit from clinical trials in a department. ”

Anna Nicholson - Radiation Oncologist

Furthermore, undertaking this radiation therapy trial saw the establishment of four sites to administer the trials. Now patients who were not part of the trial can have the treatment administered by skilled health teams.





## COMPLETED COMMITMENT

### ASCEND

International Trial for Advanced Pancreatic Cancer Treatment

- **Objective:** Test whether a 'carrier drug' can enhance chemotherapy penetration through the fibrous layer of pancreatic tumors
- **Outcome:** Recruitment closed - 9 kiwis given access to the trial. Patients in follow-up phase

### APEC STUDY

- **Focus:** Investigate how proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) affect the chemotherapy drug capecitabine
- **Importance:** High PPI and capecitabine usage in New Zealand
- **Status:** Recruitment ongoing



## CONTINUED SUPPORT

### MASTERPLAN

- **Goal:** Combine Stereotactic Radiotherapy (SBRT) with chemotherapy to increase surgical eligibility and manage tumor growth
- **Locations:** Wellington, Tauranga, Christchurch
- **GCF Commitment:** Funding for 12 patients across three sites

### FEASIBILITY STUDY of EUS-PCA in IPMN Pancreatic Cysts

- **Objective:** Assess minimally invasive day procedures to treat high-risk pancreatic cysts.
- **GCF Commitment:** \$100,000 for the setup of this study across Waikato and Waitematā
- **Recruitment Start:** Q1 FY2025



## COMMITTED TO...

### MĀORI CANCER RESEARCHER Early Career Awards

- **Partnership:** Cancer Society of New Zealand (CSNZ) and Hei Āhuru Mōwai Māori Cancer Leadership
- **Commitment:** \$50,000 to support two PhD students working on gastrointestinal cancer research
- **Timeline:** Ongoing into 2025



**Māori & Pacific Peoples are disproportionately affected by liver, stomach and pancreatic cancers.**

**VOICE**

Ensuring the needs of people living with gut cancer are understood and acted upon is at the heart of our work. We understand what is important to people living with gut cancer and are building a comprehensive evidence base to advocate effectively for them. Our work driving awareness and educating Kiwis about gut cancers and prevention continues to grow in importance.

We know that Māori and Pacific Peoples are disproportionately impacted by gut cancer, and our work in this space continues to highlight the inequities that exist in specific gut cancers, particularly liver, stomach, and pancreatic cancer. We have continued to build partnerships with Maori-led community groups and health providers.





OUR IMPACT

Shine a Light Campaign



**SHINE A LIGHT CAMPAIGN** is an annual awareness campaign where we talk about the 'Signs and Symptoms', reinforcing the ongoing message to know your whakapapa. We know Māori are more likely to be impacted by stomach cancers, so our work to raise awareness incorporates community engagement with Māori health providers. The impact of our wider media campaign doubled in value and audience reach from previous years.

“My heartfelt thanks to Gut Cancer Foundation for providing invaluable resources that advance health literacy in our Iwi whānau. This partnership streamlines our work, enabling more meaningful face-to-face interactions and empowering us to better serve our community. Your support makes a real difference.”

Chynelle Williams - Practice Manager, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Pikiao, Kauapapa Māori General Practice, Rotorua

The Power of Community & Awareness



In 2011, at the age of 28, firefighter Isaia Piho was confronted with a life-altering diagnosis. He carried the CDH1 genetic mutation, which increases the risk of stomach cancer by 70%. This same mutation had claimed his mother’s life eight years earlier when she was just 43 years old.

testing revealed early signs of cancer, he made the difficult decision to have his stomach removed. Just six months after the surgery, Piho was back at work. Through dedicated rehabilitation, he regained his fitness and built a “different kind” of strength. Today, he serves as a role model for his two children, who will be tested for the CDH1 mutation when they turn 16.

The average age to develop stomach cancer is 37, and for Piho the danger became real when his sister was diagnosed with stage 2 stomach cancer in 2011. “My mum was [first] told she had stomach ulcers. The next time she went back, it was advanced stomach cancer. So when my sister was told she had ulcers, she wasn’t gonna buy that,” Piho recalls.

