



United Nations Universal Periodic Review

September 2023

Kupu Whakataki | Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand is part of the United Nations (UN). Every five years, the UN Human Rights Council completes a Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which looks at a nation's progress on a range of human rights issues. Aotearoa New Zealand has had these completed in 2009, 2014 and 2019. Our fourth UPR is currently underway and due for release in 2024.

As part of this process, feedback is welcomed from the public and organisations. In-person and online public consultations were held in early 2023. Written submissions are open until 11 October 2023. It is advised that these submissions should describe the human rights issues of concern and include recommendations for what the Government could do to improve this. For more information on UPRs, click [here](#).

This submission, made by the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) focusses on the rights of older people in Aotearoa New Zealand. It has been prepared by our Older People policy group made up of representatives from all of our members, who work with older people in their communities all around the motu.

We submitted this to the UPR portal on 22 September 2023.

Whakarāpopototanga Matua | Executive Summary

Aotearoa New Zealand is a country with a strong sense of social responsibility, but does this extend to our older citizens?

Older New Zealanders are consistently left out of decision-making processes and ageing is seldom incorporated into national strategies as a discrete issue. The support systems for older people are underfunded and under constant strain. This flows on to significant long-term implications for our crisis-ridden Aged Residential Care sector. Ageism is embedded so thoroughly it is not considered a problem, and decisions that result in significant negative impacts on older people are made consistently without consideration to their wellbeing. There is a consistent lack of focus and action from successive Governments that is increasing social risk.

We call on the Government to commit to the creation and maintenance of Older Persons poverty monitor, incorporate ageing into the national health strategy, and take specific action to grow and support the not-for-profit Age-Related Residential Care (ARRC) sector.

Papamuri | Background

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services was established in 1968 with the mission of working towards a just and compassionate society for all who live in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is pursued through advocacy, information sharing, and input into policy development via consultation and submission.

We represent the social service branches of the six largest national Christian churches of Aotearoa New Zealand – the Anglican Care Network, the Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Methodist Church New Zealand, Presbyterian Support, and the Salvation Army.

We function in three discrete areas of policy – Older People, Children and Families, and Equity and Inclusion – with an overarching lens of Christian Love and Hope and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) across all our work. Each of these policy groups comprises several individuals from within our member organisations, providing a wide sample of insights and information from across the nation.

This report has been prepared by our Older Persons policy group and takes the Human Rights of Older People as its specific lens. This report draws strongly from our membership’s observations of how Aotearoa New Zealand is upholding the Articles of MIPAA (Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing – read it [here](#)) and the Elements of UNPOP (United Nations Principles for Older People – read them [here](#)).

Ngā Wahi o Āwangawanga | Areas of Concern

Item 1: Inclusion of Older People in Developmental Agendas

As it relates to UNPOP 6, MIPAA 7, 8, and 17

Since the previous review, there have been a large number of national frameworks set out by Ministries to direct policy action over the next work period. Regrettably, few of these have had specific consultation with older people, nor had older people as a key focus in their development.

We find this to be particularly concerning in the development of “Te Pae Ora” - the new National Health Strategy. Five specific focus groups (Māori, Pacific Peoples, Disabled People, Women, and Rural Health) were identified with their own separate strategies to sit alongside Te Pae Ora. Older people were only noted discretely as the cause of future stresses on the system in terms of sustainability and healthcare costing. The specific benefits of improving health care system savings and efficacy of age-based strategies, not the individual healthcare outcomes of those who they would be applied to.

Another area of notable concern is the exclusion of Older Persons strategies in “Te Pae Tawhiti” - the service delivery model from the Ministry of Social Development. Despite the fact that every person over 65 in Aotearoa New Zealand is eligible for superannuation – thus becoming a beneficiary – there are no specific steps in the delivery model designed to create improved access for older people to beneficiary services. In addition, recent reports from the Ministry itself¹ identified that 8% of all people over 65 are receiving a form of income support in addition to their superannuation – an enormous cohort (of 55,100 in 2018) to not take into consideration when designing new frameworks for service delivery.

In many cases, policy intended to support ageing and older people relegated to improving overall disability support. While we applaud the work being done towards the greater support of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand, ageing is a discrete issue which requires sometimes-overlapping support structures, not complete enmeshment.

The Office for Seniors - part of the Ministry for Social Development - is progressing age-specific work that has made strides, but this is not integrated into wider holistic strategies. Government silos, particularly for funding, is an on-going challenge. This means that while specific funding is available for initiatives supporting older people, it is challenging to have applications for holistic programmes accepted.

