

News Release

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Wellbeing budget delivers some good news – and some challenges

The announcement of new funding for child and family services is welcome but there is still work to be done to address the widening pay gap for social workers in community organisations.

Speaking after the briefing to social sector leaders by the Prime Minister and other ministers, SSPA National Manager, Brenda Pilott, said: “The focus on wellbeing and especially new provisions to improve the lives of children and young people is very welcome. The packages of changes in mental health and family/sexual violence should begin to make a real difference to some of these very entrenched problems.”

“The announcements of significant new programmes for transition from care and intensive support services are welcome. These will be primarily delivered by community, iwi and Māori providers and we were pleased to hear these are to be funded on a realistic and sustainable basis. We’re also pleased to see the increase in support for providers of care services.”

Brenda Pilott welcomed the increase funding of \$26.7 million as a start in addressing cost pressures for community organisations, in particular wage pressures, but said more is needed.

“The wage pressure challenge in our sector is most stark for social workers, especially experienced social workers. The starting salary for newly-qualified social work graduates at Oranga Tamariki is \$55,000. In community organisations that can be almost the top of the scale for highly experienced workers. The wage gap currently averages around 35% between community and Oranga Tamariki social workers.”

“This gap has to be further limited to ensure the sustainability of the community social service sector, and we are going to need to see more funding from government, beyond what has been committed to in today’s Budget.”

“Community organisations are struggling to recruit and retain these experienced social workers, and are losing skilled staff to Oranga Tamariki. That is having an impact on the services and support they provide to families and children, at a time where we know needs are multiple and complex.”

“These issues about fair pay are part of a wider issue about fair funding for community social services. Community social services are a vital part of the Oranga Tamariki operating model and it is critical that government moves more strongly to remediate a decade of under-funding for the NGO social service sector, to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness for those it serves.”

SSPA has commissioned research into the community social services funding gap which will report in August.

“Sustainable and reasonable funding is about recognising and investing in those people who provide services to our most vulnerable New Zealanders. This is critical to achieving the government’s wellbeing outcomes. Today’s announcements are a start. More is needed and we look forward to engaging with the government on how best to achieve the outcomes we share,” said Brenda Pilott.

ABOUT SSPA

Social Service Providers Aotearoa represents some 200 non-profit organisations funded by government to work with vulnerable children, young people and families. Brenda Pilott is national manager of SSPA.

