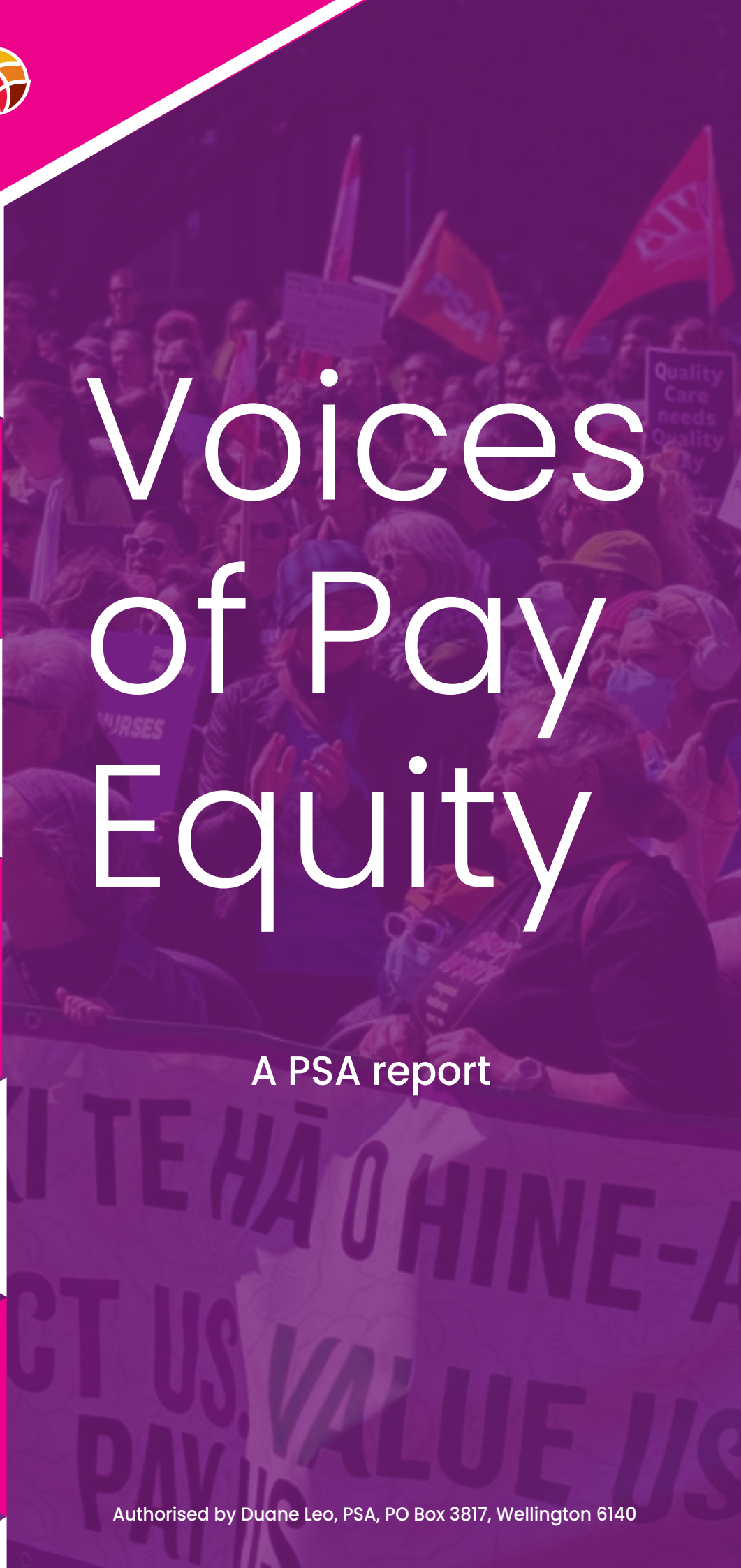
PSA
Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi

Voices of Pay Equity

A PSA report



Authorised by Duane Leo, PSA, PO Box 3817, Wellington 6140

The Voices Of Pay Equity Lost

Published September 2026, New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to the PSA members whose stories on the impact of pay equity being taken away, bring this report to life. Interviews and analysis were conducted and written by Professor Katherine Ravenswood and Emma Hitchcock from the AUT Social Transformation Research Institute.

Introduction

In May last year the coalition betrayed New Zealand women by cancelling 33 pay equity claims and making future claims almost impossible.

When the Government gutted the Equal Pay Act through Parliamentary urgency, under the cover of darkness, we mobilised – and have not stopped fighting to reinstate these claims since.

