



14 March 2021

S21.03

Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee on the Budget Policy Statement, 9 February 2021

Introduction

- 0.1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing over 200 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 15 branches. In addition, about 450 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 450,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion, and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right.
- 0.2. This submission has been written by the Parliamentary Watch Committee with reference to existing policy^{1,2} submissions³, our CEDAW work⁴, and a position paper on COVID-19⁵.

1. Human capital: our people and skills

- 1.1. Women have been disproportionately affected in job loss statistics⁶, while childcare availability and affordability has diminished.
- 1.2. Māori and Pacific women have high rates of employment in industries like tourism, sales, personal health care, cleaning, and early childhood teaching – areas which have been especially hard hit. Women generally predominate in low-pay occupational groups. The worth and value of that work should be recognised and paid fairly.
- 1.3. The budget should consider the evidence from NZ's COVID-19 experience, and actively seek strategies to prioritise employment opportunities for women who have been adversely affected by pandemic-related job losses. Where there may be work available, there has not been adequate funding for childcare. High quality childcare that is both affordable and accessible also needs to be a budget priority.

¹ NCWNZ. 2012. 115 years of resolution.

² NCWNZ. 2019. Appendix "D": Resolutions of National Meetings 2011-2019.

³ <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/submissions>

⁴ <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/cedaw>

⁵ NCWNZ. 2020. NCWNZ position paper: Covid19 and beyond – the opportunity.

⁶ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/covid-19s-impact-on-women-and-work>

- 1.4. The impact on women in terms of caring for children and managing households in addition to carrying out paid work is a great concern as this has implications in terms of mental health wellbeing for both women and children.
- 1.5. Working from home, especially during a lockdown, requires digital resources and internet capability. Support is needed for those workers who do not have this facility. Employers must provide the tools for people working from home. Consideration is also needed where women workers are expected to work their normal hours at home as well as supervise children's educational requirements.
- 1.6. Students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning; online time cannot provide many of the informal social interactions that students have at school; online classes are not as effective as in-person classes for most students especially younger ones and for students with weaker academic backgrounds. Online courses need a strong curriculum and strong pedagogical practices so more teacher training required.
- 1.7. Experiments that allow people to work a 4-day week whilst being paid for five days have found that productivity has increased. This can create time for family and community responsibilities. However, this could perpetuate gender inequalities if gender imbalances in household and reproductive responsibilities are not addressed⁷.
- 1.8. Work/skills and related education and employment initiatives need to continue especially expanding current programmes around apprenticeships and retraining opportunities.
- 1.9. There needs to be an acceleration of pay equity claims.
- 1.10. The low paid workforce includes Maori and Pasifika, immigrants, refugees, those with little or no post school education and those working in under-valued occupations. There are significant numbers of women in all these groups.
- 1.11. Investment is needed in social infrastructure projects as an economic stimulus would provide employment in female-dominated areas. "Shovel ready" projects which can be fast tracked to provide employment and needed physical infrastructure may be emphasising male dominated work opportunities at the expense of social infrastructure projects which would more likely provide employment for women. Such projects could invest in improving mental health, extending home and community support, education and training opportunities and restoring our environment.
- 1.12. Caring must be seen as central to the paid economy. Any basic income or new systems of income support must include recognition of the true values of caring and all who do it, as employment or informally, should receive an income that reflects this.

2. Natural capital: our environment

- 2.1. Rethinking social, ecological and economic change together gives a unique opportunity to rebuild a society that addresses long-standing issues of gender, social and economic inequalities, at the same time as supporting ecological systems and reducing

⁷ NCWNZ. 2019. Gender attitudes survey. <https://genderequal.nz/ga-survey>

environmental degradation, and reduces the risk of future epidemics. What is essential for a healthy planet is also essential for a healthy society.

- 2.2. The health of our planet, our biodiversity and ecological balance play an important role in the emergence and spread of infectious diseases. To achieve long-term advances there needs to be a focus on environmental impacts and climate change including revision of procurement policies and mandatory emission reduction frameworks.
- 2.3. There is a close relationship between climate change impact and gender inequality. Effective climate action should be strengthened by ensuring a gender lens on national planning, policies and strategies for climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- 2.4. There should be a focus on human rights, safe housing and secure incomes, Māori knowledge (Mātauranga Māori), renewable energy, regenerative agriculture, low carbon transport and a circular economy. Add to this a focus on gender equality and we have the potential to generate a sustainable future for current and future generations.

