

MEDIA RELEASE:
PAY GAP CRIPPLING ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE
EMBARGOED UNTIL 6PM, WEDNESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER



A dozen of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading primary, community, and telehealth care organisations have come together, calling on political parties to commit to pay parity for their nursing and health care workers.

"Collectively we represent services that support New Zealanders from cradle to grave. We've come together for the first time because we fear communities are missing out on critical health care," says Fiona Kingsford, chief executive, Whānau Āwhina Plunket.

While the group wholeheartedly endorse the recent historic pay equity settlement for Te Whatu Ora nurses and healthcare workers, it has created a stark pay gap with those working in primary, community, and telehealth care, estimated at between 15 and 35 per cent.

"The impact that the pay gap has on recruitment and retention, and subsequently the delivery of essential health services, has reached crisis point and can no longer be ignored.

"We fear we will no longer be there to meet our combined mission of assisting New Zealanders to start well, live well, and die well," Mrs Kingsford says.

The primary, community, and telehealth care workforce complete the same education, undertake additional training and skills development as Te Whatu Ora staff, and provide vital care and support to thousands of people every day. There is no justification for them not being remunerated equally.

The combined picture is bleak, with workforce shortages crippling service delivery.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket has 35 nurse vacancies, potentially impacting 140 Well Child Tamariki Ora core contacts to pēpi and tamariki every day; in an unprecedented situation, Family Planning had 64 days of closures across its clinics during August due to a lack of nursing staff; more than 1,000 aged care beds have closed permanently; and a number of hospices have reduced their inpatient beds.

A rapid data collection in September attracted responses from 246 general practices, with 43 per cent of respondents reporting they had closed or restricted services due to a nursing workforce shortage. This is impacting things such as immunisations, cervical screening, diabetic annual reviews, cardiovascular risk assessments and opening hours. While only a snapshot, the survey results correlate strongly with research carried out by GenPro in August which showed 54 per cent of responding member practices had reduced services in the last six months. GenPro results also showed 43 per cent had nursing vacancies with an average of two nurses per practice having quit in the last six months.

"Our community, primary care, and telehealth nurses and health workers care for and treat millions of New Zealanders, including our most vulnerable elderly, hapū māmā, pēpi and tamariki, and those who are dying.

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“When our services begin to crumple, these people are forced into an already overrun hospital system that is also at its breaking point,” says Dr Samantha Murton, president of The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

The significant pay gap and resulting recruitment and retention issues are forcing hospices to make some tough decisions.

“The options are reducing services to fit with available staff or use their finite reserves to increase salaries to match Te Whatu Ora, which is unsustainable even in the short term,” says Hospice chief executive Wayne Naylor.

“Hospice care cannot keep relying on the generosity of communities through charitable giving and selling second-hand goods to pay for essential health care staff and services.”

Family Planning chief executive Jackie Edmond says young people are particularly impacted by closures across its network of clinics.

“About 1 in 6 of the young people (16 to 19 years old) we see don’t have another regular health provider and 1 in 5 of them don’t know where else to go to get contraception. When we are forced to close clinics because we don’t have staff to open them, it is these young people that are at most risk of unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection,” Ms Edmond says.

National and international research has long since proven that primary and community care is essential to a well-functioning health system. The implications of the loss of care, early intervention, and prevention delivered in the community is catastrophic.

The group wrote to political parties, seeking a position and timeframe for action on closing the pay gap. Disappointingly, just one political party had responded by the 20 September deadline.

“The incoming government must address nurse pay parity urgently. We require 100 per cent pay parity with Te Whatu Ora employed nurses and healthcare workers if we are to keep providing essential services in our communities. We cannot afford to pay more, and it is putting services at risk,” emphasises Mrs Kingsford.

Despite the challenges, the group reiterate that care is still available, although it may be provided differently as organisations design ways to navigate their staffing shortages.

“We know we’ve painted a sombre picture, but we urge people never to delay seeking care. If you or someone close to you needs medical assistance, please contact your provider as you would usually or call Healthline on 0800 611 116,” says Dr Murton.

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ABOUT US

Between our organisations, we have the privilege and responsibility to provide true cradle-to-grave care. We:

- deliver 21 million contacts with patients at general practices every year
- deliver 170,000 client contacts for sexual and reproductive health
- provide home and community support services to more than 100,000 people each year
- provide healthcare and support for over 36,000 seniors in aged residential care
- support over 10,000 hospice patients who die
- provide 481,500 hospice patient and whānau contacts, and over 28,000 hospice inpatient bed days
- provide Well Child Tamariki Ora (WCTO) services to nearly 80 per cent of babies and have WCTO contact with over 300,000 whānau with tamariki under the age of five
- provide 24/7 PlunketLine for parents and a national client contact centre by FPNZ
- responded to over 2.2 million national telehealth service contacts, connecting with nearly 1.6 million individual people
- provide clinical and community education and quality standards.

WHO ARE WE:

Whānau Āwhina Plunket

Family Planning

Te Kahu Pairuri o Aotearoa – Hospice New Zealand

Aged Care Association

Home and Community Health Association

Access Community Health/Hauora Tara-Ā-Whare

Whakarongorau Aotearoa/New Zealand Telehealth Services

The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners

General Practice New Zealand

Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network

General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand

Practice Managers and Administrators Association of New Zealand

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(GPLF is a forum with membership from The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network, the General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand, General Practice New Zealand, the New Zealand College of Primary Healthcare Nurses, and the Practice Managers and Administrators Association of New Zealand.)

