



Submission to the Productivity Commission on *A Fair Chance for all: Breaking the Cycle of Persistent Disadvantage – interim report*

INTRODUCTION

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the Inquiry's Interim Report, A Fair Chance for All: Breaking the Cycle of Persistent Disadvantage.
2. We are heartened to read a report which articulates so clearly a systems view of persistent disadvantage. We commend the Commission for taking on recommendations of submitters (including ourselves) who strongly advocated for such an approach to this Inquiry.
3. The dominant, and in our view severely misinformed narrative that persistent disadvantage is caused by an individual's personal failing to engage adequately with the labour market is strongly refuted throughout this report. Instead, it recognises how our society has been shaped and disadvantage created and sustained by the enduring colonial mechanisms of the public management system, which actively nurtures power imbalances and policy settings which advance the interests of the Pākehā middle-class, to the detriment of others. A challenge to this dominant narrative is long overdue, and it is our sincere hope that it will work to destigmatise the 1 in 6 people in Aotearoa New Zealand who experience persistent disadvantage.

DISCUSSION

FRAMEWORK AND NEED FOR CROSS-GOVERNMENT CONSENSUS

4. We strongly support the use of He Ara Waiora as a framework for wellbeing and social inclusion which is both culturally responsive and consistent with te Tiriti o Waitangi, and in our opinion more accurately depicts the values upon which our contemporary society aspires to. Our concern is that without cross-party agreement around the definition of persistent disadvantage and commitment to consistent use of this framework across the public management system, it will become another recommendation which is only partially implemented.

Recommendation: The report should require cross-party definition of persistent disadvantage and commitment to use of He Ara Waiora across the Public Management System.

ASSUMPTIONS, BARRIERS AND RELATIONSHIP TO COLONISATION

5. We agree with the analysis of barriers, however, feel the discussion around the impact of colonisation and discrimination could be stronger. It warrants its own section; at present it is interwoven throughout multiple chapters which dilutes the significance of this finding. We believe the impact of colonisation and ‘anglophone neoliberalism’ is the central tenant to persistent disadvantage and from which the other three barriers originate.

Recommendation: A more robust conversation is included early in the report regarding the impacts of colonisation on our public management system’s current values and assumptions would better contextualise the identified barriers and proposed system shifts.

6. We question why further analysis of the policy changes and previous recommendations contained in table 5.1 have not been included. There is, for example no exploration of why key changes have only been partially implemented. It is our view that chosen policy reforms are still prioritising labour market incentives (i.e. minimum wage, fair pay agreements and income insurance) whilst ignoring welfare reform which is likely to have the most impact on persistent disadvantage at the micro and meso level. We hypothesise that current decisions around policy continue to reflect the long-standing values and assumptions upon which our society is built, favouring neoliberal ideas around productivity and human worth in terms of individual economic outputs. We are unsure how true change can be achieved in disrupting these values and decisions without constitutional reform which dismantles this dominant worldview.

Recommendation: Include analysis which explains why some areas of policy reform which target persistent disadvantage have been implemented and others have not.

NEED FOR A HUMAN-RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

7. We feel that there is an omission around the importance of human rights-based approaches to public service management in this report. Such an exploration, particularly around rights for children, would help fill the current gap in thinking around how the public management system and disadvantage are linked. For example, current settings favour efficiency and effectiveness as per New Public Management approaches rather than enacting human rights-based approaches, which work to achieve freedom and dignity for all. In essence, such approaches challenge all forms of discrimination in policy settings, service design and delivery. If new values and assumptions were founded in human rights-based approaches which recognise the inherent value, worth and dignity of every single individual and community, the barriers of discrimination and power imbalances could to some extent be mitigated.

Recommendation: Values and assumptions should be strongly founded in human rights-based approaches.

ACCOUNTABILITY SETTINGS

8. We agree with the constraints as listed in Table 5.2, in our view, these constraints significantly affect social work practice, as we are often unable to address the holistic needs of whānau and communities with whom we work as funding is so tightly controlled via high accountability settings which reflect philosophical differences between the public management system and the social work profession around public value add. Breaking down government silos would enable social workers to work across ‘policy areas’, practice would then better reflect our professional values

and ethics and not require frequent 'work arounds' as this report aptly identifies to empower whānau and communities to lift themselves out of persistent disadvantage.

9. Similarly, current public accountability settings work to disempower organisations and communities. Local providers are achieving great things with very limited funding, yet they are rarely recognised as effective grass-roots services which break patterns of disadvantage. We have heard from many of our members that the reporting burden associated with government contracts directly impacts on social workers' time with whānau and communities. Accountability settings need to reflect what matters most to communities and whānau, the outcomes they hope to achieve in assisting them out of or prevent them from entering persistent disadvantage. This would be best determined through a partnering process with organisations and the communities they work with, not directed from public management system officials. We would also like to see, as has been suggested, accountability on part of government agencies and services to meet their obligations to providers and communities to achieve wellbeing objectives.

Recommendation: Accountability settings need to reflect what matters to whānau and communities, and accountability of government agencies to providers and communities needs to be built into these settings.

10. We agree with the proposal for an all-of-government system lead role for public accountability. This lead role needs to be independent of Government to ensure it is not influenced by party politics which may adopt varying definitions of social inclusion and wellbeing to suit their own agendas, again playing into the barrier of short-termism and status quo bias as identified in this report.
11. Additionally, we see the benefit of such a lead role could result in de-politicising social issues such as child protection, right to healthy housing, responses to family violence and ensuring adequate benefit levels, amongst others. Enabling a bipartisan approach to such issues, which tend to both perpetuate and intersect with persistent disadvantage may be the only way to achieve meaningful progress which requires a consistent effort over time. At present, attention and meaningful progress on addressing such social issues are subject to the mercy of political will.
12. We would like to see the feasibility of adapting international models (i.e. the Welsh 'Wellbeing for Future Generation Act 2015, and the Finnish model) to the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand discussed, including consideration of how such models could uphold te Tiriti o Waitangi in application.

Recommendation: An All-of Government system lead role which sits independently from Government and for whom Ministers have accountability to in achieving wellbeing goals across the Public Management System is essential going forward.

Recommendation: The report should include a brief options analysis of international models which legislate wellbeing approaches, including how they can be applied in the specific bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The report should require cross-party definition of persistent disadvantage and commitment to use of He Ara Waiora across the Public Management System.

Recommendation 2: A more robust conversation is included early in the report regarding the impacts of colonisation on our public management system's current values and assumptions would better contextualise the identified barriers and proposed system shifts.

Recommendation 3: Include analysis which explains why some areas of policy reform which target persistent disadvantage have been implemented and others have not.

Recommendation 4: Values and assumptions should be strongly founded in human rights-based approaches.

Recommendation 5: Accountability settings need to reflect what matters to whānau and communities, and accountability of government agencies to providers and communities needs to be built into these settings.

Recommendation 6: An all-of government system lead role which sits independently from Government and for whom Ministers have accountability to in achieving wellbeing goals across the Public Management System is essential going forward.

Recommendation 7: The report should include a brief options analysis of international models which legislate wellbeing approaches, including how they can be applied in the specific bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

CONCLUSION

13. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit on A Fair Chance for All: Breaking the Cycle of Persistent Disadvantage.
14. This report provides us with hope- hope that attitudes, beliefs and conversations in the public sector and the public sphere are changing. In social work practice holding hope when whānau are faced with unfathomable challenges is a key part of our practice – we hope, that in this work the Productivity Commission can do the same until the aspirations named in this report are realised. We need a champion for this change, and we thank you for starting this conversation.

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.¹

¹ Global Definition of Social Work - International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work

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

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