

# Briefing to Incoming Ministers

A cord of three is not quickly broken. ECCLESIASTES 4:12

Ki te kotahi te kākaho ka whati. Ki te kāpuia e kore e whati. KINGI TĀWHIAO

*When the reeds stand alone they are vulnerable. But bound together they are unbreakable.*

The challenges facing Aotearoa New Zealand in the years ahead are substantial. Our Christian lens, however, is one of tūmanako – hope. The last 10 months has shown clearly that when Government, NGOs, and those working at the flax roots of our nation combine as one, we can materially improve the dignity of life for the poor and vulnerable.

NZCCSS members are committed to working for a future where the need for their services dramatically declines. This requires structural change that reduces the vulnerability of New Zealanders. At this time an immediate increase in income for those with the least and access to good-quality, affordable housing will transform the lives of those our members serve.

## NZCCSS

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) works for a just and compassionate society in Aotearoa New Zealand. We see this as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ. To fulfil this mission, we are committed to giving priority to the poor and vulnerable members of our society, and to Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

NZCCSS has six foundation members: the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Nationally, the range and scope of our six-member networks is extensive. Thirty-seven types of services are delivered through 1,024 programmes in 213 separate provider sites in 55 towns and cities throughout New Zealand.

Pages 4 to 6 summarise the work of NZCCSS membership services under our three policy groups of Child and Family, Impacts of Poverty and Exclusion and Older People.

Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website [www.nzccss.org.nz](http://www.nzccss.org.nz)

## Working Together for Positive Change

NZCCSS's membership has extensive reach throughout New Zealand communities. Our members include some of the most recognised and highly regarded names in social service provision. It is a respect earned over many years of dedicated serving of the least in our society.

The quick and effective response of NZCCSS members and other community organisations in supporting New Zealand navigate the sharp end of the pandemic evidenced the value of the sector as an in-community resource. Rapidly reorganising to respond to changing needs, our member services often led the way and then, once established, supported Civil Defence Emergency Management teams.

Throughout the lockdown period our members experienced high levels of trust, responsiveness, and collaboration while working with government agencies, other community organisations, and businesses. This proved effective in delivering welfare and social services to communities the length and breadth of New Zealand.

It is a way of working that NZCCSS wants to see maintained. For the wellbeing of all New Zealanders, both Government and communities need NGOs to be viable and sustainable partners in supporting wellbeing. The factors within Government's influence that help build this sustainability include:

- **Recognition of community contributions in contracts** – community organisations delivering government-funded social services need to do more than just 'deliver outcomes.' They need to help support and build the communities in which they work in multiple ways. Recognition of 'community contribution' should underpin funding decision making.
- **Greater use of social procurement models of government contracting** for commercial services – so that communities gain employment, community development and business opportunities when government funding is invested in their communities.
- **Fair funding** – funding that recognises the costs of service delivery and provides for the full costs of staff wages, overheads and compliance with required standards and service delivery guidelines.
- **More flexible funding** – longer-term contracts that allow for extended strategic planning and the introduction of new ways of working with communities, whānau and families.

## NZCCSS as a valued policy partner

The experience of the last 10 months attests to the ability of umbrella organisations such as NZCCSS to bring together expert community organisations with Government agencies to plan, develop and implement wellbeing services and supports. This combined approach saw vulnerable New Zealanders receiving the support they needed through strong collaboration between Ministers of the Crown, government agencies, NGOs and communities.

NZCCSS's knowledge, experience and expertise, and its extensive membership, positions us well to provide valuable insight in the development of policies and the design and delivery of programmes.

**We look forward to opportunities to continue this development work, at every level, as a valued partner and colleague organisation with the key social wellbeing agencies, and with you as Ministers.**

## COVID-19: Amplifier of Hardship in Aotearoa

Until the 1980s, New Zealand was ranked as one of the most equal countries in the world. The three decades of market-based economic policies that followed, and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, left a landscape of low wages, high housing costs and high food costs; a landscape in which poverty and exclusion has flourished.

Heading into the COVID-19 lockdown, the inequalities within our society were more starkly revealed. The 'haves' stocked up on supplies and hunkered down; the 'have nots' struggled to access readily what for many are basic human rights – food and shelter. During the lockdown, thousands of New Zealanders would have been left without a home to live in, or sufficient food to sustain them, without the intervention of government agencies and the community social service sector.

### FOOD SECURITY

Within days of the lockdown being signalled, food banks, community organisations, iwi and churches were distributing food and care packs at a rate never before experienced. The loss of other food sources – food in schools, fruit and veggie markets, community meals – pushed those with marginal food security into real and deep insecurity.

