



**Briefing for the Incoming Minister – Summary:**

**Families Commission**

*The following is a summary prepared by the NZCCSS Secretariat of the Briefing for the Incoming Minister of the Families Commission, 2005. The document itself is available at [www.familiescommission.govt.nz/download/BIM\\_2005.doc](http://www.familiescommission.govt.nz/download/BIM_2005.doc)*

*NZCCSS has provided this as a summary of the document. It is not intended to critique or comment upon the policies or initiatives contained in the agency's Briefing the Incoming Minister, but simply to give an overview of some of the major issues covered in the agency's briefing.*

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and it began operations in July 2004.<sup>1</sup> The Commission seeks to “advocate for the interests of families through policy analysis, research, community engagement and public information.”<sup>2</sup>

**Facts on families in New Zealand**

- In 2001 there were an estimate 1.05 million families in New Zealand; this is projected to increase to 1.28 million by 2021.<sup>3</sup>
- Families with dependant children make up 50 percent of all families, 29 percent of this figure is made up of one-parent families and 71 percent two-parent families.<sup>4</sup>
- The number of sole parent families has increased from 14 percent in 1981, to 24 percent in 1991 and 29% in 2001.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2001 the average size of a two-parent family was 4.0, and the average for a one-parent family was 2.7.<sup>6</sup>
- The fastest growing family type is couples without children; it is predicted to make up 32 percent of all families by 2021.<sup>7</sup>
- The number of two-parent families is projected to decline slightly in the next 20 years and the number of one-parent families is projected to increase.<sup>8</sup>
- Since 1970, marriage has become less common, people are marrying at an older age and more marriages are ending in separation or divorce than in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

**Issues and concerns of the Commission**

The Commission has identified critical issues for New Zealand families and called for government and community-wide action to:

- Recognise and support parenting,
- Eliminate family violence,
- Protect and enhance family living standards,
- Balance work, family and community commitments,
- Enhance the responsiveness of policies and services to family diversity and change.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.14, all figures are statistics New Zealand estimates

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>10</sup>The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.5, also see p.17

## Aims

Over the next three years the Commission aims to:

- Implement a comprehensive research programme involving a number of different approaches.<sup>11</sup>
- Promote policies that provide better support for families and influence public attitudes through public education and information campaigning.<sup>12</sup>
- Engage with government, non-government and community decision-makers and service providers.<sup>13</sup>
- Inform stakeholders and communities about what supports or hinders family resilience.<sup>14</sup>

## Initiatives taken by the Commission

### Research

One of the key roles of the Commission is to undertake family-centred research, there have already been a number of research initiatives by the Commission including;

- The Commission asked New Zealand Families what issues they faced, how their families functioned and what would make their family life better. Over a two-month consultation period nearly 3,700 families responded.<sup>15</sup>
- The Commission produced a research report 'Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family.'

### Communities

- In 2004-2005 the Commission developed a 'community engagement framework' which will enable them to gauge views and areas of importance for a wide range of families.<sup>16</sup> The framework will enable the Commission to engage with different groups, which are specified under Section 13 of the Families Commission Act 2003.<sup>17</sup>
- The Commission publishes a newsletter called 'Family Voice'<sup>18</sup>

### Public Information

The Commission began a public information and education programme in 2004-2005 by launching the 'What makes your family tick?' campaign, publishing and making available results of research, commenting publicly on a range of family issues and developing their website as a key way of communicating with the public.<sup>19</sup>

## Initiatives for families

### Recognising and supporting parenting

**Rationale:** Support for parents is important for both the parent and child's well being.

International research has demonstrated that parenting programmes have a positive impact for children and parents.<sup>20</sup>

### Initiatives

- Plunket has a Parenting Education Programme (PEPE) up and running which coaches first-time parents to give them skills and knowledge for parenting.<sup>21</sup>
- The government has funded parenting programmes targeted at vulnerable families with children 0-6 years, approximately 14,000 families attended the programmes in the 2003-2004 financial year.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.11

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.10

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>15</sup> See the Families Commission website for details. [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.11

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>20</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.18

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.19, see [www.plunket.org.nz](http://www.plunket.org.nz) for more on PEPE

- In 2004 the government launched the SKIP (Strategies with Kids-Information for Parents) Programme. The programme has seen the development of national resources for community organisations, giving parents support and education and supporting local community groups through funds for local initiatives.<sup>23</sup>
- Over the next four years the government will pilot and evaluate a universal parenting support service and also a scheme based in Early Childhood Education to support parents of young children.<sup>24</sup>

#### Eliminating family violence

**Rationale:** Family violence is a significant issue for many New Zealand families. In 2001 over half of New Zealand's homicides were domestic related with one third of the victims' children. In 2002-2003 the Police attended 49,682 incidents of family violence, it is estimated that 55,000 children were present at these incidents.<sup>25</sup> In the year ended 30 June 2004 the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services experienced a 36 percent increase in notifications of abuse or neglect.

