

Meeting with New Zealand Nurses' Organisation

Due to MO:	12 February 2025	Reference	HNZ00078392
To:	Hon Simeon Brown, Minister of Health		
From:	Fiona McCarthy, Interim Chief Human Resources Officer		
Copy to:	N/A		
Security level:	In Confidence	Priority	Routine
Consulted	N/A		

Contact for further discussion

Name	Position	Phone	1st contact
Fiona McCarthy	Interim Chief Human Resources Officer	9(2)(a)	X
Nadine Gray	National Chief Nursing Officer	s 9(2)(a)	

Attachments

Appendix 1: Biographies of attendees

Appendix 2: Talking points

Appendix 3: Nurses pay comparison - Health NZ and three Australian states

About the meeting

Purpose	<p>You have requested an introductory meeting with the New Zealand Nurses' Organisation Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa (NZNO) Executive Leadership Team to begin building a working relationship with the union.</p> <p>We expect NZNO to raise concerns in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collective bargaining with Health New Zealand (Health NZ)• Key issues relating to bargaining: Safe-staffing, including nurse-to-patient ratios, CCDM and culturally safe staffing• Graduate nurse employment• Internationally qualified nurses• Pay parity• NZNO claims around Holidays Act pay
Date	Thursday 13 February 2025
Time	10.00am to 10.30am
Venue	6.6, Executive Wing
Attendees	<p>Paul Goulter, CEO, NZNO</p> <p>Kerri Nuku, Kaiwhakahaere, NZNO</p> <p>Anne Daniels, President, NZNO</p> <p>Note: biographies are attached as Appendix 1.</p>
Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora officials	<p>Dr Dale Bramley, Interim Chief Executive</p> <p>Dr Richard Sullivan, Chief Clinical Officer</p> <p>Nadine Gray, National Chief Nurse</p> <p>Lorraine Hetaraka, Chief Nurse Ministry of Health</p>
Media	No
Talking points	See Appendix 2

Background and context

1. This meeting briefing provides you with information to support your introductory meeting with the Executive Leadership Team of the New Zealand Nurses' Organisation (NZNO). While no formal agenda has been provided, this memo seeks to cover key topics that may be raised in the 30-minute meeting.

NZNO is New Zealand's largest nursing union

2. With over 55,000 members, NZNO represents around 35,000 Health NZ nurses and other health professionals, including midwives, students, healthcare assistants and some allied health professionals.
3. NZNO's industrial services include legal services, professional indemnity insurance, wage and working conditions, negotiations and campaigning for key issues affecting members.

4. NZNO's professional services include support and development through education and training seminars, scholarships, and grants as well as professional services and leadership through the 20 professional colleges and sections, which also provide expert knowledge and advice to the government and other national bodies.

9(2)(f)(iv) 9(2)(j)

5. NZNO is Health NZ's largest collective agreement (CA).

s 9(2)(j)

Matters for discussion

9(2)(f)(iv), 9(2)(j)

12. On 7 February 2025, NZNO pushed the issue of culturally safe staffing to the fore. Kerri Nuku, Kaiwhakahaere, NZNO, was quoted in an article for- and in an interview on Radio NZ—see [More Māori nurses urgently needed - NSO kaiwhakahaere | RNZ News](#).
13. NZNO called on Health NZ to:
 - hire more Māori nurses
 - make sure nurses have the cultural competency necessary to provide patients with culturally-appropriate care, and
 - ensure 'culturally safe' work environments, in which nurses' cultural identity is

valued.

14. As at 24 March 2024, just over 17% of New Zealanders were Māori, while Māori nurses comprised just under 7% of all nurses with an Annual Practicing Certificate. 6.5% of Health NZ nurses identify as Māori. The district with the highest percentage of Māori nurses is Tairāwhiti District with around 31% of the nursing being Māori.
15. New Zealand is currently around 9% Pacific, while Pacific nurses comprise just under 4% of the Health NZ nursing workforce as at September 2024. The highest number of Pacific nurses work in the Northern (68%) and Central regions (20%).
16. s 9(2)(j)

17. For key messages on nurse-to-patient ratios, CCDM, and safe staffing, see Annex 2 - Talking points.

HNZ largely shares NZNO's priorities for the nursing workforce

18. Health NZ engaged with NZNO in the development of the Health Workforce Plan 2024 – 2027, focusing on NZNO's priorities for the nursing workforce over the next three years, namely:
 - supporting Māori nursing growth, retention and development
 - improving the sustainability of domestic nursing pipelines, and
 - creating strengthened pathways for health care assistants and kaiāwhina to progress to nursing roles if they so choose.
19. We consider these priorities well aligned to Health NZ's priorities for nursing – although we also intend to focus on supporting relative specialisation of nurses.
20. Health NZ is committed to developing a culturally safe and competent leadership and workforce and implementing Te Mauri o Rongo as core values in combination with the health sector principles expressed in the Pae Ora legislation.

Nursing and midwifery workforce – a current snapshot

21. The total New Zealand nursing workforce – which includes enrolled nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners – has grown from 77,634 at the end of 2023 to 85,749 at the end of December 2024.
22. As at September 2024, Health NZ had more nurses employed in hospitals than ever before, with 29,471 full time equivalent (FTE) nurses and 1,135.7FTE midwives employed across the country. Our vacancy rate for nursing has dropped to 3.7% as at September 2024.
23. We continue to actively recruit nurses in specialist areas such as mental health and addictions, and critical care, or in regions where shortage remain.