We will leave no stone unturned until New Zealand women and their families have pay equity.

We have rallied and picketed across the country in snap actions in the days following the May 2025 decision and in national days of action alongside other unions and community groups since.

We joined with four other unions in lodging a High Court claim, stating that by cancelling these claims without warning or consultation, the Government breached the Bill of Rights Act 1990. The case goes to the heart of who this Government values and who it doesn't.

We were instrumental in helping support the establishment of the People's Select Committee on Pay Equity, led by Dame Marilyn Waring. The Committee did what the Government failed to do, by hearing from the public about how they'd be impacted by the claims' cancellation. The Committee heard thousands of submissions, and released a report in February this year laying bare the Government's betrayal of women. The fact that New Zealand women had to create their own select committee to be heard is a profound indictment of this government.

As a union made up of over 70% women, representing members in female-dominated professions, we remain staunch in our battle to secure fair pay across all facets of our union.

This report is the next step in our fight. It tells the stories of the care and support workers impacted by the coalition government's decision in May last year and of delays in renewing the care and support pay equity settlement before this.

Over the following pages you will read of how pay equity would have meant helping to afford a warmer home. Of having the ability to be able to go out with mates for slice, and a cup of tea. Of how a planned trip for a daughter to meet family overseas remains now completely out of reach.

The unfairness of these brutal changes is summarised by Camella, who says "I do a damn good job. I shouldn't have to struggle to give these things."

This election, we are calling on all parties to commit to delivering genuine pay equity without delay. No more stalling. No more subterfuge. Women's rights are not up for negotiation. The report finishes with the PSA's asks of all political parties this election on restoring pay equity and expediting the care and support workers claim – and the responses we have received.



Duane Leo,
PSA National Secretary



Fleur Fitsimons,
PSA National Secretary



Melissa Woolley,
PSA Assistant Secretary

Foreword

Professor Katherine Ravenswood, AUT Social Transformation Research Institute

Our healthcare system is stretched to its limit, and the cost of living is skyrocketing.

Now is the time to invest in our support workers and the people they support.

Now is the time to take a stand, implement pay equity for support workers and build the future we want.

Support workers are leaders. In 2017 the Care and Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlement Act 2017 was passed unanimously in parliament. It was groundbreaking. Support workers' contribution was more visible and recognised as the crucial, frontline healthcare work that it is. We all agreed that a good healthcare system and economy included pay equity for support workers.

In 2018 Kristine Bartlett (CNZM) won New Zealander of the year for her work taking the pay equity claim on behalf of all support workers in Aotearoa. She worked tirelessly for years, alongside unions and other support workers to get legal recognition that support workers' low wages were a result of deeply entrenched, historic gender discrimination. Women across the motu celebrated and looked forward to a better future.

Let's cut to 2025. The National Party-led government extinguished all pay equity claims in less than one day. This was done in one brutal strike with no notice. At that point, support workers' second claim to update their pay equity wages was all ready to go and agreed by all parties, except a last-minute stalling by Te Whatu Ora. In just a few hours it no longer existed, and the goal posts were moved: the amended act also made it harder to even start a claim let alone settle one. In less than 10 years we'd gone from celebrating the pay equity 'win' to calling fair pay for 'women's work' an unaffordable cost in a government's budget line.

What does this mean? Well, you'll hear from support workers in this report that it's had a devastating impact on their lives – they've had to put life plans on hold because they have no financial security. They also worry that support workers won't stay in the job, because it's not affordable, and the loss of pay equity hits their morale hard. This is a problem in sectors that already suffer a shortage of workers. It could impact our potential to offer support services for our most vulnerable whānau. As support workers in this report say, they keep people in the community, thriving, connected and out of hospital care.

The move to extinguish the pay equity claim is a heartless, unthinking decision that flies in the face of evidence. Just recently the Ministry of Health released 'A place to grow old: Securing the future of aged care' highlighting the current and future strain on services, and the need to increase support in the community. The PSA Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi also recently showed that cutting pay equity actually cost our economy: implementing pay equity across the board would have increased GDP and increased the number of jobs for people.

Do we want a future in which people and communities thrive? Then, the answer seems simple. We need a healthcare system that values support workers' contribution and skill. We need pay equity for support workers now. We call on all political parties and voters to stand up for pay equity and then hold any future government to account until support workers get the pay that they deserve.

