

A Fair Chance For All

Interim Report | 2022



New Zealand Council of
Christian Social Services

Contact Name:	Nikki Hurst Melanie Wilson
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Ko wai au Who we are:	<p>The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Interim Report on A Fair Chance for All.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz.</p>

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

We support the kaupapa to work towards an equitable and inclusive society by addressing the drivers of persistent disadvantage relating to the public management system, as presented in the Productivity Commission's Interim Report on A fair chance for all: Breaking the cycle of persistent disadvantage. This mahi aligns with NZCCSS's mission to work for a just and compassionate society for all by amplifying the voices and needs of the poor and vulnerable in our society.

Our main points are:

- 1. Wellbeing as the measure of success for Aotearoa New Zealand**
- 2. Systems shift urgently needed to uphold the mana of those experiencing disadvantage**
- 3. A rights-based approach to wellbeing**
- 4. Greater examination of advantage is critical to the public management system response**
- 5. A more inclusive approach to measuring disadvantage**
- 6. Broader measures of disadvantage needed to align with a holistic definition of wellbeing**
- 7. Increased use of evaluative information available**
- 8. Increased trust and accountability through demonstration of improved outcomes**
- 9. Explicit acknowledgement that our economic system perpetuates the issue**
- 10. Addressing societal and political narratives**

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

We raise the following points and recommendations for consideration:

1. Wellbeing as the measure of success for Aotearoa New Zealand

We strongly support the use of He Ara Waiora to define social inclusion and wellbeing and guide the purpose and values of our public management system.

This approach draws on mātauranga Māori, honouring the Crown's commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi. We consider that the framework as defined in this report provides a holistic understanding of wellbeing that is appropriate and accessible to all within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Similarly, we agree with the Commission's definition of disadvantage, the absence of mauri ora, encompassing the domains of being left out, doing without and being income poor. Measuring lack of income alone would inadequately capture the impacts and experiences of disadvantage that exist within our communities. Our members frequently speak to the disadvantage experienced by clients not simply through financial hardship, but also through health and social challenges, disconnection from culture, identity and community, discrimination and many other factors which impact their sense of mana tuku iho, mana tauutuutu, mana āheinga and mana whanake.

Recommendation 1: We support the use of He Ara Waiora as a framework to guide the public management system.

2. Systems shift urgently needed to uphold the mana of those experiencing disadvantage

We support the report's proposal that the public management system contributes to persistent disadvantage through the prevalence of power imbalances, discrimination, and the ongoing impact of colonisation, siloed and fragmented government and short-termism and status quo bias.

Our members evidence these barriers through the experiences their clients face in interacting with systems and services designed to offer help to those experiencing disadvantage. More and more kaimahi time is being spent advocating for clients who are weary, disillusioned, and desperate as a result of their mana being diminished in their attempts to access the support they are entitled to.

These barriers are also experienced by our service providers in their interactions with government agencies, where issues of poor process, lack of transparency, consistency, and accountability impact on providers ability to maintain and grow services where needed, recruit and retain appropriate staff and engage in innovation.

We agree that a transformative shift in systems and culture within the public management system is needed to ensure these barriers do not continue to drive disadvantage for those in our communities. We welcome the proposed strategies identified in this report that intend to address these barriers, in particular the adoption of a purpose, values and assumptions for the public management system that prioritise social inclusion and mauri ora for everyone and the adoption of a comprehensive policy commitment to wellbeing.

Recommendation 2: We strongly recommend that the barriers identified in this report be addressed within the public management system to diminish the drivers of disadvantage within our communities.

3. A rights-based approach to wellbeing

We advocate for this framework to place greater emphasis on the link between wellbeing and Aotearoa's commitment to uphold human rights. There is little mention of our human rights obligations within this report despite the relevance of the Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Convention on the Rights of Person's with Disability, to the issue of persistent disadvantage.

A comprehensive policy commitment to wellbeing, as advocated for in the report's recommendations, must be guided by our responsibility to uphold dignity, to provide an adequate standard of living, to enable access to housing, healthcare and education, and freedom from discrimination. Whilst these factors can be encompassed well by the aspects of mana identified in He Ara Waiora, we must ensure that our commitment to these rights and responsibilities are explicit in any discussion regarding the purpose of our public management system and the wellbeing of our people.

Recommendation 3: We advocate for human rights obligations to be more strongly integrated into the recommendations of the final report.

