

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister of New Zealand
By email: j.ardern@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Jacinda,

2020 is the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, and while we have done our bit to support the health of all the peoples of our nation, we are pretty disappointed that we have not been able to achieve a resolution to our long running pay negotiations in the Primary Health Care (PHC) MECA.

The issue for our 3200 PHC members employed in more than 500 general practices and accident and medical centres is the disparity between their pay rates and those of their colleagues who work for DHBs. PHC members have proven during this year that their work is invaluable as the front line response to the global pandemic.

The employers of our PHC members say they cannot afford to pay any more than they have offered due to the gap in the funding they receive. They have joined with us in lobbying the Ministry and DHBs to help find the money that would provide for pay parity but at this point this has been to no avail.

We have held two national rounds of stop work meetings and have already held a one day strike. We don't want to escalate this protest but we need to be heard. Jacinda, this is just not a fair situation.

At stop work meetings on 30 September members overwhelmingly passed a resolution to commence a ballot for further industrial action if, by 14 October, additional funding could not be allocated to allow negotiations to resume. This timeframe has been proposed in good faith to allow for a resolution without further disruption to services, but please understand members are very frustrated and angry at having to consider further strike action.

Our members would like to know the answers to these questions.

1. Is it fair to ask this group of nurses to have a standard of living 10.6 percent lower than their DHB colleagues with the same skills and qualifications?
2. Did you know many of the other workers covered by this bargaining, i.e. the medical receptionists and administrators, do not even receive the living wage?
3. With the impact this pay disparity has on recruitment and retention, is it fair to put staff who choose to stay in Primary Health under pressure because they are short-staffed?
4. Your Health Minister Chris Hipkins says he can't assist, but he did step in to help sort the early childhood centres situation. Why can't he help us?
5. You have told us the Government is committed to prioritising equal pay and a lot of money has been spent on other initiatives to stimulate the economy. It would take just \$15million to provide pay parity for these nurses and other staff; aren't they worth it as the front door of the health system?
6. There is a very real potential for a crisis in recruitment to these nursing roles given 70 percent of our members are thinking of leaving Primary Health. What is your plan to resolve this shortage of nurses and support workers in this sector?

In this Year of the Nurse and the Midwife you have the chance to recognise the value of all nurses and midwives and those who support their work. Given the year we have had, what better way of

achieving that is there than to urgently resolve this matter; to acknowledge the value of their work; and to show you want them to continue to use their expertise in keeping us healthy?

We know you will do your best for us as you have been doing for everyone.

Kia kaha,

Chris Wilson | Industrial Advisor, Primary Health Care Sector
New Zealand Nurses Organisation | 03 353 1224 | 027 471 3987