Health NZ supporting the employment of new graduate nurses

24. Managing the entry of new graduate nurses into districts is a normal part of the cycle of recruitment into the nursing workforce. While the Safe Staffing Accord agreement (30 July 2018 www.nzno.org.nz/get_involved/campaigns/safe_staffing/effective_implementation_accord) with nursing unions does not guarantee employment in the sector, it does obligate Health NZ to facilitate access to training and employment opportunities, however NZNO views Health NZ as reneging on its commitment to graduate nurses by not employing all new graduates.
25. Health NZ remains committed to supporting the employment of nurse graduates into employment. However, given HNZ low turnover in nursing roles (down to 1.9%) and a need to maximise health funding, we are making it easier for non-Health NZ entities (funded providers) to hire graduate nurses in 2024 and 2025 to ensure graduates have employment options in New Zealand. That said, Health NZ is likely the employer of choice for most nurse graduates due to current employment primary care and community conditions (see Pay Parity section for more details).

Funding to non-Health NZ employers to hire more graduates

26. In November 2024, we announced funding to incentivise other non-Health NZ employers to hire more graduate nurses, with up to \$20,000 available to employers per graduate nurse, subject to eligibility criteria. These incentive payments are expected to enable an additional 200 nurses to be employed in New Zealand than would otherwise be the case.

Expansion of the Advanced Choice of Employment process promotes hiring of graduates

27. The Advanced Choice of Employment (ACE) scheme was developed to simplify the application process for new graduates wanting to apply for their first positions within New Zealand. It simplifies the recruitment process for graduates by using a centralised process which simultaneously considers the applicant's workplace (District) preference as well as the district's preference of applicants. It is beneficial for applicants as they only need to apply once to ACE for any position within the districts and are placed only into positions with Districts that they have expressed their interest in joining. It is beneficial for the districts as they see applications only from those graduates who have expressed interest in joining them. Under the Safe Staffing Accord (para 24), Health NZ is committed to support the employment of new domestic graduate nurses who apply via ACE nursing process.
28. Up to 1,679 nursing graduates were expected to seek employment through the ACE process based on registrations, which closed on 3 September 2024.
29. Following the ACE process, remaining participants had the option to enter a 'talent pool'. As at 7 February 2025, there were 562 graduate nurses remaining in the talent pool.

Internationally Qualified Nurses (IQNs)

30. Employment of domestically trained nurses, including new graduates, remains a priority for Health NZ. However, there will always be some level of reliance on internationally qualified nurses (IQNs) within our health system. As at September 2024, New Zealand has 46.3% of the nursing workforce being foreign trained, which is higher than most other OECD countries; in 2021, New Zealand was second highest in the OECD for the proportion of foreign-trained nurses.
31. The reliance on IQNs does not contribute to our strategic goal of growing our workforce and increasing Māori and Pacific workforce to represent the populations that they serve.

However, we acknowledge and value the contributions that IQN make to our workforce.

32. Reports of IQNs being unable to find employment in New Zealand ran in the media in August 2024—see [Qualified foreign nurses struggling to find work in New Zealand](#) reports.
33. Health NZ will continue to work with the Ministry of Health and the Nursing Council to monitor and respond to all trends and emerging issues associated with IQNs in New Zealand.

Pay parity for aged care, primary, community and urgent care

34. Health NZ MECA offers higher rates of pay/REM than the funded or private sectors, creating imbalance in the non-HNZ sector with harder to recruit to vacancy and/or drift of nurses to HNZ seeking higher pay and better conditions. You received an overview of NZNO salary growth and a comparison to Australian nursing wages via an information request on 3 February 2025 (Appendix 3).
35. To address service disruption from nurses in the primary and community sector moving to Health NZ positions, a \$200 million per annum initiative launched last year to address pay disparity in the funded sector including nurses employed by rural hospital providers. The funding achieved approximately 95% of the Health NZ rates as at December 2022, but subsequently the Health NZ pay equity settlement and collective bargaining settlement increased the wage gap back to about 20%.
36. NZNO has now made a number of pay equity claims for nurses in the primary and community sector.s 9(2)(j)

s 9(2)(j), s 9(2)(h)



Appendix 1: Biographies of attendees

The NZNO Executive team is comprised of the following individuals, all of who will attend this meeting:

- **Paul Goulter, Chief Executive:** Mr Goulter commenced his role in February 2022. He has an extensive career in the trade union movement (FinSec and NZEI) and since commencing his employment with NZNO has adopted a strong and vocal position on the status of the nursing pay equity claim and perceived health system crisis.
- **Kerri Nuku, Kaiwhakahaere:** Ms Nuku is of Ngāti Kahungunu and Tainui descent, has a background in clinical nursing and midwifery, and has been active in the role as NZNO's Kaiwhakahaere since 2008.
- **Anne Daniels, President:** Ms Daniels was elected to the role in September 2022. She is a Senior Nurse in the Emergency Department at Dunedin Hospital.
- Kaiwhakahaere Kerri Nuku and President Anne Daniels are the NZNO joint leadership positions based on partnership, with shared oversight responsibilities. This includes such areas as policy and strategy, NZNO's external relationships, membership groups and networks, co-chairing meetings and being the public face of the board and members.

Appendix 2: Talking points

9(2)(g)(i)

9(2)(g)(i)

s 9(2)(g)(i)