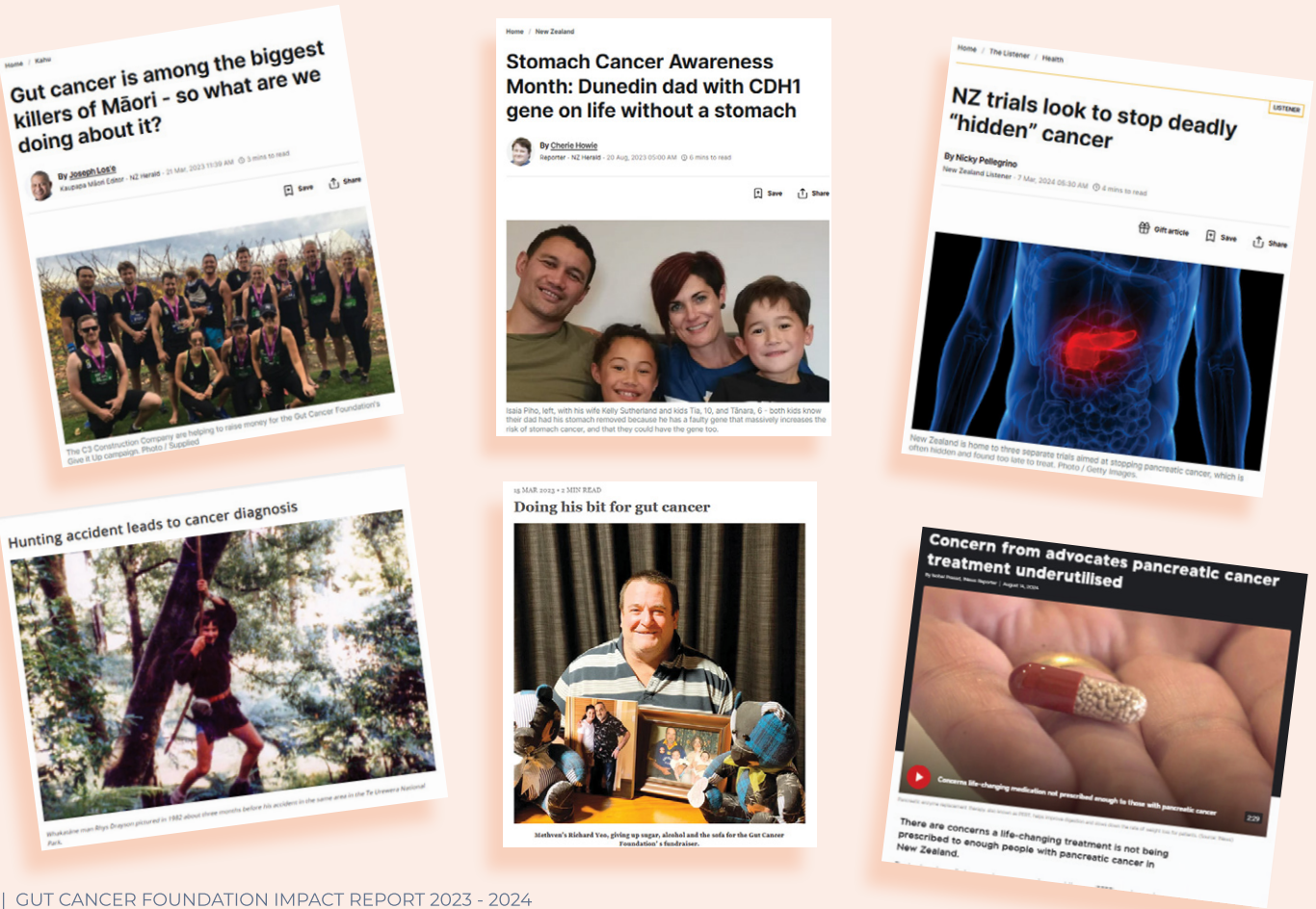
Piho’s journey is a testament to the power of whakapapa and community. It was through his community that he found the courage to undertake a prophylactic gastrectomy (stomach removal) to remove the risk of cancer due to a genetic mutation that his whānau carry. When researching the risks and benefits of the surgery he reached out to others who had gone before him and was reassured that the surgery was the best option.

The genetic link within their whānau (family) only became clear after his sister’s diagnosis. The Piho family, who are Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau-a-Apanui, had lost touch with their wider maternal relatives and were unaware the CDH1 mutation ran in their family.

Now he says “that is why I’m quite keen to get on board with awareness. I’ve got the genetic mutation, we know it could be passed on to my children but we’ve gotten to know people who had had the operation and seen that they actually lived quite a normal life so it gives you reassurance that it was going to be okay.”

