



**Hui E! Community Aotearoa**

**General Election 2017  
Ngā Take Whakahirahira a  
Hapori - Community Priorities**

***Hui E!***  
Community Aotearoa

## **Acknowledgements**

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As many of you know, Hui E! Community Aotearoa seeks to promote, strengthen and connect the Community Sector – tangata whenua organisations and the broad voluntary and community sector – charities, incorporated societies, clubs, boards, trusts, and informal community groups – so with this report we are able to advocate your commitment and passion towards our country becoming so much more enriched.

Ngā mihi nui  
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# Introduction

The 2017 elections are quickly approaching. For those citizens hoping to make an informed decision this September, it has become increasingly important for them to familiarize themselves with the key issues surrounding the election. After all, the people who we elect in will be responsible for leading the country over the next three years, and the policy decisions that they make could have lasting effects for much longer after that. Over the past few years in particular, there have been several peculiar and controversial elections abroad. While New Zealand does not seem poised for any major shocks this year, we do believe that a dialogue must be had between the government sector and the community sector in order to successfully achieve common goals. For those members of parliament who are seeking reelection and those who are opposing them, knowing what the communities that they will represent want and need will help them to improve the state of the country once in office. When the government and the community sector can work together, community needs at large are more properly addressed.

## Themes

### Community-Wide Issues

Every community organisation has goals unique to the communities and people for which it advocates. Despite a wide variety of identified issues, a common community-wide theme seemed to appear between a majority of community sector voices. In general, the community sector wants a government that will provide better support for the people of New Zealand who are disadvantaged. Organisations generally advocated for policies oriented towards supporting equality, fairness, and compassion over greater competition and individualism. Specifically, the major areas of concern included housing, social disadvantages, children needs, addiction and mental health, and the environment.

### Housing

As most recent public opinion polls express, housing has become a major issue in New Zealand. Nearly half of the community sector voices that we talked to mentioned housing concerns as a top priority. Primarily, organisations expressed concerns regarding the lack of available affordable living. While this issue exists across all communities, the New Zealand National Council for Fijian Communities appeared particularly worried that minority groups including indigenous Pacific Island peoples have been especially affected by the rising costs of owning a home. In addition to concerns over cost, some organisations, such as Community Networks Wellington and Action Station, also express concerns about the security and health of places where people live. Action Station noted that rental homes, which exist as the only option for many people due to the steep increases in housing costs, do not have to adhere to national standards to ensure that the properties are properly suited for tenants. As a result, these homes might not have proper security and often lack sufficient insulation as well.

In order to address the lack of housing and increase in homelessness, community organisations have pointed towards a few government efforts as possible solutions. Groups, including Equality Network and Community Waikato, hope to

see large scale government-sponsored housing reforms. Equality Network specified that it hopes to see government-funded construction programs that can provide affordable homes and maintain long-term tenure. Aligning with their concern over rental homes, Action Station also hopes to see government measures aimed at protecting rental home ownership. They believe that the government needs to implement national rental standards in order to protect people who are unable to afford homes. While much of the community sector believes that something should be done to address the housing crisis, sector members recognise that other factors also contribute to the homeless. Those disadvantages must also be remedied in order solve the problem at the root.

## Social Disadvantages

Along with housing, several community sector organisations expressed other concerns about disadvantaged groups, particularly those living in poverty. In order to address long-term solutions to the lack of affordable housing, efforts must also be put forth to tackle poverty. After all, part of the lack of homeownership stems from incomes not keeping up with the increasing rate of house prices. Community Networks Wellington, Equality Network, Gulf News Community Blog, Action Station, Community Law Centre and several other members of the community sector expressed concerns that low wages were a driving force behind the growing inequality. Some organisations also identified unemployment, poor job quality, high cost of living, and debt as contributing explanations for high poverty rates. Across the sector, community organisations are suggesting higher wages and better wage protection. Equality Network has also advocated for higher income tax brackets and better redistributive policies to help remedy financial inequality.

While poverty is a huge disadvantage that much of the community sector wants to see addressed, there were other disadvantages that organisations mentioned. Often times multiple social disadvantages intersect, creating a more deeply ingrained problem. Community sector voices expressed hopes to see policies aimed at tackling inequality in all of its forms. Equality Network identifies gender and ethnic conflicts, in addition to income and wealth, as major social disadvantages. Multicultural New Zealand believes that the government has not properly addressed issues of ingrained discrimination. It hopes to see legislation aimed at affirming and supporting multiculturalism and a government focus on taking steps towards ending institutionalized racism.