Item 2: Sustainability of Support for Older People

As it relates to UNPOP 10 and MIPPA 5, 12, 13, and 17

Each aspect of the system designed to support older people in Aotearoa New Zealand is in crisis. Nowhere is this more apparent than in age-related residential care. Not only do we not have enough beds to meet the demands on the sector as projected within the next 15 years, but current facilities are also being forced to restrict intakes or close altogether due to insufficient funding for necessary maintenance, staffing, and upgrades. This is leaving individuals who rely on the subsidised care options provided by NGOs with fewer options that keep them connected to their families, communities, and cultures, which directly impacts on their wellbeing.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Government does not directly provide age related residential care facilities. It relies exclusively on the provision of such care by a mixture of NGOs and For-profit providers who receive funding for providing care for individuals who meet the subsidy thresholds. Meeting the requirements to provide “appropriate levels of institutional care” as per UNPOP 13 therefore means ensuring that the funding provided to ARRC providers meets the needs of the sector in such a way that they can serve older people. Neglecting to appropriately support ARRC facilities and NGOs who maintain them is tantamount to neglecting the people who rely on these facilities for their care.

Ageing in place is considered to be a holistic and culturally safe lifestyle choice, but the funding model to access the support to do so is not fit for purpose. Providers are limited in their efficacy by strict, prescriptive forms of support for the older people they support. This inflexibility means that the service cannot fully meet the needs it is intended to. In addition, poor wages for kaiāwhina (support workers) in this sector means that existing staff are overextended and overworked, further reducing service capacity. Ageing in place meets several key elements of UNPOP and MIPAA, as well as mana motuhake (self-determination) which is key for culturally safe care provision.

Funding streams are heavily siloed within government agencies, as each seeks to meet its specific directives. Without overarching support for older people, there is limited capacity for holistic care that meets their physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs. When providers seek funding for programmes designed to meet these needs, they find themselves unable to meet specific ministerial requirements due to the lack of specific governmental support structure for older people.

Item 3: Ongoing Ageism in Aotearoa New Zealand

As it relates to UNPOP 18, and MIPAA 5, 7, and 19

Ageism is the last socially acceptable form of discrimination. We have excellent work by the Office for Seniors and the Aged Care Commissioner, but the lack of wider integration into policy and framework means that older people are often seen as simply a part of disability frameworks instead of a discrete cohort with unique needs and considerations. We have no targeted workstreams to combat ageism, and many of the widespread decisions in recent years – one example being the removal of cheques as a form of payment, and the relocation of key financial services to online platforms only – are actively ageist in their implementation.

Aotearoa New Zealand has implemented strong reporting procedures for the monitoring of child poverty but has failed to instigate any adult poverty measures. We cannot combat what we cannot measure, and as a result we have no understanding of the number of older people in Aotearoa New Zealand living in material deprivation or poverty.

Whakatutukitanga | Achievements

We would like to take this opportunity to outline our support and gratitude for the work being done on behalf of older people through the Office for Seniors. Specifically, the work done through the Better Later Life Action Plan. The holistic nature of this plan would address many of our concerns, should other areas of the government appropriately integrate their service provision with the plan.

We also wish to show support and gratitude for Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development) for engaging widely in consultation regarding the Long-Term impacts that the ageing population will have on housing and infrastructure. The Long-Term Insights Briefing compiled from this process demonstrates how it is possible and effective to embed ageing into strategies and policy instead of having it stand alongside more 'core' workstreams.

We welcome to government the role of the Aged Care Commissioner as of March 2022. We hope this new role will ensure that this sector has a stronger voice and greater presence.

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

We call on the government of Aotearoa New Zealand to institute three specific priorities to support older people.

- 1) We call for the creation of a system of measuring and monitoring poverty in older people, as has been done with child poverty. That which we cannot measure, we cannot improve.
- 2) We call for a specific Older Persons Health strategy to be developed alongside Te Pae Ora and its existing complementary targeted health strategies, as well as Te Pae Tawhiti to support older people accessing social benefits. All Ministries should have it as policy to consider marginalised groups in policy, and older people must be included in this list.
- 3) We call for the reassessment and improvement of funding levels and holistic funding strategies for Age Related Residential Care to ensure the sustainability of this sector.

Tohutoro | References

¹ Older People experiencing vulnerability and multiple disadvantage in New Zealand (2023) Social Wellbeing Agency, Ministry of Social Development and The New Zealand Government.

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/older-people-experiencing-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-in-new-zealand/older-people-vulnerability-and-multiple-disadvantage-june.pdf>
