



Disability providers need funding to match care assistants' pay boost

The significant pay increases set to be awarded to nurses and care assistants working for DHBs will need to be matched with government funding for support workers and nurses working for disability providers. Without that full funding, it will be very difficult for the already understaffed disability sector to retain staff and support levels for disabled New Zealanders, says New Zealand Disability Support Network CEO Peter Reynolds.

A proposed pay equity deal between DHBs and the New Zealand Nurses' Organisation has been released, with NZNO members to vote on it later this month. The deal contains increases of 20-25% across pay bands for DHB-employed nurses and care assistants to adjust for the underpayment of these roles relative to similar male-dominated roles. The deal does not cover nurses, care assistant or similar roles, such as Support Workers, working for non-government disability service providers.

"It is good to see the historic underpayment of these DHB roles being addressed, and disability support providers will need to move to match these pay increases to ensure fairness across the system. The government needs to fully fund similar increases in the disability sector to achieve that," says Mr Reynolds.

"Government funding for disability support providers is already insufficient for the services they are expected to deliver – they don't have the money to match the pay equity settlement. Instead, disability support providers have received years of promises and little else. We argue that it is the worth of your work, not where you work that is important."

"Our sector relies on and is constrained by how much money the Government allocates us. Disability support providers can only increase wages if the Government provides them with the fully funded means to do so."

"If disability support providers don't get a funding boost, they will be unable to compete with the pay rates nurses and care assistants can get working in the public health sector. That will erode their ability to hire and retain staff, which will lead to reduced support for people with disabilities and the ability to continue to deliver great outcomes for disabled people – a key goal of the government."

"The health reform decisions made in isolation from the rest of the health and disability sector create unfair consequences in other parts of the sector – it's like a cruel ripple effect. Support workers in the disability sector are vital to achieving this. Providers are already struggling to get enough staff as it is. We do not want to see a situation where disability support is undermined by staff leaving the sector, attracted by the higher wage rates in DHBs.

"Pay equity is an important goal and NZDSN wants to see disability sector support workers also benefit from this deal. But pay increases are significant costs that providers cannot afford with current funding levels. To increase disability sector support workers' pay, the Government needs to step up with the money to make it happen," says Mr Reynolds.

Peter Reynolds
Chief Executive Officer
NZDSN
027 534 6472

Editor's note: the proposed NZNO/DHB pay equity settlement can be found here
<https://www.nzno.org.nz/dhbpayequity>