

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mental health and addiction NGO and community sector shocked at Government decision to abolish current pay equity claims

Platform Trust is shocked and hugely disappointed by the Government's announcement today that it will retrospectively change the law and deny mental health and addiction NGO and community support workers access to a pay equity settlement they have been working towards for over three years.

"Platform Trust and the 95 NGOs we represent cannot understand why the Government would throw out years of extensive work we have done to move towards a fair settlement that values support workers for the work they do," says Sally Pitts-Brown, Chairperson of Platform Trust.

"Our members have provided huge amounts of data and information to officials that demonstrate how underpaid and undervalued our workforce is. The decision today to throw this out means there is a real risk that services may not be able to continue in the future.

"Paying for our workforce is the single biggest cost for NGO's and without change, our members may not be able to hold on to their staff. Already many staff in our sector are paid close to minimum wage, and many had been holding on to hope that the current pay equity process would lead to real change.

"This decision risks a very real breakdown in care and support for some of the most vulnerable members of society at a time when demand for our services is rising, and more and more people are seeking support. This is the workforce Minister Doocey is counting on to advance peer support services in Emergency Department and Crisis Cafes, including the four mental health and addiction targets.

"It will create immense uncertainty in the sector. It provides no realistic pathway for future pay equity negotiations, and it will make it almost impossible to attract new staff.

"Not a single provider in our sector was consulted on this proposal, and the Government has announced they will ram the changes through Parliament under urgency. This is one of the worst abuses of Parliamentary process I have seen," says Memo Musa, Chief Executive.

"We are calling on the Government to meet with us immediately to discuss an urgent resolution to the pay equity issue. If they do not, I fear for the future of our sector's workforce."

Chair of the Platform Trust, Sally Pitts-Brown is available for further comment and interviews.

/ENDS

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About Platform Trust

Platform is a membership organisation and peak body representing the mental health and addiction NGO and community sector. Platform actively collaborates with a network of 6 Regional Navigate Groups covering mental health and addictions services in the community. Currently 95 NGOs are members of Platform that provide support to tāngata whai ora (people seeking wellness) including Māori and Pasifika providers, and whānau and peer-led services.

Collectively across 2023/24, approximately 73,000¹ people accessed mental health and addiction NGO services, making up approximately 42% of all people accessing specialist support for their mental health or addiction needs in Aotearoa. NGO and community providers also work alongside primary care teams to support over approximately 92,250² people who used Access and Choice programme, for mild to moderate mental health needs.

There is a large and diverse workforce across the broader mental health and addiction NGO and community sector with a range of staff working across different occupational groups which in 2022 consisted of about 5,820 staff fulltime equivalents³.

¹ Te Whatu Ora|Health New Zealand PRIMHD extract dated 27 November 2024, analysed by Te Pou.

² Te Hīringa Mahara | Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission. (2022). *Access and Choice Programme: Report on the first three years | Te Hōtaka mō Ngā Whai Wāhitanga me Ngā Kōwhiringa: He purongo mō ngā tau tuatahi e toru*. Wellington: Te Hīringa Mahara.

³ Te Pou. (2023). *Mental health and addiction workforce: 2022 primary, community, and secondary healthcare settings*. Auckland: Te Pou.