

NZ Productivity Commission Persistent Disadvantage feedback

1. What are the main dimensions of persistent disadvantage that should be included in the Terms of Reference as areas to be investigated? For example, because they have a stronger direct impact on wellbeing, or because they have a knock-on impact in relation to other dimensions.

1. Colonisation and racism
2. Welfare trap & intergenerational poverty vs universal basic income & the possibility for equity (not equality)
3. Dominant social discourses, perpetrated by media and some MPs, around a culture of blame-the-individual rather than the system
4. Evidence-less policy decisions, for example removing children from beneficiaries to attend (often poor quality) early childhood education (ECE), rather than wrapping around families and creating cohesion between ECE and homes.

2. Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

The neuroscience of brain development (Nathan Mikaere Wallis)

The intergenerational effects of trauma (Gabor Maté)

Institutional racism and unconscious bias

What do you see as the biggest gaps in our collective knowledge?

Neuroplasticity – the knowledge that anything is possible, the flexibility to challenge our assumptions and change our views.

Racism and unconscious bias – the education system is a place to start as that sets people on a path for life

What areas would you encourage us to undertake further research into, and why?

The neuroscience of brain development (Nathan Mikaere Wallis) because it's important that anyone influencing decisions that effect children understand how children actually develop.

The intergenerational effects of trauma (Gabor Maté) because we need to develop a more traum-informed society.

3. Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

Affordable housing by addressing the issue of demand

Universal basic income

NZ History Curriculum

For ECE: Playcentre, home-based care, Kōhanga reo, Kindergarten.

Critical journalism – tax google/amazon/facebook etc and use the money to fund more critical journalism through NZ on Air

What are the key barriers preventing New Zealanders from reaching their potential?

Education – the unconscious bias that means students are not treated equally; the decile system; illiteracy because we haven't taught using a structured literacy approach; inconsistency between schools; too much responsibility on and power in Boards of Trustees; a Ministry that is overly bureaucratic and politicised; a focus on knowledge transfer rather than developing key competencies; poor quality in ECE (see below).

Poverty – the intergenerational welfare trap; abatement being in existence – ie don't just lower the rates, change the system; ineffective competition law leading to rising prices for core building, food etc products; unaffordable housing due to high demand because of no tax on housing.

Mental health – due to the above + intergenerational trauma; investment landing in the wrong places, eg in DHBs, rather than funding Gumboot Friday and other community-driven initiatives.

What are the key triggers or circumstances that can result in people becoming stuck in persistent disadvantage?

When people feel helpless and have no control or influence on their circumstances – when, in their perception, things are done to them. If change is inevitable, it's crucial to bring people along on the journey.

Are there key windows of opportunity in a person's life course where positive changes are easier to secure, or where they are more likely to endure?

At points of transition, there is an opportunity for people to shift from their automated state, enter a learning phase, and adjust – see neuroscientist Jared Cooney-Horvath for more.

Which aspects of government policy are most important to focus on? For example, secure housing, mental health treatment and supporting new parents.

1. Affordable housing
2. Universal basic income
3. Community-oriented ECE

Are changes needed in the ways that government services are provided? For example, devolving responsibility for services, joining up service provision and helping those most in need navigate the system.

Yes, less bureaucracy, more participatory democracy, using collaborative methods like citizens assemblies. Empowering communities with specialist/expert advisory committees and sufficient funding, rather than regulating them and expecting them to comply. Getting rid of 80% of WINZ with a UBI, removing the stigma of welfare, creating equity.

4. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the Terms of Reference for this inquiry?

Just a point to note on the early years of 'learning' – children are sponges, what they experience is what they learn. Their developing brains create neural pathways based on their interactions with their environment. They need a reciprocal, consistent, warm, 1:1 relationship with a primary

caregiver in the 1st 1000 days. Language matters in these first 1000 days, but interestingly, it's only the language that's spoken by this primary caregiver that counts in terms of brain development. The language from others is 'white noise' in the early years. Within this relationship, children need a variety of sensory experiences. The most repetitive experiences will develop the strongest pathways. In terms of child development, neuroscience over-rides all other perspectives (e.g. woman's rights, economic modelling, teacher-led ECE etc). The others are social constructs. The neuroscience of brain development is not.

At the moment, some of our minimum quality standards in ECE are low, especially around space allocations, group size and ratios. Many services operate at these minimum standards. Therefore, participation in ECE (at all costs) is not the panacea to disadvantage it's been made out to be. Inserting 'quality' into policy statements doesn't make it so. Quality in ECE is a complex debate and shouldn't be undervalued. A by Māori, for Māori approach is crucial for Māori participation in ECE. Community-oriented ECE is crucial, so that children are regularly exposed to a range of experiences within the security of strong relationships. Children are our most vulnerable citizens. We should treat them as such.