4. Greater examination of advantage is critical to the public management system response

We suggest that a greater understanding of the drivers of persistent disadvantage might be achieved through examination of the experiences of those who have moved out of a period of disadvantage and the experiences of those who have been advantaged persistently and intergenerationally.

Whilst this research provides a picture of the population across the three domains of disadvantage, there is room for greater exploration of the factors that have improved wellbeing for those previously disadvantaged. This could be achieved through a strengths-based approach and greater examination of trends across the periods of measurement, observing where disadvantage has diminished rather than persisted and what factors within the public management system may have contributed to that.

Similarly, greater focus on the drivers of persistent advantage would also identify opportunities for the public management system to realign itself to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. Despite the challenges of housing insecurity and the recommendations of the Tax Working Group, we are yet to see a comprehensive Capital Gains Tax. Nor have rent controls been adopted, although we understand the pressure rising rents have placed on whanau across the motu. We must not measure the impact of exclusion without also questioning that of inclusion, nor poverty of income without also investigating abundance. Power imbalances and assumptions that maintain the flourishing of some at the expense of others must be challenged, but this cannot be achieved if we focus consistently on the problem of poverty, without equally recognising the problem of excess and its impacts on the long-term wellbeing of our communities.

Recommendation 4: We strongly advocate for greater examination of the drivers of advantage and persistent advantage to support an effective public management system response.

5. A more inclusive approach to measuring disadvantage

We recommend a more inclusive approach to measuring persistent disadvantage, in particular the inclusion of older people.

We observe the rationale for excluding older people from the findings as follows:

We decided to exclude New Zealanders aged 65 years and over because retirement can give the impression that older people are being left out because they are not working. (pg.34)

We suggest that approaches to measuring persistent disadvantage among older people be pursued, despite this limitation. The report highlights that almost 1/3 of older people (31.8%) experienced 2+ exclusion factors in each of both years, indicating that a significant proportion of older people experience exclusion beyond simply their status as being retired and therefore jobless. (pg. 138).

By excluding older people from this analysis, we continue to reinforce the well-entrenched link between employment and perceived advantage and fail to fully appreciate the experience of those within this age group who do experience persistent disadvantage. Social challenges such as lack of access to transport, or internet access and can impact significantly on the wellbeing of older people. The measures used to relate to employment also fail to capture those older people who need to, or wish to be in, employment but are not, and the impact this has on their long-term wellbeing and experience of disadvantage.

Our providers observe a growing population of older people who are not home-owners, who are reliant on employment beyond age 65 and/or facing significant disadvantage due to lack of accessible, affordable, and stable housing and increases in the cost of living. The impacts of this in relation to their wellbeing and the drivers of persistent disadvantage are worth capturing to ensure we do not overlook the experiences that are unique to this valued portion of our population.

Recommendation 5: We urge the Commission to include experiences of persistent disadvantage among older people in the final report and ongoing measures.

6. Broader measures of disadvantage needed to align with a holistic definition of wellbeing

We suggest that a broader set of measures could be used to identify disadvantage, noting the prevalence of financial measures across all three domains of disadvantage. We observe that whilst He Ara Waiora proposes a model of wellbeing that is holistic in nature, most of the measures used to define disadvantage, except for those sourced from the General Social Survey, continue to relate to financial access to resources.

An example of this is the measure of being left out/exclusion. The report defines this as follows:

“This includes people not being able to participate in or connect with society, communities and activities that people regard as important to mauri ora and wellbeing.”

We suggest that this domain would benefit from the inclusion of health-related measures, observing the impact that poor health (independent of a diagnosed disability) may have on a person’s ability to engage in activities that support mauri ora. These measures should not be limited to one’s ability to pay for a medical service, but also capture the ongoing impacts of health on one’s ability to participate in work, education, and to feel connected to whanau, friends, and communities. We suggest that the measures from the Household Economic Survey relating to postponed visits to the doctor or dentist may more accurately fit within the domain of deprivation.

Recommendation 6: We suggest that the measures of disadvantage be broadened to provide a more holistic understanding.

7. Increased use of evaluative information available

System learning and improvement through monitoring and evaluation must consider the compliance burden placed on social services providers.