#### Initiatives

- In June 2002 the government launched the Te Rito strategy; it has nine guiding principles, five goals and a framework for implementation which consists of 18 action areas.<sup>26</sup>
- The government has set up a ministerial team to provide advice and leadership on family violence prevention.<sup>27</sup>
- A Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families has been set up with government agencies, NGOs, the Chief District Court Judge, Principal Family Court Judge and Chief Families Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner.<sup>28</sup> The Taskforce aims to develop a campaign to change attitudes and behaviours that support family violence.<sup>29</sup>

#### Protecting and enhancing family living standards

**Rationale:** A living standards survey was carried out by the Ministry of Social Development in 2000, it found that 20 percent of New Zealand's population had living standards that were 'somewhat restricted' or worse.<sup>30</sup> New Zealand experiences high levels of income inequality compared to other OECD countries.<sup>31</sup>

#### Initiatives

- The Working for Families package will improve living standards for low-to-middle income families with dependant children.

#### Balancing work, family and community commitments

**Rationale:** Between 1986 and 2001 there was an increase in the total hours worked by couples with pre-school children.<sup>32</sup> Family members are sometimes restricted due to childcare or care giving responsibilities. Childcare is a barrier to participation in work due to cost, hours that childcare centres are open, travel arrangements and taking time off to care for children. The most significant barrier to mother's participation to work, education or training is the cost of childcare.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.19 see also: *Achieving Better Social Outcomes for all New Zealanders, our Families and our Communities*, Ministry of Social Development, September 2005, p.28

<sup>24</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.19

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.22, see [www.msd.govt.nz/publications/te-rito/](http://www.msd.govt.nz/publications/te-rito/) for full copy of Te Rito strategy.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.23

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.24

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.25

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.27

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.28

## **Initiatives**

- As part of the Working for Families package the childcare subsidy that is available to parents has been increased.
- The government is planning to introduce 20 hours of free early childhood education for all 3-4 year olds.
- The Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987 provides mothers with 14 weeks unpaid leave from work, this is low compared to OECD standards.<sup>34</sup>

Enhancing the responsiveness of policies and services to family diversity and change

**Rationale:** The social service system is very complex and families often have trouble understanding their entitlements. It is particularly true for separated and blended families, people who are employed part time and people whose circumstances have changed suddenly.<sup>35</sup>

## **Initiatives**

- The government has been trying to simplify the welfare system to make it more accessible and easier to understand.<sup>36</sup>

## **Other issues that concern the Commission**

### **Maori families**

Average social and economic outcomes for Maori are not as good as average outcomes for the general population.<sup>37</sup> The Families' Commission is developing a whanau strategy in order to develop programmes and services relevant to Maori economic, social and cultural development.

### **Pacific families**

A high proportion of pacific families have low incomes and living standards, low levels of tertiary education attainment and adult literacy and low rates of employment.<sup>38</sup> Research has shown that there is pressure on some families to remit funds to overseas family members. The Commission is currently undertaking research with Auckland University (AUT) to better understand the needs of pacific island families.<sup>39</sup>

### **Migrant and refugee families**

Most research on immigration has focused on the individual migrant. The Families Commission wants to look at researching migrants and refugees from a family perspective.<sup>40</sup>

### **Families affected by parental separation**

There is little knowledge on how separation affects families and the impact of post-separation care for children. The Commission is planning a survey to address these issues. They are also working with the Ministry of Social Development and other agencies on the development of a proposed longitudinal study of children and families.<sup>41</sup>

### **Families affected by disability**

One in five New Zealanders have a disability according to the 2001 disability survey.<sup>42</sup> The Commission believe that in order to support families with disabilities their needs must to be

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.29

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.30

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.31

<sup>37</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.33

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.34

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.35

better understood. They are planning an extensive project on families who are affected by disability.<sup>43</sup>

### **Older people**

Due to the ageing population New Zealand families are changing in structure and in function. The Commission is undertaking research into the contributions that older people make to families, the difficulties of caring for older members of families, intergenerational roles, responsibilities and obligations and the flow of financial and other forms of support within the family.<sup>44</sup> An issues paper is due out in early 2006, this will form the basis of sector consultation for older people.<sup>45</sup>

### **Fertility**

The fertility rate of New Zealand is below replacement rate, this is expected to decline further in years to come. The Commission has expressed interest in contributing to research and wider debate about the impact of declining fertility.<sup>46</sup>

### **Discipline and guidance of children**

Research shows that physical discipline towards children can lead to ongoing and escalating punishment which results in bad outcomes for children.<sup>47</sup> The Commission supports the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act and is keen to see options such as parenting education, put in place.<sup>48</sup> The Commission and the Children's Commissioner were planning to hold discussion forums to discuss and debate issues of physical discipline and Section 59.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The Families Commission: Briefing to the Incoming Minister, October, 2005, p.35

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.36

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.