

**Maori Party Responses  
Carers New Zealand  
October 2008**

**Do you have a policy on carers/caring?**

The Maori Party will promote and strengthen whanau-based and home-based care options for older people and people with disabilities to choose to remain in their homes, connected to their family and social networks. These options need to be better resourced – particularly the pay rates and training of home-based carers; and the respite care arrangements for whanau-based carers.

The current rates of pay in the aged care sector are far too low, and vastly beneath comparative rates received by health care assistants in DHBs. The Maori Party supports the call from the NZNO for pay parity across the aged care sector.

We know that aged care workers are often Maori and Pasifika women. The 2006 Census revealed that the median annual income for Māori women aged 15 years and over was \$17,800. We have a problem with embedded low wages in this country, and this burden more often than not falls on Maori and Pasifika women. Pay disparity is obviously a major issue for Maori women. We have called for the minimum wage to be raised to at least \$15 per hour, as we believe this would lead to a massive improvement in the lives of those that currently have to subsist on the minimum wage.

We want to see quality provision of kaupapa Maori services. We believe, if Maori health is about treating Maori then let Maori be part of the solution. Let's support, foster and develop a sustainable Maori health workforce – including pay parity between Maori and the public health sector.

Currently, caregivers are compromised by high staff to patient ratios, meaning that our elderly people and people with disabilities are not being given the level of care they deserve. This is hard on staff, those being cared for and their families. We will support measures to see minimum staffing levels introduced, as this is critical for the provision of safe, quality care.

Safe care also requires adequate training for all staff, including cultural safety training. We support the need to improve access to training and education for aged care workers who want to upskill or achieve national qualifications. A more skilled workforce has positive ramifications for the entire sector.

**How do you rate its importance as an issue for your party?**

These changes are desperately needed, and we look forward to backing them after the election.

**Do you support the recently launched New Zealand Carers' Strategy and its Five Year Action Plan? Would you endorse it if you were part of the government?**

The Maori Party is supportive of the newly launched strategy, and are particularly interested in how Maori are to be included in the development of the strategy as it progresses, and how their input will actually be reflected. As such, one area for further work, is the development of connections and synergies between the strategy and iwi care initiatives and social service programmes.

We are also committed towards:

- Implementing recommendations of the Health Workforce Advisory Committee paper, *'Care and support in the Community setting'*
- Giving priority to developing an action plan based on the Public Health Advisory Committee report, *'Health is everyone's business'*;
- Promoting and supporting inter-sectoral models
- Improving IT infrastructure and capability – including highspeed broadband in rural areas.

**How would you improve on this progress during your time in government?**

A greater investment is needed to be able to offer carers pay parity, to ensure the adequate retention of carers, and to increase the opportunities for carers to access further training and education. As noted above, work needs to be undertaken to link the strategy with the plethora of initiatives and programmes being developed and offered by iwi health and social service providers.

Effective planning and development strategies must be in place to ensure a self-sustainable health workforce.

We have been proud of the work NZNO has championed in fighting for Maori and Iwi Primary Health Care providers to be funded adequately to offer their workers pay parity with DHB health professionals. We have supported this work, promoting the goals of Te Rau Kokiri – the tikanga based partnership negotiated between NZNO and some sixty Māori and Iwi Primary Health providers.

**What do YOU think is the major issue facing carers in New Zealand?**

Low nursing morale, inappropriate and unsafe staffing levels and skill mix, appalling rates of pay, lack of training and the increased casualisation of nursing have long been associated with this sector, and yet, year after year, devoted caregivers and support staff continue to work in this industry as a

labour of love. A major issue is being able to retain adequate numbers of carers to enable those who need to be cared for, to receive care to a quality level. The most significant issues affecting retention, are the inadequate levels of pay and access to training.

We, as a nation, must demonstrate our labour of love in rewarding the expertise of caregivers and take actions which demonstrate that we value the wellbeing of our older New Zealanders.