The Background to Support Workers' Pay Equity

The following timeline shows how under the leadership of support workers and their unions, Aotearoa achieved pay equity for support workers (and others) reaching new levels of recognition for women workers, and bit by bit dismantling gender inequality. What started as an amazing, heroic success story now has a sense of the horrific, the triumphal ending has been threatened. With an election coming up, let's turn this story back around and vote for pay equity.

2012 Kristine Bartlett takes her case under the Equal Pay Act 1972. The judge determines that the case, on an industry rather than individual basis, can be pursued under the Act. This changes how the Act had been used. Following hearings determine that there is historic gender discrimination that has undervalued support work leading to the persistent low wages.

2014 The employers seek leave to appeal the case to the Supreme Court, which is dismissed.

2015 Cabinet approve the commencement of negotiations, limited to support workers in the aged and disability residential care and home and community support services. These negotiations replace any legal process that would have determined what pay equitable wages would be.

2016 The negotiation parameters are approved and negotiations commence. Treasury places a financial limit on the cost of settlement that is determined by a desire to minimise cost rather than driven by pay equity principles.

2017 A settlement is reached and agreed to by Cabinet and the Care and Support Worker (Pay Equity) Settlement Act comes into effect.

The settlement agreement sets out the key terms of the settlement to be included in the subsequent legislation:

- The Settlement expires on 30 June 2022.
- It extinguishes retrospective claims by current employees and prevents future claims by employees.
- Ensures that every support worker will be paid according to the pay rates, and no one will be paid less than before the Settlement.

New legislated pay rates that are attached to NZQA qualifications from Level 2 to Level 4 are agreed. Parallel pay rates recognising length of experience are included – at a slightly lower rate than the qualification. Any new support workers employed after the Act took effect would be paid only according to the 'qualification' rates. In 2017, the lowest rate was $19 per hour ranging up to $23.50. The majority of support workers had previously been on or near the national minimum wage which was $15.75. The Settlement marked a significant, welcome pay increase that changed support workers' lives.

2018 Kristine Bartlett is awarded New Zealander of the Year.

Mental health and addiction support workers are officially included in the pay equity settlement.

2020 The global covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Support workers were essential workers and often the only people that their clients see. They worked with inadequate PPE and faced heightened anxiety in clients, and threats like client's whānau breaking 'bubbles'. A workforce invisible to some had due recognition for the critical role it plays in healthcare.

2022 The Care and Support Worker (Pay Equity) Settlement Act expires.

While the Settlement Act expired, the obligations on employers under the Equal Pay Act 1972 remained.

By this point, the top rate legislated for, those with a 'Level 4' qualification was $27 per hour, compared to the minimum wage of $21.20. The 'pay equity' wages had not kept up well with minimum wage or general wage growth. The then Labour-led government agreed to a temporary wage adjustment and extension of the Act. Union members highlighted that the increase offered wouldn't even buy them a banana for lunch. There was no reason that the government could not do a wage review based on at least minimum wage relativities, but they refused to do this and forced Unions hands to make a new pay equity claim.

2023 The PSA, E tūand the NZ Nurses Organisation worked with Employers' Associations in these sectors to determine and agree to an appropriate comparator occupation for the new claim. This took over a year, and each step was agreed to with Te Whatu Ora. At the last hour, Te Whatu Ora stepped in, stalled the process and ordered a review of the work.

In October unions and employers alike called out the actions of Te Whatu Ora in the media. Care and support workers were deeply disappointed that a Labour government was holding up what was essentially a completed pay equity claim process. The claim was held it up at the point that the funders would need to budget for the increased wage cost. It is not difficult to imagine, just like when Treasury imposed fiscal limits on the first negotiations, that the then government was just not prepared to pay what this work is actually worth.

The New Zealand General Elections were also held in 2023. The stalling of the claim meant that support workers could not settle the claim until a new government was voted in and established. Late in the year the New Zealand National Party announced that they had formed a coalition government with the Act Party and New Zealand First. This is a party that would immediately work to dismantle workers' rights and passed more legislation under urgency than any previous government ever in New Zealand. They were a government that took its inspiration from populist racist, sexist and transphobic rhetoric from politics in the USA and the UK. They were a government that viewed employee rights and 'DEI' as unnecessary red tape.

2024 A repeat of Treasury's ringfencing pay equity. In February Treasury provides advice on a change to how pay equity claim costs would be budgeted. By April the 'Funded and public Sector Frameworks' are disestablished, and the Pay Equity Taskforce is disestablished. If claims came out costing more than the funding contingencies, the costs would have to be covered from existing budgets in the public and funded sectors. In December, Minister Willis advised that there would be no more specific dedicated funding for pay equity settlements and pay equity becomes a 'fiscal problem'.