## Children Issues

Children and youth are especially vulnerable among disadvantaged people, as often times it can be especially difficult for them to advocate for their own needs. That being the case, many community sector voices expressed a desire to see greater government support for children. Nearly a third of the organisations that we talked with, including New Zealand Council for Christian Organisations, New Zealand Council of Fijian Communities, Citizens Advice Bureau Whangarei, Gulf Stream News, Child Poverty Action Group and others, identified children issues as a primary concern for this election. Organisations identify intergenerational poverty in particular as an important subject to tackle moving forward. Community policy suggestions on this subject are fairly varied. The Council of Fijian Communities, for example, expressed a desire to see more funding go towards children living in poverty, especially within islander communities. As they see it, funding children now will mean less funding needed for adults in the future. Wellington Pacific Leaders' Forum has also launched several initiatives aimed at addressing youth issues in island communities. 20/20 Trust hopes to see policies aimed towards equipping children with technology in order to prepare them for their future careers. Other community sector members have put a greater emphasis on healthcare.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in particular expressed pressing concerns about the health risks faced by children living in poverty. New Zealand Council for Christian Organisations and Waiheke Gulf News both echoed these same concerns. CPAG bases their position on the issue on research conducted on health risks associated with child poverty. Their findings showed that children living in poverty are almost twice as likely to suffer from otherwise preventable illnesses, such as pneumonia and bronchitis. Overall the number of children being hospitalised for otherwise preventable illnesses related to poverty has increased significantly since 2000. CPAG suggests several policies aimed at improving child health. They want to see universal adequate health care for children for all health needs, including insurance that covers oral care, hearing care, and general practitioner visits. They have also put forth an immediate universal common assessment plan and pathway, which would include universal enrolment at birth with a GP and national immunisation registration for all children. They also hope to see more funding for school programs to feed hungry children, and better school health care, which would include mental health care.

## **Mental Health, and Addiction**

The community sector expressed several other health care needs, most notably in the realm of mental health and addiction. This problem is especially prevalent among young people. Multicultural New Zealand, in association with Hui E!, the NZ Human Rights Commission, and the NZ National Commission for UNESCO, have been putting resources into youth workshops. Among other things, these workshops aim to identify major community problems from the perspectives of young people. One of the most common issues brought up by the youth at these conferences is mental health and addiction. Issues like crime and poverty can have an increased effect on young people who already deal with mental health issues at a high rate. CPAG included mental health treatment in what they hope to see from improved school-provided health services, and the Wellington Pacific Leaders' Forum also identified mental health as an important youth issue.

That being said, the need for improved mental health and addiction services is not unique to young people but rather resonates across the community sector. Community Networks Wellington and Action Station both identify the same problem with mental health services in New Zealand: there are insufficient resources to deal with the high demand of services. Platform Trust and Te Pou have made mental health the primary concern of their election messaging. They advocate for joint action between the government and the community sector in order to provide better support for people suffering from all sorts of mental health issues. The community sector wants to see more done for mental health awareness and support.

## **Environment**

Around a quarter of community sector organisations we talked with mentioned environmental protection as a priority for government moving forward. While this may seem divergent from the main themes of mitigating social disadvantages, we believe that a healthy environment is a common good that impacts all people. A healthy environment contributes to a healthier social climate. Many specific environmental concerns brought up by organisations had social wellbeing in mind. Action Station and One Voice Te Reo Kotahi, for example, both believe that higher standards should be put in place to protect freshwater. One Voice Te Reo Kotahi worry about the standards of freshwater areas intended for swimming. Action station expressed concerns about the quality of water used by bottling companies.

A few organisations have brought policy ideas to the table to correct for the lapses in environmental protection. One thing that could make a difference is better funding for the Department of Conservation. Recreation New Zealand and One Voice Te Reo Kotahi have both sent messages to government expressing concerns that funding has not kept up with the increased responsibilities of the DOC. Community Recycling Network has proposed increasing levies on waste disposed in municipal landfills and on plastic bags in order to generate more funding for environmental protection measures. They also hope to see government efforts towards effective product stewardship schemes to prevent excess waste created by end of life tyres and beverage containers.

## Sector-Specific Issues

While the organisations we researched and spoke with advocated for many policy ideas to address community problems, part of the solution, they agree, must come from better collaboration between community sector organisations and the government. The community sector wants its relationship with government to improve, and it sees this election as a prime opportunity to start strengthening connections. Over half of the organisations that we interviewed directly expressed a desire for government programs to work better with the community sector. While this sentiment has multiple facets, organisations across the sector want improved recognition and support so that the two sectors can continue to work together moving forward.

## Recognising the Value of the Sector

The general consensus from our community sector research showed that most organisations want better government recognition of the value of their services. Almost half of organisations mentioned government support as a top election policy concern. According to ComVoices, the community sector is the second largest employer in the country. It provides \$6 billion to the economy annually, which makes up 2.7% of GDP. Some organisations estimate an even larger financial contribution than that. However, despite this contribution much of the community sector does not feel as though their contributions have truly been noticed. Organisations including Volunteering New Zealand, Community Law and Recreation New Zealand, as well as many others, want the government to recognise that they are playing an important role in the communities that they serve.

With better recognition of the contribution of community organisations, government might also benefit from working with community organisations. Akina Foundation requested that the government work as a partner with the community sector in order to help it work more efficiently. Inspiring Communities have taken a hardline stance in their election manifesto for greater delegation to the community sector. They argue that government-led methods for implementing social change have not been effective. Instead, they hope to see greater collaboration between government and the community sector in order to produce more innovative community-driven policies. ComVoices believes that the government should develop a better, more efficient system for contracting and collaboration between community sector organisations.

