



NZDSN Submission to the People's Select Committee on the Repeal of the Equal Pay Amendment Act

June 2025

1. Introduction

The New Zealand Disability Support Network (NZDSN) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the People's Select Committee and commends the initiative for seeking to restore democratic scrutiny and amplify the voices of those impacted by the urgent repeal of the Equal Pay Amendment Act on 7 May 2025.

NZDSN is the national peak body representing over 180 disability support providers who collectively employ tens of thousands of support workers, the vast majority of whom are women. Our members are deeply concerned about the consequences of the repeal, both in principle and in practice. This action undermines pay equity progress, disproportionately impacts women in feminised care roles, and further entrenches systemic inequities in the disability support workforce.

2. Context of the Disability Support Workforce

The disability support workforce is:

- Overwhelmingly female (approx. 80–90%), with many identifying as Māori, Pasifika, or from migrant communities.
- Low-paid, despite being responsible for highly skilled, emotionally intensive, and safety-critical work.
- Under-resourced, with chronic funding shortfalls from government contracts that are often outdated and inflexible.
- Experiencing workforce shortages, burnout, and high turnover, placing pressure on both workers and disabled people.

The repeal of the Equal Pay Amendment Act abruptly halted 33 live pay equity cases, including three that NZDSN members were actively participating in:

- The Support Workers Pay Equity claim and the Front-Line Managers claim, jointly raised by unions and provider employers.
- The Allied Health claim, also supported by providers with members covered under DSS and Ministry of Health contracts.

3. Impact on Women and Gender Equity

The repeal disproportionately affects low-paid women in feminised sectors, especially in health and community care. For our members, this action:

- Devalues women's work, particularly in roles involving relational care and emotional labour—functions essential to wellbeing and human rights.
- Stalls gender pay equity efforts in a sector already marginalised within the broader health and care economy.
- Undermines the Pay Equity Principles that were co-developed over years of negotiation and were embedded in employer-union collaboration.

4. Impact on Disabled People and Services

Our concern is not just for the workforce. The erosion of pay equity will:

- De-stabilise disability services by making recruitment and retention even harder, especially in rural, high-needs, and 24/7 residential services.
- Reduce the quality, continuity, and safety of support for disabled people who rely on trusted, skilled support workers to live independent and meaningful lives.
- Disproportionately affect disabled women, who face both ableism and gender-based disadvantage.
- Undermine the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) approach, which is contingent on a stable, skilled, and valued workforce to deliver flexible, person-directed support.

5. Impacts on Employer-Employee Collaboration

The Equal Pay Amendment Act repeal has weakened the legal and collaborative framework that allowed employers and unions to jointly raise and progress claims. For NZDSN members:

- This change removes a vital mechanism for ensuring fair pay in a sector where market mechanisms cannot operate due to price-controlled funding.
- It creates uncertainty for employers, many of whom were acting in good faith and had invested time and resources to support these processes.

- It damages trust in government and policy stability, which is crucial in sectors that depend on long-term workforce planning and investment.

6. Broader Systemic Implications

The repeal occurred without consultation, select committee process, or input from those directly affected. This sets a dangerous precedent for the erosion of rights in other undervalued sectors. In the case of disability support services, it risks:

- Driving skilled women out of the workforce, worsening the care crisis.
- Exacerbating gender and ethnic pay gaps, particularly for Māori and Pasifika support workers.
- Undermining commitments under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the CRPD, and the Gender Pay Principles.

7. NZDSN Recommendations

NZDSN urges the People's Select Committee to:

1. Advocate for the immediate reinstatement of the Equal Pay Amendment Act, or its equivalent protections.
2. Call for proper consultation with employers, unions, workers, and disabled people before future legislative change.
3. Recommend a tripartite review of the disability support workforce strategy, incorporating gender, ethnicity, and disability equity.
4. Support restoration of funding mechanisms that enable pay equity without harming service sustainability.

8. Conclusion

Pay equity is not an optional extra in a just society, it is a fundamental right. In the disability support sector, it is also a prerequisite for workforce sustainability, service quality, and the realisation of disabled people's rights.

NZDSN is committed to continuing to work with all parties, unions, government, and community leaders to uphold the dignity of disabled people and the workforce that supports them. We thank the People's Select Committee for taking the time to hear our concerns and for standing up for democratic scrutiny and gender justice.

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