2025 Throughout earlier months, work on the Amendment Act had proceeded in secret, in Cabinet, with no external consultation. Employers and Unions still proceeded with claims in progress during this time.

On the 6th May 2025, the Equal Pay Amendment Act 2025 was passed under urgency in less than 1 day. The claim that was stalled by Te Whatu Ora was wiped out of existence. Minister Brooke van Velden (Act party) announced the changes. Years of work was wiped out in a matter of hours.

Women and supporters across the motu protest what many saw as ideologically driven, anti-democratic changes made under urgency.

The People's Select Committee was established voluntarily by former women members of parliament from across the political spectrum: Professor Marilyn Waring (DNZM), Jackie Blue (MNZM), Jo Hayes, Belinda Vernon, Ria Bond, Hon Liane Dalziel (CNZM), Hon Steve Chadwick (QSO), Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Lynne Pillay, Dr Sue Bradford. They held 'select committee' hearings to gather the written and oral submissions on the Equal Pay Act Amendments 2025 that were denied by the government through the use of 'urgency'.

2026 The People's Select Committee on Pay Equity released its report.

PSA support worker members campaign highlighting the $30,000 they have lost through the cancelled claim.

November 7 is the general election. Will we vote for pay equity?



Faces of pay equity lost



Camella Ross, Timaru

For nearly 25 years, Camella has been caring for people in their homes, supporting people recovering from injuries, older people with disabilities and those experiencing mental health challenges. Over that time, she has learned that no two clients, and no two days, are ever the same.

Camella decided to try working in healthcare and quickly discovered she loved supporting people in their homes and communities. "I love the job, love the people, love the different things I come across. Because no job's the same. So, you just don't know what you're walking into."

Every day requires Camella to adapt to situations that can change without warning. She helps people navigate injury, illness, loss of independence, and loneliness, often finding ways to reassure those who feel vulnerable or uncomfortable accepting support. Whether she is encouraging someone recovering from an accident, helping a client through an emotional day, or responding to an unexpected emergency, she says the work is about knowing what to say at the right time and helping people feel better about themselves, "it's about really thinking on the spot. Every client is different. Every client you're having to pick up a wee bit more and just find ways to make them feel better about themselves. Generally, when I leave a house, I've made someone happier."

Much of Camella's work relies on skills that are difficult to see. She is constantly assessing how clients are coping, noticing slight changes in their physical or mental wellbeing, and deciding how best to respond. She says care and support work requires far more than practical assistance. "Different people, different issues, nothing's ever to say, you don't know what you're walking into. Some of you want to turn around and walk out, but you stay. You give a wee bit of yourself differently to everyone." "Right from the minute you're hopping out of your car with a mental health client, you're alert."

The cancellation of pay equity has had a growing impact on Camella and her family. Rising living costs and wages that have not kept up have made it harder to make ends meet. As a caregiver for her grandsons, she is now finding it harder to provide the opportunities and experiences she wants for them. Activities, outings, and everyday extras now require careful consideration. "We were so close to that pay equity that you could see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it was just ripped away, and life is getting tough now. I work and I do a damn good job. I shouldn't have to struggle to give these things."

Camella believes care and support workers deserve recognition for the value they bring to people's lives. The cancellation of pay equity left her feeling that the skills, responsibility, and commitment required in the role continue to be overlooked. Yet despite her disappointment, she remains committed to the work she loves. "Still love my job. Yeah. I'll be here until I retire."

The cancellation of pay equity has had a growing impact on Camella and her family. Rising living costs and wages that have not kept up have made it harder to make ends meet.

Bethany Mays, Wellington

Bethany supports people with disabilities to live more independent and fulfilling lives. Working with around twelve people from different backgrounds, cultures, and circumstances, she sees her role as helping people develop the skills, confidence, and support networks they need to achieve their goals.

For Bethany, one of the most rewarding aspects of the role is building meaningful relationships. “I really enjoy making the connection with people who actually need help, and discovering how best to connect with people on different levels.” She believes understanding what matters to each person is essential to providing the right support.

Bethany says one of the biggest misconceptions about disability support work is that care and support workers are extraordinary people. ‘People assume that when you work in disability that you’re some kind of saint of a human being. You’re such an angel.” Instead, she sees support as a partnership. “It takes two people to make a support happen, so it's a teamwork sort of exercise. And finding that common ground with a person is really, really important. People underestimate how much teamwork is involved."

