

# Empowering the NZ frontline

How educating primary health practitioners may help mitigate red meat emissions while saving lives and costs

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## Introduction

In New Zealand (NZ) red meat is eaten at one of the highest rates globally and is a top export. However, pressure around climate emissions, water pollution and health problems connected to red meat are intensifying.

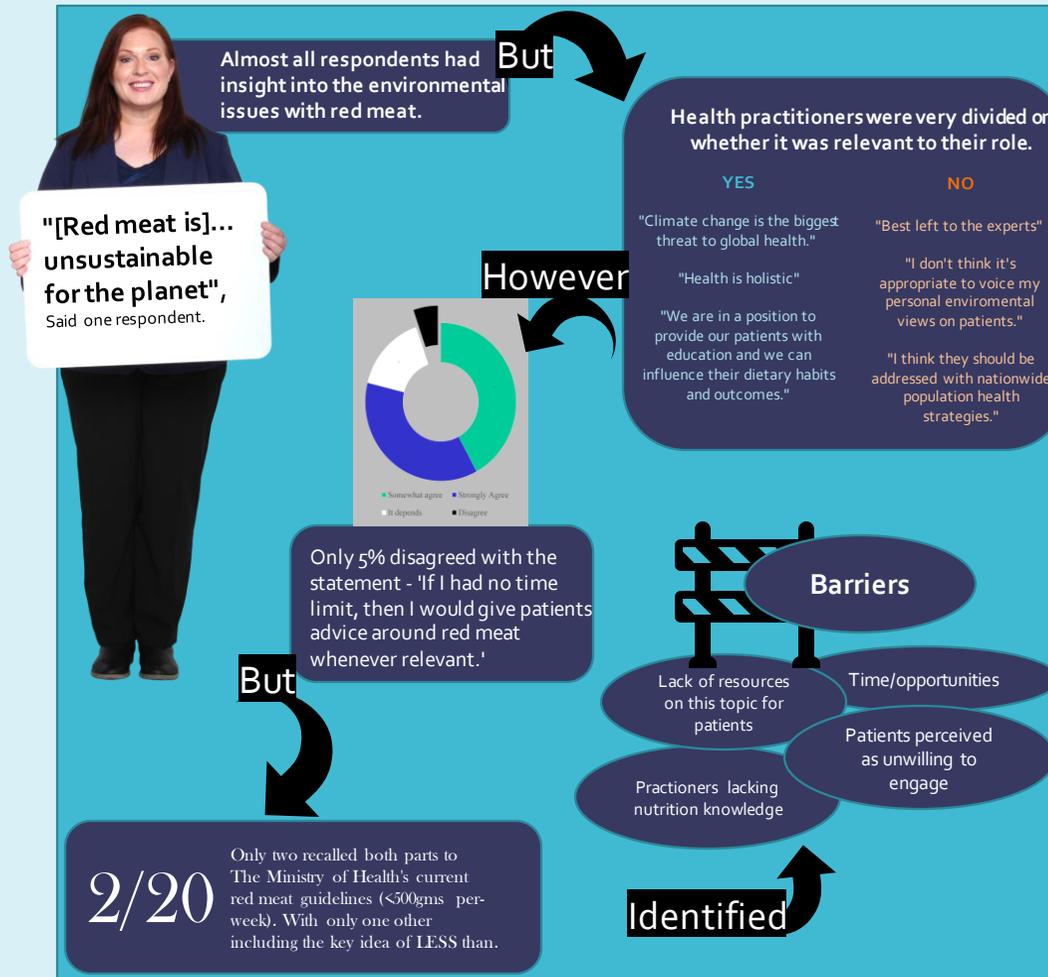
Eating less red meat has been shown as one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon footprints. Drew, Cleghorn, Macmillan & Mizdrak (2020) estimate over a lifetime (NZ population) a 'climate friendly diet' could save NZ 1.0–1.5 million quality-adjusted life-years and NZ\$14–20 billion health costs, with one main change being red meat reduction.

There is also a consensus from major health institutions world-wide that red meat consumption should be minimized in high-income countries, for both health and climate reasons (Campbell-Lendrum & Prüss-Ustün, 2019). But no one had studied the current knowledge, attitudes and practices of primary health practitioners around their education of patients on decreasing red meat.

## Method

20 primary healthcare practitioners from general practices located in higher socio-economic areas in Auckland completed an online mixed methods questionnaire in March 2021.

The study is a dissertation project for partial fulfilment of Emily Rushton's MSc Sustainability, Health and Wellbeing at the University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom.



## Conclusions

Primary healthcare professionals are in an ideal position to educate patients. And having patients encouraged to reduce red meat is likely to save quality-adjusted life years and health spending (Drew, Cleghorn, Macmillan & Mizdrak, 2020). Many advisory entities on climate change and health recommend practitioners support the population to reduce red meat consumption. However, preliminary findings from our research suggests that the diffusion of information has been very slow.

While these results are not generalisable, it suggests there is likely room for improvement, with the respondents showing a majority understand there is an environmental issue with red meat and are willing to educate patients around reducing red meat. However, a lot do not understand why it is relevant to their job and lack knowledge of current guidelines and nutrition.

This suggests that many health practitioners would be willing to engage in educating patients to reduce red meat intake if they understood why this was relevant, had better knowledge of nutrition and their barriers were addressed.

With climate change requiring immediate action, the authors posit that educating primary healthcare professionals to support the population to decrease red meat may be another string to our climate action bow.

We suggest this is done via:  
- Education of primary health care practitioners  
- Development and distribution of resources (e.g. pamphlets)

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## References

- Campbell-Lendrum, D. & Prüss-Ustün, A. (2019). Climate change, air pollution and noncommunicable diseases. Bulletin of the World Health Organization 97, 160–161. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.18.224295>
- Drew, J., Cleghorn, C., Macmillan, A. & Mizdrak, A. (2020). Healthy and Climate-Friendly Eating Patterns in the New Zealand Context. Environmental Health Perspectives. 128(1), <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/EHP5996>