



## Submission to the Human Rights Commission on the *Pacific Pay Gap Inquiry*

### INTRODUCTION

1. Thank you for the opportunity to input into the Inquiry into the Pacific Pay Gap in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is unfathomable that in 2022, Pacific as a group earn 17.9% less than non-Pacific workers<sup>1</sup>. This is not new, and despite various action plans by government agencies to remedy this, we agree that equitable outcomes cannot be achieved for Pasifika until the drivers and solutions are fully explored and acted upon. Pasifika are valuable contributors to the labour workforce, and it is time that the systemic barriers to them being paid and recognised as this are dismantled.
2. In late 2021, we consulted a group of our Pacific social workers to canvas their views on the drivers and solutions to the Pacific Pay Gap. Here we present their insight into what they see and experience, which is reinforced by evidence on pay gaps.
3. It is apparent that the social work sector is not exempt from the Pacific Pay Gap, further compounded by the fact that our sector, as a female dominated and historically undervalued profession, also grapples with the gender pay gap. Pacific women, the most disadvantaged in terms of pay equity, are subsequently well represented within our feedback.
4. We would welcome any further opportunities to speak with you regarding our submission. We could arrange sessions with our Pasifika members if required.

### DISCUSSION

#### PAY TRANSPARENCY

5. Pay transparency is an important issue for achieving pay equity as it relates to western-centric pay negotiation processes which make assumptions about employee behaviour in direct contrast to values held by many Pacific cultures.
6. Pacific social workers report that when a first pay offer is made, it is generally accepted without challenge. The reasons given for this are Pacific cultures often hold a value of humility and therefore a belief of '*what is offered is what they should have*'. The process of negotiation is seen as challenging authority and disrespectful, it was also described as deeply uncomfortable for employees to have these conversations. The sense of family and collective financial responsibility

<sup>1</sup> Te Kawa Mataaho: Public Service Commission. (2021). *Pay Gaps*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/our-work/workforce-data/remuneration-pay/pay-gaps/#s4>

was also raised as paramount in negotiations; Pacific workers may prioritise job security and “*not wanting to topple the apple cart*” in preference to negotiating higher wages. However, Pacific social workers did note there are some generational differences in this view and that New Zealand born and educated Pasifika may be more confident to move jobs for better pay conditions.

7. Haar’s (2019) research echoes these comments but goes further to say that western value-driven pay negotiation processes in Aotearoa New Zealand give most regard to the money figure rather than valuing the relationships and connections and fairness of process<sup>2</sup>. Unions could play a role in providing collective support to Pacific workers around pay negotiations, however this would not address the systemic racism which is leading to these outcomes for Pasifika. Furthermore, belonging to a union costs money and this may be a barrier to Pasifika workers accessing this crucial support.
8. The lack of cultural competence of some managers has been highlighted as a key driver during pay negotiations, as a western dominant view of organisational behaviour creates inherent bias against Pasifika. Humility, or being quietly spoken is mistakenly perceived as a lack of confidence or assertion when being considered for a raise or promotion<sup>3</sup>. Such bias needs to be challenged and addressed at every level with better organisational policies to ensure the needs of Pasifika are met during recruitment processes (such as access to an interpreter and representative interview panels).
9. To counter these drivers at a systemic level, measures need to be legislated and processes regulated as per other OECD countries to ensure recruitment and pay negotiations become fair and transparent going forward<sup>4</sup>.
10. Compulsory pay gap reporting can be implemented to encourage action by employers to narrow pay gaps<sup>5</sup>. This is a measure strongly recommended by the OECD to specifically address gender pay discrepancies as it both monitors where gaps are and targets action within the workplace<sup>6</sup>. It is legislated in many jurisdictions such as Australia, where the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 requires non-public sector employers of 100 or more staff to submit an annual report to an agency watchdog detailing gender breakdowns. Employers of more than 500 staff are required to meet minimum standards to support gender equality and diversity in the workplace<sup>7</sup>. It has been recommended that this approach is extended to include ethnic pay gaps<sup>8</sup>.
11. Another pay transparency option is compulsory advertising of salary range and prohibiting enquiries as to previous salary, a measure currently being piloted in the United Kingdom<sup>9</sup>. Evidence suggests that women and those of ethnic minorities are disadvantaged when asked what their