She believes the role requires a willingness to develop new skills and keep learning. “You might have to start learning things about different disabilities. If somebody has a very specific type of disability that might be rare, you actually have to start learning about it and finding resources for them”. Bethany explains “Ive had to learn an entire language. I've had to slowly learn how to sign.”

Much of Bethany's work involves helping people navigate barriers that stand in the way of independence. Some of the hardest days are when she knows what someone needs but faces obstacles beyond her control. “It’s really hard to get more support for people, and a decent living situation right now because there’s just not enough. It's really hard to watch people just fall by the wayside because there's no help for them out there and you're sort of their last resort.”

Pay equity represented more than a wage increase for Bethany. It represented recognition that the work of supporting others has value. It would mean “I was getting a fairer income based on the work that I do.” “I don't even want to be rich. I just want to be comfortable. I just want to be able to afford things.” The additional income would have helped her afford a warmer home, get a pet or car, take a holiday, see her family more frequently, pursue further study, and feel more secure about the future. Instead, many of those goals remain out of reach.

“It feels really awful to know that we're not valued. It makes me want to leave the sector because I don’t see how it can be a viable way to live if we’re not valued. It makes me feel like I have no other choice but to move into a different area of work”

> *“It would mean I was getting a fairer income based on the work that I do. I don't even want to be rich. I just want to be comfortable. I just want to be able to afford things.”*



Christie Cox, Christchurch

After 10 years in a job Christie loves, she had hoped a successful pay equity settlement would help her build the future she and her partner had planned. Instead, the 2025 pay equity cuts have left Christie feeling trapped between her commitment to the work and her own financial security.

"I'm held back in life because that pay equity settlement didn't go through. I've worked in this job for 10 years, and I love it. But I want to save for a house, have children with my partner and I just can't afford it. I'm stuck."

Christie says that it's hard knowing she could work at a supermarket or Burger Fuel and earn more, without the stress and emotional toll of her job. She works in mental health with young people and adults and says that "there's a pretty big misconception that all we do is sit and have a cup of tea with someone. And there might be days where I'm sitting and having a cup of tea with someone, but we're working with some complex people, who often have had bad experiences and a lot of distrust of mental health workers. We have to be patient, compassionate to build relationships with people. We also need to advocate for them and stand our ground. We are there with our clients daily and sometimes need to be strong in giving feedback to clinical teams who don't have that daily knowledge."

Christie says seeing the impact mental health support can have keeps her going: "I'm most proud of the people that I've seen be able to continue living in the community. They're able to maintain their independence. Continue living in their own space, starting a job, walking away from violent or unsafe relationships, gaining a bit of self-confidence. And it's things like that, keep me going through some of the harder days, thinking of those moments where I have been a safe person and the people who have gone through significant changes and have kind of, come out the other end."

Those positive outcomes and real lives are at risk because of the pay equity cuts in 2025: "support workers are the kind of people who care, and we want to look after these people, and we're not just going to throw our hands up and walk away. But that does mean that we're going to end up being quite burnt out, others will end up leaving the job altogether and that's going to harm people needing support."

And it's personal, Christie is in a pay equity limbo: "I was looking forward to some financial security. A big thing, it's nearly $30,000 now that we haven't got. That's a deposit on a house, that's financial security, some stability for me to be able to actually start my family."

"It was devastating when it was pulled out from underneath us. I didn't quite think it was going to happen, and then I watched Parliament TV when it happened, and I just cried myself to sleep that night because, yeah, it was shocking."

"I was looking forward to some financial security. A big thing, it's nearly $30,000 now that we haven't got. That's a deposit on a house, that's financial security, some stability for me to be able to actually start my family."

Sarah Strid, Auckland

Having spent almost 23 years with the same organisation, Sarah has witnessed significant change over the course of her career. She started part-time when her children were at school and now works full time, bringing decades of experience to the role. “It takes a certain kind of person to do what we do. We don't just go in and sit with someone and have a cup of tea. That's not what we do at all.”

“People don’t really know how hard the job is,” Sarah says. “We do everything from standalone showers where the client showers themselves and we just assist to hoisting from a hospital bed to a commode chair into the shower. We also deal sometimes with suppositories. We do diabetes blood sugar checks as well, and we sometimes empty catheter or stoma bags. We’re the ones who notify the office that the client’s health or care needs have changed. We're supporting you to be able to live independently in your home, we keep you out of hospital or rest homes.”

