



THE QUIET ENGINE OF TARANAKI MEDICINE

In 1966, a visionary group of Taranaki doctors came together with a shared desire to invest in medical education and research that would shape healthier futures for generations to come.

With an inaugural grant of \$100,000 from the Taranaki Savings Bank, the Taranaki Medical Foundation (TMF) was born, and six decades later, it continues to drive the region's medical excellence.

WORDS Hannah Mumby PHOTO Sandra Henderson

As the foundation approaches its 60th anniversary in 2026, Executive Secretary Dr Nadja Gottfert has been closely investigating decades of meeting minutes and stories of innovation. She says the milestone is not only a celebration of the organisation, but a tribute to the people who've built and sustained it.

"The foundation has been the quiet engine behind Taranaki medicine for 60 years."

At its heart, TMF fosters medical research and education for the benefit of the community through meetings and workshops, research grants, and scholarships. These initiatives have helped generations of doctors expand their skills while maintaining strong ties to the region.

TMF's monthly Continuing Medical Education meetings provide a vital bridge between hospital and community doctors, strengthening collegial relationships and

improving patient care. As the health sector has expanded over the years and become more complex, these meetings have remained a cornerstone for collaboration, learning, and connection, as well as a meaningful way to attract new doctors to this beautiful region.

"TMF is one of the few regional medical foundations in New Zealand that is doctor-led for doctors, and community-supported, ensuring that education and innovation stay rooted in Taranaki," says Nadja.

Today, the foundation has 83 active members and continues to attract doctors and medical students who want to invest their expertise back into Taranaki. Its summer scholarship programme invites at least three students from the region, back home for the summer to work on a research project each year, giving them hands-on experience and a taste of what makes Taranaki's medical community so special.

Former summer student, Dr Emily Davenport, is a respected local surgeon who leads many specialist workshops and now acts as the foundation's treasurer. It's a full-circle story that really embodies TMF's purpose, says Nadja.

Over the past six decades, TMF has supported dozens of groundbreaking projects. Among one of its most impactful contributions was the initial funding of Whānau Pakari, led by Professor Yvonne Anderson.

This world-class programme supports children and teens struggling with weight-related health issues, taking a holistic approach that includes their whānau and community.

"That local backing allowed it to grow into something really extraordinary," says Nadja.

Another example of home-grown innovation comes from Dr Yariv Doran, whose development of a smart screening tool for ADHD has improved how clinicians identify and support children across New Zealand.

Orthopaedic research has long been a focus, too, with TMF contributing to major knee replacement studies and surgical innovation that has improved patient outcomes across the region.

TMF's support for such projects underscores its vision to support a thriving Taranaki, where healthcare is strengthened through ongoing medical education, research and collaboration.

Part of the foundation's 60th-year celebrations will honour the remarkable individuals who helped shape its history. The early committee featured well-known names such as Miss Jean Sandal, the country's first female surgeon, Dr Peter Allen, a former Deputy Mayor of New Plymouth who introduced New Zealand's first mobile chest X-ray unit to Taranaki, equitable healthcare advocate, Dr John Valentine, and Dr Kenneth Fox, an anaesthetist and entomology enthusiast who also discovered a new moth species on Mt Taranaki.

The celebrations will include a range of community and professional events highlighting the foundation's achievements and its ongoing commitment to the future of local healthcare.



A Diamond Anniversary ambrose golf day in March 2026 dubbed "60 Years in the Sun – Playing for Skins" will raise awareness and funds to help promote skin cancer prevention and early detection education - a must for Taranaki given its high melanoma rates.

A major event that explores rural and cultural health, Hauora Taranaki Wānanga, will also be held in the region. As keynote speaker, local doctor Moerangi Tamati will share her internationally recognised research on Muka Titiki (flax fibre ties for umbilical cords), supported by TMF Regional lectures and a doctors' mountain summit will round out the busy events calendar.

While the 60th anniversary is a moment to reflect, Nadja says it's also about looking ahead. TMF has launched a 60th Anniversary Impact Fund, dedicated to supporting education and skill development for resident doctors. "Every donation, large or small, helps us grow the knowledge, skills and professional networks that underpin quality healthcare in our community," she says.

The foundation also welcomes bequests and donations, ensuring that today's legacies will continue to nurture medical excellence.

"There's something special about this region and the people who choose to serve here," Nadja reflects. "The Taranaki Medical Foundation exists because of that spirit and belief that by supporting those who care for our community, we strengthen the whole community."

After 60 years of impact, Nadja proudly declares the foundation is "just getting started".



To learn more, contribute to the 60th Anniversary Impact Fund, or join the anniversary events, visit taranakimedicalfoundation.org.nz or contact Dr Nadja Gottfert via email at info@taranakimedicalfoundation.co.nz.