Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa
NEW ZEALAND NURSES ORGANISATION

Professional Nursing Advisor Report for Mental Health Nurses Section BGM 2026

Tēnā koutou and thank you for the opportunity to present the NZNO Professional Nursing Advisor report.

I have only recently come to work with your komiti and wish to sincerely acknowledge and thank them for their dedication and many volunteer hours put into this important mahi. Nursing, as a profession, is under attack from role creep, chronic under-resourcing, increasing service demand, and ongoing workforce shortages. The komiti advocate strongly for the role of nursing in mental health and for safe patient care in therapeutic environments.

They have recently provided feedback to the Chief Mental Health Nurse on proposals relating to acute inpatient units, surveyed members on the Phase 4 Police handover in emergency departments and are actively contributing to the Mental Health Workforce Support Programme. This important work aims to address workforce challenges and strengthen quality and safety across mental health services. Key workstreams include safe staffing, violence and aggression prevention and management, and recruitment and retention strategies. The programme is led by the Chief Nurse Mental Health and Addictions and represents a significant opportunity to influence system-wide improvements for both nurses and those who use mental health services.

For the komiti to remain sustainable and responsive to emerging opportunities, it is important that all eight committee positions are filled. We are particularly keen to strengthen Māori representation and to ensure the committee includes members with experience from acute inpatient mental health settings. A diverse and representative committee is essential to ensuring the voices and perspectives of members across mental health nursing are reflected in its mahi.

The following is a snapshot of NZNO activities for 2025/2026:

Collective bargaining activity continues across Aged Care, Primary Health and community services, with NZNO supporting members through active negotiations, pay equity work, change proposals, and ongoing issues such as staffing, overtime consistency and employer engagement. NZNO is strengthening visibility and advocacy, with Age Safe training being rolled out, and new tools such as Age care understaffing and whanaū impact online reporting. Because bargaining environments are shifting quickly, members are encouraged to follow the CEO's fortnightly updates for the most current information.

The Ministry of Health released a document called "Putting Patients First – modernising the health workforce." This document undermines the nurse's role, prioritising political mandates over public safety and replacing the profession's core values with government priorities. NZNO objected to this attack on health workforce regulation. The Ministry of Health's analysis of this document revealed political overreach in regulating health practitioners. The Minister introduced the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act Amendment Bill to the House of Parliament before the House closed for this election cycle. There are potential issues that may emerge from the amended legislation regulating nurses. Again, please keep an eye on the fortnightly CEO to keep informed about any proposed changes following the election and how NZNO members can be involved.

I appreciate the national committee's responsiveness in engaging with national issues, including ongoing mahi on the Mental Health workgroup. This initiative, which came from Bargaining with TE Whatu Ora, aims to address staffing challenges and ensure quality and safety across mental health services. Key workstreams include: quality and safe staffing, violence and aggression management, and recruitment and vacancy management.

Pay Equity

The next phase of NZNO's Pay Equity campaign under Maranga Mai! has been advancing. NZNO is the largest union in health with the largest female dominant workforce and the only union with PE claims being progressed under the amended act (Plunket and Hospice). NZNO's approach is to build national visibility, support organising in worksites, and progress claims in ways that pursue outcomes for members and the operation of the amended law.

NZNO Medico-Legal Forum

The 2026 Medico Legal Forums were held in July in Christchurch and Auckland (which was also hosted online). The forum offered essential legal and professional updates for nurses, featuring NZNO medicolegal experts, the Nursing Council, and the Health and Disability Commissioner. The programme covered unsafe staffing and professional obligations, whistleblowing and advocacy, AI in nursing, Code of Conduct updates, informed consent, and practical workshops led by Professional Nursing Advisors. With recent cases and regulatory insights presented directly by sector leaders, this forum provided a timely and highly relevant, practice-ready guidance.

Student Survey 2025

This occurs every two years, undertaken by the NZNO National Student Unit (NSU).
Key implications and recommendations include:

- Financial hardship and placement poverty -requires system level responses such as paid or financially supported placements, bursaries and flexible pathways.
- Bullying, incivility and unsafe learning environments remain prevalent.
- Preceptor training, clear policy and robust reporting processes are needed.
- Graduates continue to report feeling under prepared, reinforcing the need for strong transition to practice programmes.
- Cultural safety and rainbow/takatāpui competence require consistent, co-designed inclusion across curricula.
- Student mental wellbeing requires urgent attention, including assessment load reform and genuinely accessible support services.
- Engagement with students as co designers of education and workforce solutions is essential.

The NSU is currently highlighting these issues via a social media campaign and NZNO together with NSU has just released a policy position to ay nursing students a weekly allowance while they're on clinical placement.

Please view the annual report for further details from all parts of Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO Annual Report, 2025-2026.pdf

Ki te Kotahi te kākaho, ka whati; ki te kāpuia, e kore e whati.

Michelle McGrath, Professional Nursing Advisor, Tōpūtanga Tapuhi Kaitiaki o Aotearoa NZNO