

April 2026

Submission: Amendments to the Dog Control Act 1996

From: Te Kāhui Mātai Arotamariki o Aotearoa | Paediatric Society of New Zealand (PSNZ)

PSNZ has previously submitted on dog control legislation, and we write again with growing urgency. Since our 2023 submission, rates of dog-related injury have continued to rise. Children remain disproportionately and seriously harmed. This issue is well documented, solutions are known, and action is overdue.

Our organisation endorses the recent work and recommendations of the [Public Health Communication Centre Aotearoa](#) and calls on the government to act on this issue without further delay.

Paediatric Perspective: Children are Being Harmed

In 2024/25, ACC recorded **29,220 claims for dog-related injuries and 1,139 hospitalisations** nationally, rates that have increased steadily year on year.¹

- **Children are disproportionately harmed:** Children aged 0-9 are significantly more likely to be hospitalised than adults. This reflects the greater severity of injuries in children, who sustain 75% of bites to the head, face, and neck region when hospitalised, compared to 11% in adults. These injuries often require complex surgical repair, with an average healing time of nearly 11 months. This is a significant disruption to a child's life during crucial developmental years.²
- **Normal child behaviour can trigger attacks; education is not enough:** Dogs may become activated to attack in response to children's natural movements, such as running, sudden sounds, and unpredictable gestures. This means that educating children on dog safety alone is insufficient. Systemic and legislative controls, not changes in child behaviour, are required.³
- **Children are routinely blamed, and trauma is minimised by dog owners:** Caregiver research found that children were often blamed for an attack, or their trauma was minimised by the dog's owner. This theme creates a culture where attacks go unreported and repeated harm occurs.⁴
- **Equity is central:** Tamariki Māori aged 0–9 years are 2.47 times more likely to be hospitalised for a dog bite than non-Māori children. Injury rates are also 3.97 times higher in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived. This is a stark structural inequity demanding targeted investment.²

“Tamariki in Aotearoa flourish in health and wellness”

PSNZ Calls For

Specific amendments to the Dog Control Act 1996 are urgently required:

- **Mandatory sterilisation** of all dogs by six months of age or within 28 days of ownership, with exemptions for registered breeders or on veterinary grounds. Existing low-cost programmes must be maintained to support whānau in low-income communities.
- **Mandatory notification** of all dog-related injuries by health professionals and veterinarians to Animal Management. This system is already operational at Starship Hospital and could be scaled nationally.
- **Enhanced powers for Animal Management Officers**, including: immediate seizure following attacks or non-compliance; minimum fencing standards; infringements for roaming dogs and attacks on people (especially children); a single high-risk classification for dangerous and menacing dogs; and limiting owner disputes/appeals.
- **Equitable and sustained resourcing**, with investment targeted at regions with the fewest officers relative to population, and partnership with Māori and iwi-led initiatives to ensure approaches are locally led, culturally responsive, and equitable.

Children have a right to run, play, and explore without being at risk of a serious injury. The current law is not protecting them, and tamariki, especially those already facing the greatest inequities, cannot afford for these rates to continue rising.

Ngā mihi,

Dr Sonja Crone, President PSNZ | Consultant Paediatrician

Dr Dave Graham, Co-Chair, General Paediatric Network PSNZ, Paediatrician

“Tamariki in Aotearoa flourish in health and wellness”

References

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- ² Duncan-Sutherland N, Moaveni Z, Exeter D, Colbert J, Kool B. Epidemiology of dog related injuries in New Zealand. *N Z Med J*. 2022 May 6;135(1554). Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35728223/>
- ³ Duncan-Sutherland N, Lissaman AC, Shepherd M, Kool B. Systematic review of dog bite prevention strategies. *Inj Prev*. 2022 Apr 7; injuryprev-2021-044477. doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2021-044477
- ⁴ Duncan-Sutherland N, Hunt M, Shepherd M, Kool B. Caregiver perspectives on the value of dogs and their effects on children in private and public spaces. *J Vet Behav*. 2025 Mar;78:36-44. doi:10.1016/j.jveb.2025.01.00