During lockdown, the demand for food parcels was sitting at three-to-four times more than normal<sup>1</sup> – the level at which demand plateaued for the lockdown duration. Post lockdown, the demand has reduced – but has not returned to levels prior to lockdown. This is unlikely to improve. Job losses, reduced hours, the increasing cost of food, and housing costs (including rental) all a direct impact of COVID, mean more and more New Zealand families and whānau are not managing.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Kore Hiakai Zero Food Collective

## HOUSING

The lockdown put homelessness and insecure dwellings (tents, cars and overcrowded houses) into the spotlight. After years of advocacy generating little result, money was quickly found to provide temporary housing in motels around the country.

NZCCSS members collaborated extensively with other community organisations, local businesses, central government and local government. These relationships formed a collaborative ecology that ensured New Zealanders were housed, received essential supplies and, where needed, received wraparound services. It also ensured that vulnerable children and families and whānau could continue to access social workers during this time.

The challenge now is finding a permanent housing solution in the face of limited housing stock and a housing register at 21,415 eligible households (30 September 2020)<sup>2</sup>.

## Ko tēnei te wā – It is time

The inequalities exposed in 2020 are set to grow as job losses due to COVID-19 continue and the extension of the wage subsidy runs out. Already NZCCSS members are reporting an increase in demand for services from people who have lost their jobs, who are struggling to pay rent/mortgages and in need of income support. Increasingly, they are seeing people who never previously needed assistance.

It is time for us as a country to re-think our core values and harness our nation's sense of common good, compassion and fairness to ensure low-income households vulnerable to poverty and exclusion have a better future.

It is time for a new vision for a fairer and kinder future for all.

## Manaakitia te ara whakamua – A fair and compassionate society

NZCCSS believes there are enough resources in Aotearoa New Zealand to enable everyone to live with dignity. In a fair and compassionate society there are mechanisms to distribute public resources so everyone can experience a base-line standard of living that enables people to develop and flourish. For this to be a reality, structural change is needed. In our view, the changes Government must undertake are to:

- **Replace the minimum wage with a liveable wage.** The weekly income of workers must reflect basic living expenses – food, transportation, housing and childcare.
- **Immediately increase the rates of main benefits** based on the WEAG<sup>3</sup> report evidence. The human cost of not increasing benefit rates in the short run far exceeds the long-term human and social costs from lost opportunities to participate in society and flourish.
- **Adopt evidence-based income support that provides a liveable income** and not a poverty-driving benefit or wage. The two-tier system created by the COVID response to job losses has demonstrated that the 'normal' welfare payments are insufficient and must increase.
- **Make an immediate and substantial increase in the construction of public housing** in both the government and community housing sectors. All New Zealanders have a right to a safe, secure and quality home.
- **Ensure building and design is responsive** and includes papakāinga and Pacific peoples models that represent the diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand and ensures that people live in housing that is fit for purpose.
- **Create pathways to home ownership for low income New Zealanders**, including through providing shared equity and rent-to-own options.

Ultimately, NZCCSS wants to see:

- all New Zealanders enjoying an income that provides for the necessities of life and for meaningful participation with dignity in our communities.
- all New Zealanders accessing sustainable affordable secure and quality housing.

<sup>2</sup> MSD Housing Register, September 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report *Whakamana Tāngata*, 2019. [www.weag.govt.nz/weag-report/](http://www.weag.govt.nz/weag-report/)

# NZCCSS – Our Work on the Ground

The members that NZCCSS represent serve New Zealanders in many community settings. Our people work at the flax roots of their communities, which gives them a deep understanding of the everyday lives and struggles of New Zealand's most vulnerable. This understanding informs NZCCSS's three policy groups and the work we undertake to build a fair and compassionate future for all.

## Poverty and Exclusion

NZCCSS members work to respond to the challenges and needs of those experiencing the consequences of poverty and marginalisation. Our member services range from financial literacy education and financial inclusion, Housing First, emergency, transitional and community housing provision, food support, family support programmes, youth services, education and training. Services span the focus of both early intervention and prevention as well as crisis response.

### WHAT OUR SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES ARE SEEING

Thousands of families and whānau continue to be trapped in poverty – their income whether from a benefit or wage is insufficient to cover the basic essentials for health and wellbeing.

- Income support payments are inadequate – apart from two small increases to main benefits and the introduction of the winter energy payment – benefit rates have not substantially increased for over 40 years.
- People receiving income support experience a shortfall of between \$50 to \$320 per week,<sup>4</sup> depending on family circumstances, including benefit eligibility and where they are living.
- Many families and whānau living in poverty are 'working poor' and often work multiple low skilled/low paying jobs.
- The combination of inadequate income and lack of housing options see individuals and families forced into poor quality housing – run down, overcrowded properties.
- Huge increases in demand for emergency and transitional housing – with little ability to move people into permanent affordable housing.
- Over half of New Zealand's homeless population is under 25 – landlords of private properties are often reluctant to rent to young people. Young people are unlikely to meet the criteria to get on the MSD Housing Register.
- The demand for food parcels and other forms of food support is increasing.
- The demand for mental health services is increasing as people lose hope and become unwell as a result of the multiple negative effects caused by the experience of poverty.