Of the four Piho siblings, three carry the faulty gene. All three are alive today after having their stomachs removed.

Initially, Piho chose regular six-monthly monitoring. But after his second round of





OUR IMPACT

Give It Up Campaign

The **GIVE IT UP for Gut Cancer** encourages people to take on a 30-day challenge by giving up alcohol, sugar, or time on the sofa to support gut cancer prevention. Serving as GCF's main fundraiser, this campaign raised over \$230k for crucial research and brought one of GCF's core goals to life: raising awareness about how a healthy lifestyle can lower the risk of gut cancers.

By highlighting the connections between obesity, alcohol consumption, and gut cancer risk, the campaign reinforced the benefits of healthier choices like reducing alcohol and increasing exercise.

For the 1,213 participants, this wasn't just a fundraising challenge—it was a personal journey to better health. Each participant received tailored guidance on how making these changes could improve their well-being and reduce their cancer risk, creating a meaningful, positive impact on their lives.



GIVE IT UP  
FOR GUT CANCER



BOOZE  
FREE



SUGAR  
FREE



COFFEE  
FREE



SOMETHING  
ELSE



Ally Battrick

Kicking sugar and raising funds for gut cancer awareness

Ally Battrick took part in GIVE IT UP for Gut Cancer this year, raising \$680 for kiwis with gut cancer and kicking a lifetime sugar habit. Here's what she had to say about the challenge.

"I would like to thank the organisers of Give It Up for Gut Cancer month for giving me a good reason to quit sugar. I would never have done it without the added incentive of people donating money. I was slowly eating myself to death with a diet of 99.9% sugar, so this has made the world of difference to me.



Being at high risk of bowel cancer (my Father had it) and recently diagnosed as pre diabetic, I desperately needed to do something! Now I fully intend to continue excluding sugar from my diet, in fact just looking at the aisles of lollies, chocolate and biscuits makes me think of poison, not treats. Thank you so much for changing my life, and no doubt making it a longer one."

Building partnerships for healthier futures

As part of this year's Give It Up Awareness campaign we hosted interactive webinars with two of our major corporate partners, engaging over 92 staff members. Led by our nutrition expert, the sessions offered practical tips and lifestyle hacks to help prevent gut cancers, making healthy habits easier and more accessible.

“To support such an important cause and raise money for vital research is deeply gratifying for us. The fact that we can do so whilst engaging our teams in healthy activities & providing access to information that will help them live healthier lifestyles, and reduce their own risk of gut cancers, is hugely important.”

Todd Hunter, CEO - Turners Automotive Group



1213  
participants  
involved



250K  
funds  
raised



3493  
individual  
donations



9  
webinars  
watched



OUR IMPACT

Advocacy

One of our greatest impacts is giving voice to our patients at a Pharmac and Government level. In this period, our team has met with key stakeholders, politicians across the Coalition and opposition, and industry leaders, both locally and internationally, to advocate on behalf of patients. We continue to establish ourselves as the voice of digestive cancers in Aotearoa.

Whakatāne liver cancer patient welcomes new Pharmac funding for life-extending drugs



Whakatāne man Rhys Drayson, pictured in 2019, has terminal cancer but says being part of a trial for drugs that are soon to be funded by Pharmac has extended his life.

The doctor told him while it was good news, he still A Whakatāne man with terminal cancer says he has outlived his life expectancy after joining a trial for cancer drugs that will be funded in New Zealand from next month.

Rhys Drayson was diagnosed with liver cancer in March 2022. He said he was told in November 2023 he had six to 12 months to live.

PATIENT STORY

Rhys  
The Golden Ticket



Whakatāne man Rhys Drayson was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2022 after he developed hepatitis C from a blood transfusion in 1982.

**‘Absolutely disgusted’ drugs weren’t funded**

Drayson said the drugs would have cost more than \$100,000 per year without the trial.

He had planned to use his KiwiSaver and remortgage his house if he was denied.

In 2015, Rhys was cleared of Hepatitis C, but liver damage left him at risk of Hepatocellular Carcinoma (HCC). Two years ago, his worst fear was confirmed - cancer had developed and spread, ruling out surgery or transplant. With no funded treatment in New Zealand, his future was uncertain. In 2023, hope arrived when he joined a clinical trial for Atezolizumab and Bevacizumab, a standard treatment overseas. His oncologist now calls his response “complete,” and Rhys calls it his “golden ticket.” While not a cure, it is extending his life, and he hopes his journey helps others access lifesaving care.

