



For more than 30 years Community Networks Aotearoa (formerly the New Zealand Council of Social Services) has been the Peak Body for local, regional, and national Community Networks in Aotearoa | New Zealand.

We empower and strengthen the community sector by supporting community networks.

Submission to The Productivity Commission on Scoping the Terms of Reference for an Inquiry into Breaking the Cycle of Persistent Disadvantage.

CNA greatly welcomes the opportunity to participate and to submit on The Productivity Commission's consultation. Our understanding of the issues and the impact on the social services sector comes from our collective experience representing 60+ highly diverse local, regional, and national networks from all over the Motu.

We strongly support the Productivity Commission identifying the causes and solutions to persistent disadvantage. We also strongly support the timely development of an actionable implementation plan resulting from this inquiry. Too often recommendations are just that – recommendations. Without an implementation schedule there is no pathway for Government to follow. This also enables contributing and supporting organisations in the Sector to robustly plan and to create clarity around how they can engage with and support that implementation.

1. What are the main aspects of disadvantage that should be investigated in this inquiry?

In 2022 alone, CNA has been working on and seeking solutions to some the following issues creating disadvantages including

- Digital Exclusion – In an ever increasing, though not electorally mandated, creation of a 'digital society' we know many groups face being frozen out of access to fair representation, access, and support.
- Upholding Te Tiriti – the recognition of historic marginalisation must be at the forefront of all ongoing mahi. Institutional biases must be recognised and disestablished to ensure fair play in Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

- Disabled Access – This sector of our society faces barriers that are physical, financial and a cost to wellbeing. Lack of appropriate access to Government departments and their programmes leads to disengagement, spiralling mental health, financial disadvantages. This can present as lack of disabled access from poor urban planning to lack of financial aid to make physical changes to buildings; lack of resources for agencies to ensure adequate rental homes; availability of healthcare in under-resourced front-line agencies such as Emergency Departments; extended, and sometimes fatal, waiting lists for health assistance.
- The increasing wealth and equity gaps in, but not limited to, employment opportunities; educational opportunities; health; disenfranchised sectors such as women, the disabled, ethnic communities, refugees, the aged.
- ‘Helpful’ Legislation – 2022 has seen an increase in legislation that effects the Community, Volunteer and Social Services Sector (Incorporated Societies Act 2022, Charities Amendment Bill, Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act 2009 Review, etc.). Most legislation attempts to codify, regulate and ‘assist’ our sector’s organisations but does so from a government lens. In attempting to increase transparency and accountability without considering how many organisations are created (i.e., in direct response to a need that has arisen locally), this top-down approach is not sympathetic to the beneficial running of community organisations. This brings about organisational and funding uncertainty, and the removal of support for New Zealanders who may already be vulnerable.

2. Where should the commission focus its research?

CNA, along with other organisations, believes there is sufficient research and evidence to enable the Commission to outline key ways forward. Primarily utilising the [Report of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group](#) (WEAG), some members of which have submitted to the Commission on this inquiry. It would be worth including the current mahi of the [Child Action Poverty Group](#), and the wide range of research available through [Community Research](#).

3. Ways forward

- a. CNA supports [SocialLink](#)’s recommendation to have “more local, granulated official data available for local regions and communities to use.”

In order to apply for targeted grants, and to represent local communities with data collation, analysis and collating local information, local organisations need to be able to access local data. Without supporting data, applications and programmes may be hindered in providing an accurate picture. Regional and national data is too broad and creates a ‘one solution fits all’ response.

How does the Government and associated agencies engage with the For Purpose (previously the Not-For-Profit) Sector in supporting already networked agencies to create capacity at a grass root level, rather than imposing a ‘national standard’ of response?

- b. We support a dis-establishing of government silos. Any approach should encourage interlinked action. We would also encourage Government departments to look outside of their funded organisations.

It is well known in our Sector that if you aren’t funded by a government agency you are not seen by them. CNA has termed this ignorance of important organisations forming the backbone of our nation as a ‘Blind Spot’. Government only sees approximately one-third of the agencies, organisations, and people who work and volunteer to keep an incredible amount of social support active in our communities. By reaching out these departments may find answers, resources, and a wealth of actionable information currently ignored.

- c. CNA also strongly supports the call to implement the [UN Convention of the Rights of Indigenous Persons](#); the [UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD); and the [UN Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) (OHCHR).
- d. As already stated, the WEAG Report provides a number of relevant solutions.

Ros Rice
Executive Officer
Community Networks Aotearoa

+64 4 472 3364
Level 3, 2 Woodward Street, Wellington 6011
PO Box 11785, Manners Street, Wellington 6142