#### VISIONWEST INNOVATION IN YOUTH HOUSING

Young people/rangatahi transitioning out of care, youth leaving the justice system with inadequate supports, and the rise of mental health struggles are factors driving youth homelessness. Currently, over half of New Zealand's homeless population is under 25.

To help turn the rising tide, West Auckland's VisionWest Community Trust launched 'My Whare', an innovative youth housing solution that places architecturally designed one-bedroom studios on residential properties. The studios are for youth who have had a challenging start.

The programme includes mentoring from the host family to support the young resident to reach education and employment goals. Community connection is also encouraged through shared meals and experiences, along with the space to grow independently.

<sup>4</sup> Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report.

## Child and Families

NZCCSS members have a long history of working alongside children, families and whānau in vulnerable communities. They see first-hand the impacts of poverty and exclusion on health and wellbeing. Members provide services across a continuum of work that spans complex, multiple intergenerational issues within a family and whānau, through to preventative supports and advice, including work to:

- stabilise and increase family income [advocacy to access income support, financial capability, improve employment skills],
- address other co-existing stressors such as debt, addiction, family violence, mental health, illness and loss of social, cultural and community connection
- ensure the dignity of the whole child/family/whānau and recognise the inherent mana of all.

## WHAT OUR SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES ARE SEEING

- More families and whānau both in work and receiving income support are without an adequate income to cover housing costs and the basic essentials necessary for health and wellbeing.
- Covid-19 has brought through the door of services a new cohort of families and whānau who have previously never needed to access support.
- The high cost of private rentals is a barrier to a decent, sustainable home for thousands of families and whānau.
- Run down motels, without appropriate cooking facilities, safe spaces, and adults with significant challenges, housing vulnerable families and whānau, including homeless teenagers.
- Demand for financial mentoring has significantly increased due to redundancies. Many of these families and whānau are unable to access job seeker support because their spouse or partner works, reducing the household income.
- Mental health issues across age groups are on the rise. Vulnerable youth are feeling particularly impacted by cost of housing, violence at home and insufficient income.

### MERIVALE – KEEPING YOUNG MUMS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER

An intensive, long-term residential programme developed by Auckland-based Baptist social service provider Iosis is helping young mothers turn their lives around. 'Merivale' is specifically designed for young mothers who've been impacted by abuse, addiction or neglect. The aim of the programme is to provide a unique opportunity for the child to stay with mum in a supportive safe environment, rather than go into care. Mothers – and their children – stay for at least six months, addressing challenges such as parenting, addiction, and overcoming violence and trauma. Through mentoring, they are helped to become independent and gain the practical skills to look after themselves and their family. As one of only two parenting residential programmes in New Zealand that caters mainly for the Auckland region, there is a demand for the service that has seen mothers referred and enter the programme from as far north as Kaitiaki.

## Older People

NZCCSS members deliver social services to older people in the community that range from informal local parish supports to contracted home support services, residential services and retirement villages. Across all of these services is a spiritual, whānau-centred approach where health and wellbeing are central.

Community-based services such as day programmes, drop-in centres, visiting and social support and community development work remain a significant part of the work of church social services with older people. This valuable work, which provides social and spiritual support for older people, continues to be outside of government funding.

## WHAT OUR SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES ARE SEEING

- Inequality of income and wealth is growing in the over-65 age group – two thirds of older people have little or no wealth to draw on other than NZ Superannuation.
- With no or few assets, growing numbers of older people cannot afford increasingly expensive retirement living options and have little choice but to remain in unsafe and isolating home settings.
- Pay parity between nurses in residential facilities and DHBs remains an issue that contributes to the challenge of recruiting nurses for residential facilities.
- With most new residential facilities developed at the premium end of the market, the availability of standard (ie, more affordable) care is rapidly decreasing.
- Affordable rental housing for those over 65 is an emerging issue arising from the growing inequality in income and wealth.
- Older people in private rentals, without savings, are struggling to afford high rents and are trading off basic essentials to pay their rent.
- Older New Zealanders are experiencing exclusion from vital services due to a poverty of technology capabilities, e.g. inability to use the internet, especially for banking purposes.

### VIRTUAL VILLAGE CONNECTING SENIORS

Isolation and poorer life outcomes are a risk for seniors who either don't want or can't afford retirement village living.

Virtual Village East is a networking initiative developed by HBH Senior Living to encourage community engagement of seniors – both those living in their homes and in retirement village settings. The initiative is the modern equivalent of the traditional physical village, acting as a local network of friendship and support to people in the East Auckland community areas of Pakuranga, Howick, Botany and Flat Bush.

Now an independent trust, Virtual Village East connects people with a range of activities, events and gatherings as well as access to local support and neighbour-to-neighbour services.