Voice for  
New Drugs

In 2023, Gut Cancer Foundation worked with partners, researchers, doctors, and industry advocates to lead an open letter to Pharmac, written by oncologist Dr. Kate Clarke, member of the GCF Scientific Advisory Committee, and co-signed by 35 individuals across the cancer sector. The letter highlighted the lack of new gut cancer treatments in New Zealand and was supported by personal stories from patients and families. Kim Vigors shared how her husband received treatment in Australia that isn’t available here, while Diane Smith spoke about self-funding Keytruda for oesophageal cancer. The letter called for access to proven drugs widely available overseas, including Cetuximab, Pembrolizumab, and Atezolizumab-Bevacizumab. Thanks to this advocacy, GCF secured direct engagement with Pharmac’s Therapeutics team, ensuring patient and clinical



Oncologists pen open letter to Pharmac asking for more life-saving cancer drugs



Diane Smith. Photo: Supplied

Drug-buying agency Pharmac is not moving fast enough, says a gut cancer patient paying more than \$10,000 a month to keep her treatment going.

With 5700 New Zealanders diagnosed every year, gut cancers are one of the most common forms of cancer in the country - including cancers of the bowel, pancreas, stomach, oesophagus and liver.

voices are considered in future decisions. As a result of continued efforts, funding has now been approved for all three treatments - bringing long-overdue progress for gut cancer patients in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Herald

**Budget 2024: Cancer organisations tell Govt lives will be lost if 13 drugs aren’t funded**



Prime Minister Christopher Luxon told Newstalk ZB’s Mike Hosking this morning it needed more time to find the money, but reassured it was “still a priority” for his Government. Photo / Jason Dorday

“Knowing that patients are no longer receiving cancer care as per international guidelines and being powerless to effect change is increasingly common.

Please do not accept our silence as compliance. The moral injury experienced by involved clinicians cannot be underestimated.”

Dr Kate Clarke and colleagues

Collaboration across the cancer sector

The Gut Cancer Foundation, as part of CANGO, a coalition of nine cancer NGOs in New Zealand is lobbying the government to speed up cancer treatment access, as many patients can’t afford to wait and are dying prematurely, while essential medicines are freely available in other OECD countries.



PATIENT SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

We partner and collaborate to deliver services to meet the gut cancer community. This includes providing support and information to empower people to live well, connecting people with services, and helping to reduce fear and isolation.

Our impact

The Hub

We are committed to offering New Zealanders a hub that serves as the foundation of support for those impacted by gut cancers. A focus of 2024 was the redesign of our website providing a wealth of resources—covering treatment options, nutrition advice, emotional support, and connections to local groups—designed to support patients and their whānau at every stage. Developed collaboratively with input from patients, whānau, specialists, and Māori

groups, the site ensures that all information is accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive. Guided by Te Whare Tapa Whā, the content addresses the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of our community, to support everyone involved in the journey with gut cancer. Our partnership with PanCare Foundation in Australia was significant in the delivery of this hub, providing their intellectual property, time, and expertise free of charge.