## Funding

Another common point mentioned across the community sector was a desire for better funding. Nearly every organisation that mentioned community interaction with government specifically noted community sector funding as a priority policy concern. According to ComVoices, the community sector has shrunk by 42% between 2004 and 2013 due

to lack of funding. The number of community organisations is at risk of shrinking even further if their funding needs continue to go unaddressed. Several organisations with which we talked to have either entirely run out of government funding or are on the verge of running out within the year. This includes organisations like Community Law Centre, who despite serving the legal needs of more individuals across New Zealand than any other legal aid provider, has been without funding since 2008.

From a policymaker's position, increasing community sector funding might seem somewhat difficult, especially when considering that these organisations are advocating for community policy changes that will also cost money. However, this reasoning ignores the financial and social benefits that the community sector creates and the increased social capital that a high number of community organisations creates. Some organisations have offered possible solutions to the problem of funding. Several organisations suggested new taxes and levies. These could be used to help fund organisation work or to free up funding elsewhere. Now more than ever before, community organisations are turning to social enterprise in order to make revenue. Organisations that are engaged in community enterprise suggest that government make use of these enterprises in contracting so that the government spending will have a double effect. At the very least organisations hope that available funding and commitments will not continue to decrease, which would include ties with inflation. If the government can recognise the contributions of the community sector and help them work to become even more efficient, there is no reason why we should not see better funding moving forward.

# CONCLUSIONS

## Expectations This Election

With the elections coming up soon, there are a few things that the community sector organisations hope to see from people running for office. They want to see the key community issues that they brought up addressed through discussions on actual policies. Several sector voices expressed a belief that politicians have put too much emphasis on trivial matters and not enough actual policy. The sector wants to see discussions on policies that can properly address the wide scope of the issues. Many organisations fear that when the government takes action its actions are usually small steps that do not aim to solve the problem at its root. In terms of community sector issues, the sector wants to see people running for office who are willing to work with the community sector. They want to see candidates recognise the positive impact that the sector has and who are wanting to work to help the sector stay funded and improve their work. The community sector is not satisfied with the minimal concern that they believe most of government has shown towards addressing the pressing issues. Organisations want candidates to acknowledge that not enough has been done to promote the social goods for which they are advocating. They want candidates and incumbents to share a forward-moving and policy-based vision, a vision that includes working with the community sector to achieve common goals.

## Continuing Advocacy

While common themes did emerge between the community sector members that we talked to, there were many sector concerns that this report could not cover. With the diversity and scope of issues that exist within the community sector, some issues were difficult to incorporate into our major themes or were not expressed by enough organisations to include in this report. Some of these issues included data collection and management, public transit, migrant work, tourism, recreation and specific healthcare concerns. We are also aware that there are many organisations with opinions on the issues that we mentioned beyond what has been included in this report. We encourage those organisations to reach out to politicians to make those concerns heard and to reach out to us for our post-election report, which we intend to have a larger scope and rely on more quantitative data. And finally, we encourage policymakers to listen. Many of the organisations we have referenced below have questions that they have submitted to candidates or pledges, like Platform trust's It Matters Campaign, which they have asked candidates to endorse. Many of the organisations below also have election manifestos posted on their websites. We encourage candidates to respond to those, and for organisations and individuals to be on the lookout to keep talking and advocating.

## Concluding Statement

One surprising observation from the youth workshops that Hui E! helped sponsor was a lack of feel for civic engagement. At most of these workshops, when identifying community problems and solutions, government was not once mentioned to play either positive or negative roles in the community. When the topic of civic engagement did come up, the youth who talked about it unanimously believed that it was lacking in their communities. These were young people who were willing to give up a Saturday morning through afternoon to participate in a community

organisation's discussion forum but who still did not feel a real sense of civic engagement. We believe that this disconnect needs to be addressed. In this report, we have identified several major concerns relayed to us by the community sector: homelessness, poverty, social disadvantage, children issues, mental health, and environmental protection. The sector wants to work with the government in finding solutions to these problems. If candidates work with these organisations now and leading up to the election, then we will have a stronger working government and community sector moving forward.

## **Organisations Cited**

20/20 Trust  
Action Station  
Akina Foundation  
Alzheimers NZ  
Child Poverty Action Group  
Citizens Advice Bureau Whangarei  
Community Law  
Community Networks Wellington  
Community Recycling Network  
Community Waikato  
Community Youth Workshops  
ComVoices  
Equality Network  
Inspiring Communities  
Network Waitangi Otautahi  
New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services  
New Zealand National Council of Fiji Communities  
New Zealand Recreation Association  
One Voice Te Reo Kotahi  
Platform Charitable Trust  
Transparency International NZ  
Volunteer NZ  
Waiheke Gulf News  
Wellington Central Pacific Leaders' Forum