



**National Council of  
Women of New Zealand**

Te Kaunihera  
Wahine O Aotearoa

National Office  
Level 4 Central House  
26 Brandon Street  
PO Box 25-498  
Wellington 6146  
(04) 473 7623  
www.ncwnz.org.nz

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**Submission to the Welfare Working Group on the WWG Issues Paper**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 46 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 26 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of some 150 other societies as well as individual members...

This submission is a collation of current opinion from the membership, feedback submitted to the CEDAW report and existing NCWNZ policies.

Since our members were last canvassed for input on this in 2003 and a letter of substance written to express our views the economy has declined, a recession has occurred and unemployed is higher. While members still agree the current rate of benefit payments is unsustainable they feel that the planned changes to the benefit system is too harsh and maybe seen as 'punishment' for past failures to the benefit system. Removing individual circumstances when assessing benefit entitlements is seen as discriminatory and takes away everyone's personal identity. NCWNZ think it would be wise for the Welfare Working Group to see the findings of the Alternative Welfare Working group in advance of any firm and actionable recommendations being made to the Government. The AWWG after all has the coal-face voice and experience

NCWNZ has consistently supported the parenting role many beneficiaries carry out and support parents who are full time caregivers, especially mothers. Forcing parents into work takes away the choice of being a full time parent and can devalue this role.

Removing funding for Adult education and removing the Training incentive allowance results in less choice for beneficiaries who study and were working towards upskilling themselves so they could enter/re-enter the workforce. Forcing beneficiaries into low income occupations, receptive and short term jobs does not fill one of the stated intentions of the current Government to raise self esteem and prevent generational benefit users. NCWNZ feels mixed messages are being sent with these two occurrences.

Encouraging beneficiaries to study to improve their job prospects should be encouraged but removing the Training incentive allowances and cutting funding gives the impression that the Government is only looking at menial work for beneficiaries and not seriously looking at any worthwhile gains. Members feel that people have been forgotten and only dollars and cents matter.

While social contact is improved while out working the objective of the exercise is stated to be raising peoples self esteem and income levels but how is this being achieved when part time workers are facing more financial outgoings by going out to work (clothing, childcare, transport to name a few extras) and less net income than when they were on the benefit.?





One major issue members have is the unemployment the recession has brought. Where are the jobs coming from for all the beneficiaries expected to go out and find work? Or are these 'jobs' non-existent and the beneficiary ends up suffering because their benefits are cut? Where is the fairness or logic in that?

Many people's personal circumstances make working extremely difficult.

- eg....A 63 year old grandmother who is raising grandchildren suddenly.
- A parent of a special needs child who requires constant attention and monitoring.
- An adult single person who is caring for their elderly sick parent.
- Home schooling parents. Are they going to be forced to send their children to school because that is what the Government decides is best for them?
- A parent who has taken time out to be at home for their child who has been stood down or suspended from school. Are they now required to leave that child at home by themselves and go to work? What happens to the child? What happens if CYPS becomes involved and the parent is charged with child neglect?

Members do agree that there are times when the benefit system is being abused but this is in the minority so why should all beneficiaries be targeted. A better monitoring system needs to be put in place to prevent this happening, not one size fits all. And some of those who abuse the system will still continue to do so but more covertly.

There are many issues with changing a system and more time needs to be made to get this proposed change happen, rather than change it and try and fix problems as they arise. While problem fixing is being addressed people are left in limbo, causing more hardship.

The ACC clinical pathway changes which have subsequently caused a complete about face regarding how the survivors of abuse are now to be treated... there are similarities between that being rolled out irrespective of warnings from providers and users, and the level of concern being voiced regarding the potential impact of welfare reforms right now. The community does not want to be part of another failed experiment.

Those on sickness, unemployment and War pensions have their own special needs and these should be taken into consideration. Forcing someone back into work after being sick or has on going treatment happening isn't going to save money in the long-term.

Widows aren't included in this proposed change at this time . Are they going to be included in the future? The death of a relationship can be just as traumatic as the death of a partner but because a relationship has failed doesn't make anyone less deserving than someone who has lost a relationship through death. The same issues occur...bills still need to be paid, children still need to be supported and we still need to wake up every day and live through that day.

NCWNZ agrees the current system needs changing but feels the proposed changes are too harsh and need toning down. Current communication between MSD and beneficiaries is one sided and can at times be very harsh so members would like this looked at and better 'letters of intent' drafted. Not everyone is trying to rip the system off.

NCWNZ members thank you for the opportunity to give their opinions to this.

Belinda Greenwood  
Family Affairs Convenor