

NZCCSS Submission the Productivity Commissioner on Immigration, Productivity and Wellbeing:

Contact Name:	Nikki Hurst
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Organisation Name:	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)
Organisation description:	<p>The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on proposals to strengthen protections against incitement of hatred and discrimination. NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.</p> <p>NZCCSS represents over 250 member organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz</p>

Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

The closure of New Zealand's borders in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the corresponding skills shortages in a range of sectors, including the aged care sector, has highlighted the contribution made by migrant workers to New Zealand's labour market and communities.

The work of NZCCSS member organisations includes the provision of services to older people both in residential care settings, and in the community (i.e. retirement villages, rest home care, specialist dementia hospital care, day care programmes, and homecare support).

NZCCSS feedback to the Productivity Commissioner on the issues paper primarily focuses on the need for a migration policy to be responsive to New Zealand's aging population and need for an aged care workforce with capacity to provide the services needed today and in the future.

We would welcome to opportunity to discuss the points below with you more fully, and to remain engaged throughout this process.

Key points NZCCSS wishes to highlight to the Productivity Commission's inquiry:

1. Immigration policy should include a reference to and incorporate Te Tiriti O Waitangi, and Te Ao Māori.
2. Immigrant nurses and healthcare workers are a valued part of the aged care sector and their role will continue due to a severe shortage of New Zealanders nurses entering the age care settings.
3. Recent government initiatives will simplify the pathway to residence for around 5,000 age care workers who are already working in Aotearoa. A corresponding accelerated and simplified pathway to attract new migrant nurses and care workers from overseas is also needed. NZCCSS urges the Government to step in and support whole sectors to work together to fill skills shortages in areas crucial to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders
4. An urgent and considered review of the ability for migrants to have their qualifications accepted in Aotearoa

1. Te Tiriti O Waitangi and Te Ao Māori

NZCCSS acknowledges Te Tiriti O Waitangi as the founding document as the founding document of Aotearoa. And in that acknowledgment our collective obligation to ensure the agreement is upheld and honoured in any and all legislation drafted in Aotearoa.

NZCCSS strongly advocates for ongoing and meaningful involvement of iwi in the development of immigration policy. It is widely acknowledged that immigration has had a destructive impact on iwi, whānau and hapu. As the tangata tiriti, we believe any revision to the Immigration Act should include a clause requiring consultation with iwi leadership on all migration strategies and policies.

In addition, we support the inclusion of Te ao Māori perspectives into any future redesign of immigration policy, with a particular emphasis on manaakitanga and rangatiratanga.

2. Acute Shortage of registered nurses and healthcare assistance in aged care settings.

The closure of New Zealand's boarder in 2020 due to Covid-19, has exacerbated existing health workforce shortages. Recent data (NZ Aged Care Association) indicates more than 900 unfilled nursing vacancies in rest homes and about 1500 in DHBs. This situation is not sustainable. We are already hearing some services are unable to take on new admissions due to a shortage of skilled staff, placing undue stress on the older person who may require rest home care, and their family and whānau who may be unable to provide the skilled care required to care for their relative, particularly where there is early onset of dementia.

The following data provides a clear indication of the gravity of the workforce shortages in the aged care sector experienced across for-profit and not-for-profit.

- Across Aged Residential Care, Registered Nurse vacancies currently stand at 730 with 170 working out notice (900 in total).
- 15 Aged Residential Care sites have either closed beds or turned away admissions due to shortages of Registered Nurse's.
- 82 sites have experienced challenges maintaining 'safe' staffing levels.
- 860 Registered Nurses have resigned or handed in their notice since 1 March 2021.
- 60% of Registered Nurses are going to DHB public hospitals, 30% to other Aged Residential Care providers, 6% to MIQ, 8% to work as vaccinators, 12% to another health provider outside of aged care.
- Main reason given for leaving is higher pay package at DHBs (70%).

- 300 Registered Nurses are waiting on Immigration New Zealand for visa finalisation, or are waiting on New Zealand Nursing Council registration.

(Source: New Zealand Aged Care Association Audit of Members July 2021)

3. Current visa system

Since Covid-19 New Zealand's international borders have closed leaving the Critical Workers Scheme as the only visa available to Registered Nurses and healthcare workers wanting to enter New Zealand for work. Earlier in 2021 NZCCSS raised strong concerns about the expiry of essential skills visas in February 2021 and the pending departure of thousands of migrant workers from the aged care sector. An extension was issued to the essential skills visa in July 2021 providing a reprieve to sector.

Recent government initiatives will simplify the pathway to residence for around 165,000 migrants already working in Aotearoa. Members report that this measure will go some way to retain skilled workers in aged care services (approx. 5,000) who were otherwise at risk of leaving New Zealand.

While this is a positive move, overseas nurses and care workers with jobs in New Zealand continue to wait to enter Aotearoa. NZCCSS supports a corresponding accelerated and simplified pathway to attract migrant nurses and care workers. We would also urge Government to step in and support whole sectors to work together to fill skills shortages in areas crucial to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

New Zealand has an ageing population. The number of people aged 65+ doubled between 1991 and 2020, to reach 790,000. The number is projected to double again by 2056. [Statistics NZ]. In addition, the latest Dementia Economic Impact Reports (DEIR) indicates nearly three per cent of all New Zealanders will have dementia by 2050, including over 10 per cent of our 65+ population. This is a 240 per cent increase in dementia numbers in the next 30 years. <https://cdn.alzheimers.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Dementia-Economic-Impact-Report-2020.pdf>.

Migrants who work in aged care either as nurses or health assistant or any other role are highly valued. Bluntly with many other opportunities available it can be hard to attract existing citizens to this work. However, with the rapidly ageing population and increased complexity of aged care work we simply need a very large amount of people to do the mahi. Migrants are critical to Aotearoa's aging population being able to age well.

4. An urgent and considered review of the ability for migrants to have their qualifications accepted in Aotearoa

Many migrants have qualifications from their own countries that are unable to be recognised here in New Zealand. The system built to assess these qualifications are blunt discriminatory and racist.

An urgent review of these processes is required to ensure equity and pay parity among migrants. Where there are pathways these are generally broad, blunt, and costly. We are doing a disservice to our migrants in this space and need collective work between NZQA, TEC and related regulatory bodies