---

<sup>2</sup> Haar, J.M. (2019). *Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito*. Pou Mātāwaka, Wellington

<sup>3</sup> Haar, J.M. (2019). *Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito*. Pou Mātāwaka, Wellington

<sup>4</sup> OECD. (2021). *Can Pay Transparency Tools Close the Gender Wage Gap?* Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/gender/Pay-Transparency-2021-Policy-Brief.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Dromey, J. and Rankin, L. (2018). *The Fair Pay Report: How Pay Transparency Can Help Tackle Inequalities*. Institute for Public Policy Research: London.

<sup>6</sup> OECD. (2021). *Can Pay Transparency Tools Close the Gender Wage Gap?* Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/gender/Pay-Transparency-2021-Policy-Brief.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Manatū Wāhine: Ministry for Women. (2019). *Country Case Studies on Pay Transparency*. <https://women.govt.nz/documents/country-case-studies-pay-transparency>

<sup>8</sup> Dromey, J. and Rankin, L. (2018). *The Fair Pay Report: How Pay Transparency Can Help Tackle Inequalities*. Institute for Public Policy Research: London.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-pay-transparency-pilot-to-break-down-barriers-for-women>

salary expectation is, without any information about expected pay for the position<sup>10</sup>. Instead, when applicants are informed about the typical pay for the position, they are more willing to negotiate and may have more success in negotiations, narrowing the pay gap<sup>11</sup>.

## LEADERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

12. The glass ceiling for Pacific is also another driver in pay inequities. A glass ceiling is described as a structural inequity which sees certain groups less likely to progress to senior positions<sup>12</sup>. The State Services Commission confirms that in Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific ethnicities are still “under-represented in the top three tiers of Public Service management”<sup>13</sup>. Only 4.3% of those who hold management positions within the public sector are Pacific<sup>14</sup>.
13. The impact of under-representation for Pacific is significant as when there are no senior managers who reflect an ethnic minority group, it signals that leadership roles are not an option for them<sup>15</sup>. This is summed up well by a quote in Haar’s (2019) research; “*If I can’t see it – how can I be it?*”<sup>16</sup>. It is noted that leadership for Pacific outside of specific roles (for example the CE of the Ministry for Pacific People) is rare, and that these specific roles are not counted by Pasifika because of the perception that being an ethnic minority leader is a requirement of the job<sup>17</sup>. One Pacific social worker told us “*The same hierarchy do not want to see Pacific rise yet they’re thriving professionals and academics in their own right*”.
14. Pacific social workers agree that lack of representation is a structural barrier to progression, they note that there are pockets such as South Auckland where more Pasifika hold higher positions within the social service sector, however, this is not reflected across the motu. It is also noted that there is lack of opportunity for mentoring which is what they see non-Pacific colleagues receiving in order to progress further in their careers.
15. Pasifika workers bring unique cultural skills to workplaces, this is especially true in social services where the cultural skill of language allows for effective communication with Pacific families. Without effective communication, appropriate strategies for support cannot be developed or implemented. Pasifika bring these skills and are called upon for translation purposes within a variety of industries, a role which monolingual speaking staff are unable to fulfil. However, the pay gap strongly indicates that these crucial skills are not acknowledged or valued, even though they are the key to effective engagement and developing close working relationships with Pacific families.

---

<sup>10</sup> National Women’s Law Centre. (2020). *Salary Range Transparency Reduces the Wage Gap*. Retrieved from: <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Salary-Range-and-Transparency-FS-2020-1.17.2020-v2.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> National Women’s Law Centre. (2020). *Salary Range Transparency Reduces the Wage Gap*. Retrieved from: <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Salary-Range-and-Transparency-FS-2020-1.17.2020-v2.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Dromey, J. and Rankin, L. (2018). *The Fair Pay Report: How Pay Transparency Can Help Tackle Inequalities*. Institute for Public Policy Research: London

<sup>13</sup> State Services Commission (2018). *Our People: Public Service Workforce Data 2018*. State Services Commission, Wellington, New Zealand

<sup>14</sup> Te Kawa Mataaho: Public Service Commission. (2018). *Diversity and Inclusion*. Retrieved from: <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/resources/public-service-workforce-datahrc-diversity/>

<sup>15</sup> Dunn & Veltman, (1989), as cited in Haar, (2019).