3. Social capital: our connections

- 3.1. Health, safety, and wellbeing are areas where the different and multiple impacts of ethnicity, disability, gender identity, age and socio-economic status have resulted in stark and unacceptable disparities between New Zealand women in access to treatment and outcomes of health care.
- 3.2. In New Zealand 83% of the healthcare and social assistance workforce are women.
- 3.3. New Zealand has very low rates of infection and death from COVID-19. Overall, the health system is responding well and some identified weaknesses like data collection and tracking systems, have been addressed with speed and innovation. But the pandemic has highlighted chronic and systemic health inequalities:
 - One third of NZ women but 47% of Māori women have unmet health needs.
 - only real partnerships based on Te Tiriti and human rights will effectively address health and other inequalities.
 - The Government's failure to provide data disaggregated for disability is a breach of its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 3.4. Before COVID-19 at least one in six New Zealand adults had been diagnosed with a common mental disorder at some time. Many mental health disorders are causally linked to socio-economic factors, ethnicity, discrimination poor physical health and substandard housing. Women are more likely to experience a common mental disorder than males, regardless of age, and Māori and Pacific people have higher rates of mental disorders and psychological distress⁸.
- 3.5. The lockdown has raised awareness of those already most at risk of isolation, loneliness and depression -older people, people with disabilities and their careers, and those in poverty. The additional impact of the stress of lock down, loss of income, fears about the

⁸ Ministry of Health. 2017/18 New Zealand Health Survey. <https://www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/national-collections-and-surveys/surveys/new-zealand-health-survey#2017-18>

virus and of the future, are a major concern. The physiological and emotional impacts on individuals of long-term loneliness is an important public policy issue.

- 3.6. Social goals, including increasing social connections, should be incorporated into the design of infrastructure, town centres, neighbourhoods, and housing developments.
- 3.7. Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing is a budget priority area. Addressing child poverty must be done by focusing on the family's situation.
- 3.8. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)⁹ sees increases in wages and welfare payments going a long way to improving conditions for the country's poorest children. CPAG also notes the increased negative impacts of poverty on children who are disabled, and notes the material hardship statistics for Māori and Pasifika children are still above national rates.
- 3.9. The issue of homelessness has serious consequences for children's wellbeing, an area which needs to be addressed in the budget. Thousands of children are living in motel accommodation - in confined and overcrowded living conditions with parents desperate to find affordable and healthy living accommodation for their families. Emergency housing grants increased by half over the past year. The emotional stress for children living in emergency accommodation is significant. Motels are not designed for permanent living, and unsuitable for those with addiction or mental health issues.
- 3.10. Violence against women is already endemic in New Zealand with Māori, Pacific women, refugee/migrant women, disabled women, LGBTIQI people and older women most affected. As predicted, statistics from NZ Police show a gradual and steady increase in reported cases from just before the lockdown, particularly in the bigger cities. Women's Refuge have reported lower numbers than expected but do not find this surprising, given the difficulties of escaping in a lockdown. A sustained increase is anticipated post COVID-19. The pandemic has highlighted inequalities in services across the country, especially the digital divide with some women in isolated areas having no access to internet or even telephones.

4. Financial and physical capital: our built and financial assets

- 4.1. There needs to be greater investment in social housing. The affordability, accessibility and quality of housing involves significant issues for women, especially those reaching retirement¹⁰.
- 4.2. Addressing pay inequity, increasing financial stability, and recognising the true values of caring and carers are necessary response to improving the socio-economic status of New Zealanders.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The pandemic is exacerbating and highlighting existing gender inequalities across the

⁹ Child Poverty Action Group. 2021. <https://www.cpag.org.nz/news/>

¹⁰ Dale MC, St John S. 2020. Women and retirement in a post COVID-19 world. <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/business/about/our-research/research-institutes-and-centres/RPRC/OtherPapers/Women%20in%20Super%20September%202020.pdf>

board and the impacts on women are the culmination of decades of a whole range of deficits.

5.2. NCWNZ's concerns include:

- The disproportionate impact of Covid on women.
- The need for continuing and expanding initiatives around work/skills and related education and employment initiatives.
- Continued support for a living wage., given that women are the majority in lower paid occupations.

5.3. The Budget Policy Statement is an opportunity to reduce these inequalities.



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