Social service providers hold deep insights into the experiences of disadvantage within our communities and spend considerable time completing quantitative and qualitative reporting to inform government agencies. Our members convey frustration at the level of contractual reporting and evaluation they prepare which appears to be used to trigger further funding and then shelved, rather than leveraged for broader evaluative and monitoring purposes. This impacts trust and reflects disregard for the valuable knowledge and contribution made by the social services sector in addressing policy priorities and social concerns.

The burden of reporting and compliance places undue pressure on an already stretched workforce. We hope that this will be improved through efforts to develop a joined-up approach to contracting such as that proposed in this report and other frameworks such as the Social Sector Commissioning Action Plan. We suggest that efforts to establish evaluative leadership and processes are cognisant of the processes and data that exist currently and are developed in consultation with organisations such as our members.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that approaches to evaluation take into consideration the contribution of our members and other social service providers.

8. Increased trust and accountability through demonstration of improved outcomes

NZCCSS advocates for improved accountability and transparency to guide effective investment in wellbeing and build trust in the public management system.

We agree that the barriers identified in this report contribute to people within Aotearoa New Zealand experiencing disadvantage. A review of public accountability settings will bring these barriers to the fore and is critical to the embedding of a wellbeing approach into the public management system.

We identify a lack of transparency as a key issue for the sector, noting the recent example of Oranga Tamariki, where increased funding and reform were found to have done little to shift outcomes for children. We also see this evidenced through our social security system which is complex to navigate and costly to administer. We strongly advocate for the provision of an adequate base benefit which would improve accessibility for clients and eliminate the administrative cost of delivering various supplementary payments.

We support a first principles review of public accountability settings across the public management system to ensure that improved outcomes are achieved and demonstrable.

Recommendation 8: We strongly support a first principles review of public accountability settings across the public management system.

9. Explicit acknowledgement that our economic system perpetuates the issues

We have followed the movement to a “wellbeing approach” across government with hope and interest but continue to question the ability for the approach to be successful within what remains a fundamentally neoliberal approach to economic policy.

We strongly urge the Commission to use their platform to clarify that a commitment to ever increasing profit is unsustainable, and harmful. The principles within our economic system that both perpetuate and rely on persistent disadvantage must be reset for any form of wellbeing approach to succeed.

The increasingly rapid rate of transfer of wealth through government subsidisation (childcare subsidy’s flowing to a handful of for-profit childcare companies, accommodation supplements flowing at peak rates to an under regulated rental market, food subsidy’s further enhancing obscene supermarket profits...) is misunderstood by many as a solution to disadvantage. A tax system that allows lower earners to carry the bulk of the weight for the few who are able to arrange their affairs to their advantage, etc...

We believe that the work of the Commission must also address the wider economic system, and support wide understanding of its impacts on us all. Further, we strongly urge the Commission to use their curiosity and expertise to consider and promote what an economic system that actually serves us all would look like.

Recommendation 9:

a) We suggest that the Commission clearly acknowledge the impact of our economic settings on our society, and support others to see and understand this

b) We suggest that the Commission be tasked with actively seeking a more equitable economic system that better serves Aotearoa, urgently

10. Addressing societal and political narratives

We suggest that the most challenging aspect of addressing persistent disadvantage is in shifting existing societal and political narratives about disadvantage.

We note a critical success factor identified in the report:

Power imbalances can be addressed by reorientating the system around the needs of whānau. Whānau centred and mana-enhancing approaches prioritise the voice, needs and aspirations of people experiencing disadvantage. **We will need a broad social and political consensus to secure the long-term commitment required to address persistent and intergenerational disadvantage.** (pg. 5 – emphasis added)

The current political climate suggests that obtaining consensus on the causes and solutions to disadvantage may be challenging. We continue to see mana-detracting narratives regarding issues such as benefit-access within the political discourse, which does little to prioritise the voice of those experiencing disadvantage. We are concerned that this work be embedded deeply to counteract the risk of changes in government. We also acknowledge the constraints that government cycles place on driving long-term change.

From our legal frameworks to our social narrative, assumptions about disadvantage prevail, underpinned by arguments based in equality rather than equity and discrimination rather than

inclusion. Until we better understand our own fragility and our responsibility to each other, we will struggle to engage in efforts that prioritise the wellbeing of all.

We wholeheartedly support efforts to build broad social and political consensus for change and suggest that greater citizenship education and awareness of the impacts of persistent disadvantage be included in strategies to achieve this.

Recommendation 10: We suggest that awareness and education be prioritised to build social and political consensus.