<sup>16</sup> Haar, J.M. (2019). *Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito*. Pou Mātāwaka, Wellington

<sup>17</sup> Haar, J.M. (2019). *Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito*. Pou Mātāwaka, Wellington

16. Progression plans and equal opportunity pathways which include mentoring and developing Pacific social workers so that they can confidently progress to supervisors and management roles is needed. In parallel, dismantling of structural racism in order to recognise the value base and attributes Pasifika bring to leadership roles, rather than dismissing different ways of working because they do not match colonial views of 'management traits' is key.
17. Financial barriers to further study also need to be addressed. A Pacific social worker notes "Pasifika families don't have access to resources to help them move in a positive direction... it's harder to access scholarships". Investment in Pasifika to achieve the training and education required and exploring alternative pathways to career attainment needs attention to remove this structural barrier to career progression.

## RECOGNISING THE VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF 'UNPAID WORK'

18. Many Pasifika cultures hold contribution to family, and the wider community through cultural norms or 'unpaid work'<sup>18</sup> as an important value. However, participation in and the impact of unpaid work is poorly recognised within formal workplace settings and differences in work patterns compared to the normative, dominant model undervalued<sup>19</sup>. In their report, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples state: *"For Pacific peoples, unpaid work and volunteering are expressions of love for their families and communities and are embedded in their cultures and identities."* (2021, pg. 19). Workplaces need to do better to understand and provide flexibility for varying work patterns which allow Pacific workers to fulfil these responsibilities outside of the formal workplace setting.
19. Additionally, within the formal workplace setting, Pacific workers report that it is common that they are asked to act as a cultural advisor and liaison, above and beyond their job description and without any remuneration<sup>20</sup>. Essentially, Pasifika experience racism through an expectation by employers that they will undertake unpaid work outside of their job role within their workplace and provide default expertise on behalf of Pacific people which many experienced as an 'intense responsibility'<sup>21</sup>. This has financial implications for them and impacts their ability to fulfil their obligations outside of paid employment.

## CONCLUSION

20. We strongly support action by the Government to address the Pacific Pay Gap which we view as being heavily influenced by structural inequalities and racism. Regulatory and legislative measures already tested in other parts of the world should be explored to improve pay equity and opportunity for Pasifika and organisational policy which addresses the challenges Pasifika experience in the workforce applied.

---

<sup>18</sup> MPP notes in their research that this term is often seen by Pacific peoples as inaccurate, so too is the term 'volunteering' given the different ways these are defined and quantified between Pasifika and dominant cultures. We use this term as the best available description to illustrate our points and as the term used within the literature with this caveat.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry for Pacific Peoples. (2021). *Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Economy-Research-Report-on-Unpaid-Work-and-Volunteering-in-Aotearoa.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ministry for Pacific Peoples. (2021). *Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Economy-Research-Report-on-Unpaid-Work-and-Volunteering-in-Aotearoa.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Ministry for Pacific Peoples. (2021). *Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Economy-Research-Report-on-Unpaid-Work-and-Volunteering-in-Aotearoa.pdf>

21. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit, we look forward to the outcome of this Inquiry, and hope to see action as a result of the findings which will improve pay equity for Pacific across all sectors.

## ABOUT ANZASW

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional association for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have over 3,600 members who work throughout the community in both statutory social work and community social work settings. We advocate on behalf of members for social change and justice.

### **Definition of social work**

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.<sup>22</sup>

### **Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Social workers in Aotearoa are required to be registered with the Social Workers Registration Board. Social workers are registered under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 and are not included in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

### **Contact details**

If you have any questions or require any clarification about this submission, please contact:

Braden Clark  
Kaiwhakahaere Chief Executive  
ANZASW

Bronwyn Larsen  
Senior Policy Analyst  
ANZASW

---

<sup>22</sup> Global Definition of Social Work - International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work