When you’re new, “You might think you know what you’re doing”, after your initial training and being buddied for a few hours she says, “but every single client is different. Then you turn up and the client is stressed because of family issues. Or the hoist you need isn’t there. And then there are the handsy clients who might be a bit touchy-feely with female support workers – grabbing your bum or your boobs. And some of the support workers, especially if they're new ones, don't know how to, or that they should be reporting those sorts of things.”

The days are long too, “it’s common to have your hours spread over a 12-hour day, and in a busy period you might not actually get a break in all that. Lunch breaks aren’t on your roster”.

“Newbies” often don’t last past a couple of weeks or months in the job because it’s a shock: “You're thrown in the deep end. And some just go, I’m not doing this anymore”.

Without the pay equity settlement, “life is a bit of a struggle”, Sarah says. Things like petrol and groceries are hard. “Well, I don't go anywhere on the weekends because I can't afford to. Don't go anywhere. The only places I go during the week is to work. I drive to work to different clients and that's it”.

“If we can't afford to get to work, then it affects clients because if we can't afford to run our vehicles and to get to clients, that affects clients not receiving their cares”.

> *“If we can't afford to get to work, then it affects clients because if we can't afford to run our vehicles and to get to clients, that affects clients not receiving their cares.”*



Kate Halsall, Lower Hutt

Many people assume care and support work is simply helping people with everyday tasks, but Kate says the reality is far more complex. Over her career she has supported people living with dementia, Parkinson's disease, disabilities, terminal illnesses and complex health conditions.

Every day brings new challenges as Kate supports families through grief, responds to emergencies, and helps people remain in their own homes when they are nearing the end of their lives, as “the hospices are full, so people are staying more and more at home to actually pass".

Kate cared for her parents through Alzheimer's disease and saw firsthand the difference support workers make in people's lives. She wanted to give back and became a support worker herself. “I've stayed strong in this job for nearly 14 years. I'm qualified up to a level four, which is as high as you can go. But the thing that really annoys me is you can have all these skills and you're giving these people the respect of whether it be culture, and I learn languages as well, so I can try and speak at least hello and goodbye and thank you in their language, just to break the ice. But nothing is recognised. Nothing we do is recognised”.

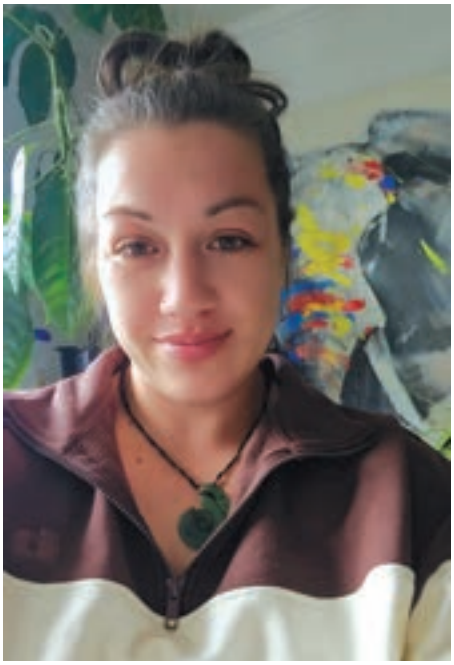
New Zealanders do not realise how important support workers are to our health system, as pressure on the health system grows, so does the importance of their work. If no one was there to do her job, it would be a reality check: “I'd say people would die. The hospitals think they're overloaded now. Oh, I'd hate to see what would happen there. Hospitals are full, everybody knows that. But where are these people staying? They're staying at home. We've got them." Without care and support workers, Kate believes hospitals would become overwhelmed and vulnerable people would be left without essential care.

The 2025 changes to pay equity, Kate says, took away her ability to afford life's basic necessities, “It would mean more food in the cupboard. I'd have the heat pump on and have the house nice and warm. It's winter. I wouldn't have to worry about trying to get to a doctor. I could afford to go and do it. It's just the pure, simple things of like, I'd be able to go out with my mates and say, hey, I'll shout you a cup of tea. We'll meet up at the cafe and have a slice and a cup of tea. I'd love to do that. Love to do that. It's just, the pure basics would be easy.”