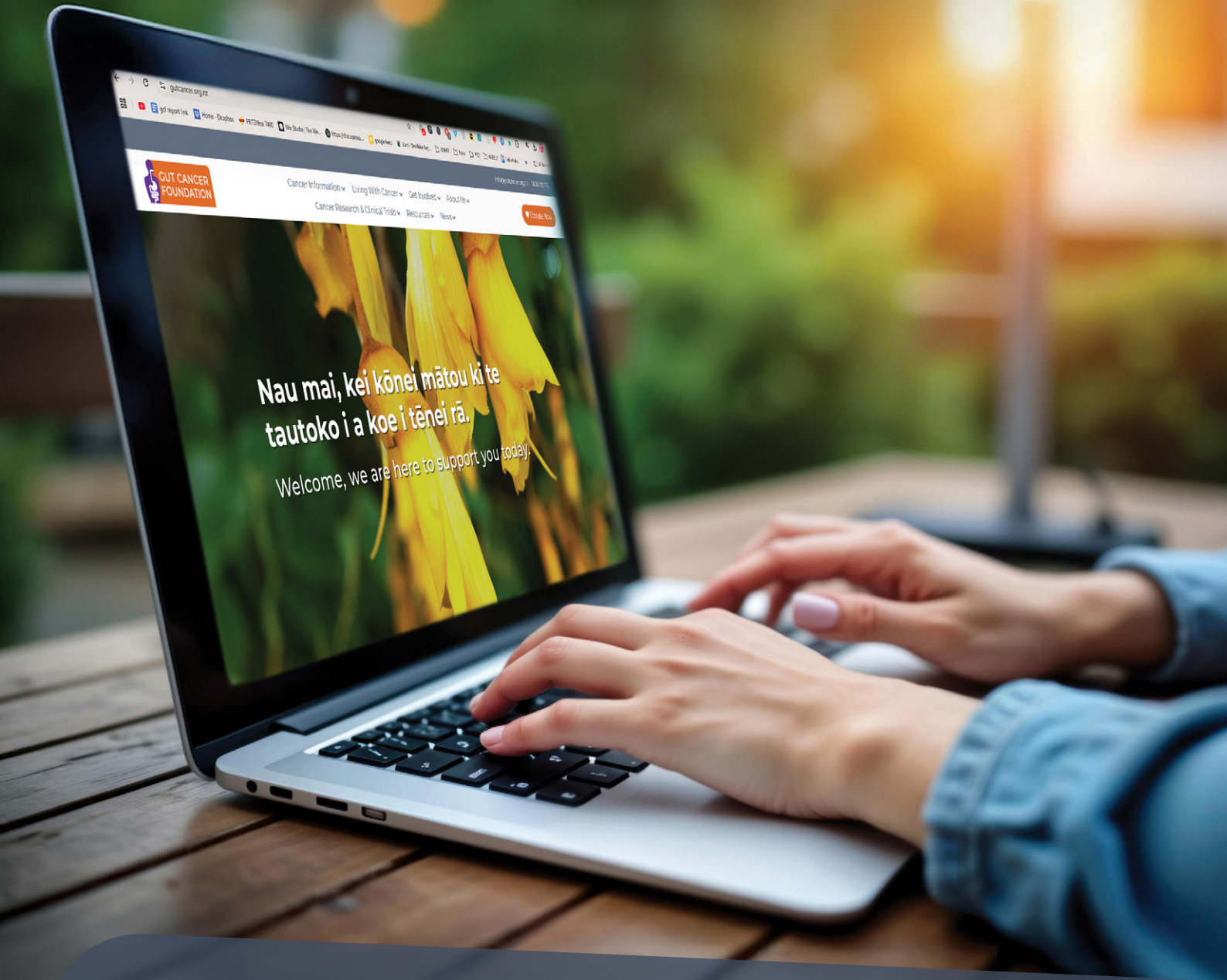
“The updated and revamped Gut Cancer website is a fantastic resource. It serves as a ‘one-stop shop’ with a distinctly New Zealand flavour, continuously improving the ways we inform, guide, and support treatment decisions and associated care, while enhancing patient outcomes. This site is designed for patients and whānau to revisit repeatedly, adapting to their changing needs as they navigate their treatment and disease journey.

It comprehensively explores and provides user-friendly, valid, and appropriate information that is well-written for its target audience. The site takes a broad approach, offering information across various topics such as nutrition, clinical trials, publicly funded and private treatment options, supportive care—including psychosocial and practical supports—and, importantly, end-of-life care.

This platform recognises our bicultural obligations by including Te Reo Māori content and aspires to provide resources for our growing Pacific Peoples and Mandarin-speaking populations. It is an invaluable tool for reducing inequities and empowering our patient group with knowledge and support.”

Felicity Drumm, Oncology Nurse Practitioner, Auckland Hospital

Website Visits



NOVEMBER  
2023

1,505 Website visits

20% increase  
in organic users

NOVEMBER  
2024

18,903 Website visits

300% increase  
in direct users

1156% increase  
in website visits



## OUR SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to the individuals, families, trusts, foundations and corporate organisations that support the Gut Cancer Foundation.



### MAJOR DONORS

We are extremely fortunate and very grateful to receive the ongoing support of some incredibly generous major donors. Thanks to...

*Guy Haddleston*

*John Tomson*

*JM Thompson Charitable Trust*

### CORPORATE PARTNERS



### TRUSTS & FOUNDATIONS



The Estate of Ernest Hyam Davis & The Ted and Mollie Carr Endowment Trust, proudly managed by Perpetual Guardian.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS







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FOUNDATION**

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