



3 June 2021

S21.13

Contribution to Gender Justice Collective submission to the Health Select Committee in support of the request for a National Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Introduction

1. The National Council of Women New Zealand-Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is proud to be a founding member of the Gender Justice Collective and strongly supports the call for a national women's health strategy.
2. NCWNZ is an umbrella group representing over 200 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 14 branches and another 450 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 450,000.
3. This year, NCWNZ celebrates 125 years of advocacy and action to achieve gender equality in Aotearoa New Zealand. Since 2017 we have led a national campaign to raise national consciousness about gender equality in twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand.¹

Obligations

4. We are strongly committed to holding governments to account for their obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and for many years, have coordinated the reports from the non-government sector.
5. NCWNZ is also committed to honouring Te Tiriti in all its work and recognises that only strong, equal relationships with iwi, hapū and whanau and Maori health providers will successfully address the unacceptable gaps and inequalities in the health of wāhine.

Health inequities

6. While there have been many victories and achievements over the years, the stark truth is that Aotearoa New Zealand has slipped to 6th place in the world for gender equality. One area where we are lagging behind similar countries is in the development of a national women's health strategy: Canada has had a strategy since 1999, Australia since 2019 and a national strategy is currently under development in the United Kingdom.

¹ <https://genderequal.nz/>

7. Good health and wellbeing are fundamental to achieving women's equality and the chronic and systemic inequalities in access to health care, quality of care and outcomes – especially for Māori wāhine – are simply unacceptable.
8. The continuing inequalities have been sharply highlighted by the Covid 19 pandemic: women everywhere are most impacted, especially in job losses and additional care responsibilities.
9. Women are more likely to experience a common mental disorder than men. The lockdowns have highlighted concerns about those already most at risk of isolation, loneliness and depression – older women, women who are disabled, carers and women in poverty.
10. NCWNZ has already advocated to Government to address the serious gaps in gender health research and data exposed by the pandemic; especially for women who are disabled, older women's mental health and LGBTQI people. This is in breach of international obligations, a serious impediment to developing effective policies and services and something a national women's health strategy would address. It is disappointing that there was no allocation in Budget 2021 for this, as called for by the Gender Justice Collective.

Conclusions

11. The major restructuring of the health system with national agencies replacing the DHBs, is the ideal time to begin the development of a national women's health strategy, and we urge the Committee to make this a strong recommendation to Parliament.



Suzanne Manning
NCWNZ Board



Raewyn Stone
Convenor NCWNZ Health Standing Committee