For Kate, pay equity would open up possibilities that currently feel out of reach. "I'd love to visit my daughter in Australia, but without pay equity that's just a dream," Kate says. The loss of pay equity was about more than just money, “I can remember talking to other carers, and the shock that the absolute, oh my God, they've taken it away from us. We were so close. Because I remember back in 2017, where we went from minimum wage, and all of a sudden, you're being paid, twenty-three, twenty-four dollars an hour. That was my level at the time, and it was like wow, this is good. I'm actually being paid what I'm worth for this job. Now it's all, it's been chipped away and chipped away and we're all basically going back to minimum wage, and it's like, this is stupid. Nobody's going to want to do this job. Nobody.”

"It would have taken the pressure off just living."

> *“I can remember talking to other carers, and the shock that the absolute, oh my God, they've taken it away from us. We were so close.”*



Rachael Neho, Lower Hutt

For the past seven years, Rachael has worked in disability support, helping people achieve their goals and live fulfilling lives. Family is at the centre of everything she does. She lives with her partner and stepson, while also supporting her parents.

When her mother was diagnosed with brain cancer, the experience shaped the person she is today. "I'm very caring, always wanting to help the next person," she says. It is the relationships she builds with the people she supports that keeps her in the role. "I would do anything for my family," she says, and that same commitment extends to the people she works alongside every day. "It's for the people, the relationships that we form with them." "They become, I become, we become very attached to them. We want them to succeed. It is because of the people I support. If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would have stuck around for as long as I have."

She believes the public often underestimates disability care and support work. "We are the everything. So, from their support worker to their friends, to their kind of like, social worker, to their person, we're their everything. So, a lot is put on us, and I don't think we get a lot of recognition for how much we actually do for the people we support."

As a home coordinator, she is responsible for running an entire house while supporting people with complex needs. The role requires "common sense. You need common sense. You need a kind heart. It's not for everyone. You need empathy. You need good communication skills. You need respect." Complex needs include ensuring people have safe environments, in some cases that's understanding their behaviour, recognising changes and eliminating any triggers that might lead to self harm: "it's just making sure that the environment is safe and that we are able to guide her through it."

Like many support workers, she had hoped the pay equity settlement would recognise the value of the work she does. "I personally don't think we get paid enough. We get very minimal for what we do. That would help pay bills. I think that I am probably not the only one that would be struggling, and with the way things are going, it's definitely not cheap to live."

Instead, she faces the ongoing challenge of rising living costs and unchanged wages. Without a pay increase, "I just have to make things work, pick up extra hours where possible. We've just got to do what we've got to do, right? But things where we, if we don't necessarily need it, then I guess we won't be getting it. Make those sort of sacrifices."

"I wouldn't be there if it wasn't for my people," she says. "I love what I do."

> *"I personally don't think we get paid enough. We get very minimal for what we do."*

Pay equity impacts men who do work that is traditionally women's work and is undervalued. The next two stories from Dan and Dev show the impact on their families of pay equity lost.

Dan Moreira, Waimakariri

Dan works with people with intellectual disabilities. He started working in this after getting a degree majoring in sociology, political science and Māori and indigenous studies. He'd tried a few jobs in hospitality, dairy farming, retail, construction, film and media before settling in as a support worker. His job supports his family, including three young children.

Dan says that most people just wouldn't know what support workers like him do, and what it takes. He works in a secure unit, with people who have committed a crime and "the biggest thing is the communication and the people skills. You very quickly learn that those things are definitely needed as well as patience, the ability to sort of care for others and role model. Yeah, role modelling is a big thing because some clients haven't had the best upbringing and they haven't had the best role models either."

People just don't realise the key role a support worker plays, he says. "It's our job to help manage their behaviour, help rehabilitate them, teach them skills that a functioning adult should have, and that's anything from basic handling of finances, doing their, chores, cooking, cleaning, helping them manage social interactions, and the list goes on really." Without their role, "a lot of these people would be lost, would potentially not have very much direction in life. They could be on the street, they could be in prison."

His job provides stability, with reliable hours and consistent demand, but the work is challenging. "It's not just about communicating with one client but mediating between clients who live in the same unit. This means, observing the smallest of behavioural changes, de-escalation skills" and still "we've had to put up with verbal abuse, physical abuse, threats, pretty intense, like intimidating behaviour, getting spat on, scratched, bitten, dealing with that." Dan's job means balancing a fine line of being professional, aiding rehabilitation while maintaining "a good working relationship with these guys, still have a laugh and things, but also protecting yourself, keeping yourself safe."

For Dan, nearly achieving pay equity "felt like we were going to get paid what we were actually worth. Pay that was not just pay but also working conditions that showed that we were valued." Before the pay equity cuts, Dan was looking forward to buying a house, helping cover the increasing costs as his kids reach school age, and taking his children overseas to visit their grandparents.

Apart from the financial cost, the pay equity cuts make him and others feel like they are not valued or respected, and it effects the service: "How the employer treats values and pays its staff is a direct, I think, is a direct show or a direct reflection of how they actually value their clients as well, so that's the people with the intellectual disabilities."

> *"How the employer treats values and pays its staff is a direct, I think, is a direct show or a direct reflection of how they actually value their clients as well, so that's the people with the intellectual disabilities."*



Dev Deep Singh, Christchurch

Dev has worked in residential care supporting young people with complex needs for nearly 10 years. From helping young people develop life skills to supporting them through challenging behaviours, he believes every small step forward has the potential to change a life.

For the young people Dev supports, daily routines, familiar faces, and predictable environments are essential. Something as simple as knowing who is working that day and what activities are planned can have a significant impact on their wellbeing. He says these routines help young people feel safe, settled, and able to succeed. "Proper structure, if that is taken away, it's a recipe for disaster".

Dev regularly encounters challenging situations, "Assaults, police call outs, ambulance, we've had police call outs here quite often." "Name calling, racism, the N word." He explains that support workers must think constantly about safety, balancing the needs of the young person with the wellbeing of everyone around them. Working effectively often means responding calmly under pressure and adapting quickly when situations change unexpectedly.

What Dev is most proud of is the progress he has helped young people achieve. "Making sure these tamariki have got skills that would be needed for them when they turn 18 and they step into the real world". He recalls supporting a young person who initially struggled to participate in education and community activities. Over time, that young person has developed the confidence and skills to attend school with minimal support and engage more successfully with the world around them. For Dev, these moments are a reminder of why the work matters. "From the point where he came from to where he is at, even he can't recognise what he was back then." "We've been able to take him out in the community. He's going to school."

He believes care and support work requires "sympathy, empathy, and you need passion for this stuff. Otherwise, you can't do this." Supporting young people through trauma, developmental challenges, and complex behaviours requires workers who genuinely care about the people they support and are willing to remain alongside them through difficult times. "You have to care about someone else apart from you if you want to do this job."

The cancellation of pay equity has placed significant strain on Dev and his young family. As the sole income earner supporting his wife and infant daughter, he saw the settlement as a chance to achieve some financial security. "Real tight on finances. I sold one of the cars just to pay off some loans and stuff. At the moment we are just scraping by". "Just be able to go out, enjoy life, because at the moment, we're not. That's a privilege, that's a luxury that we don't have." This impacts "my wife, and my daughter. Everyone I love". A planned trip for their daughter to meet family overseas remains out of reach, "we had planned once she was born, we would go overseas for her to meet the family over there, but it hasn't happened."

"Work is what I love, but this work is not paying enough to survive."

The cancellation of pay equity has placed significant strain on Dev and his young family. As the sole income earner supporting his wife and infant daughter, he saw the settlement as a chance to achieve some financial security.

What's at stake this election

After a decade of progress in winning wage justice for workers in female dominated industries, the stakes couldn't be higher this election for pay equity.

The PSA is calling on a commitment from parties this election to

1. Within the first 100 days, fund and deliver the pay equity settlement for care and support workers based on established undervaluation.
2. Repeal the 2025 changes to the Equal Pay Act, reinstate legislation that ensures New Zealand women can access genuine pay equity, and restore the cancelled pay equity claims and reviews.
3. End pay gaps based on the grounds of ethnicity, disability, sexuality and gender identity.

The PSA asked political parties for their commitments on the above. At the time of writing, National, Act and New Zealand First declined to participate in our request.

The Green Party and Te Pāti Māori said yes to the first question. Labour said the claim needed to be urgently addressed and work on this would commence within the first 100 days of a newly elected Labour Government. Opportunity said they would take time to properly assess the pay equity framework and an appropriate route for re-establishing cancelled claims.

To the second question, Labour replied that it is committed to repealing the 2025 changes and funding pay equity claims. The Green Party, Te Pāti Māori and Opportunity said yes to the question.

The Green Party, Te Pāti Māori and Opportunity said yes to the third question. Labour said it was committed to ensuring that there are no pay gaps on the grounds of ethnicity, disability, sexuality and gender identity, and will work on how to best address these issues when in government, and that they currently have a Member's Bill in the name of Carmel Sepuloni.

