

5/02/2025

Human Rights Team  
Policy Group  
Ministry of Justice  
SX10088  
Wellington

## **Submission on: Fifth Periodic Report on Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

Tēnā koe

Age Concern New Zealand (ACNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Fifth Periodic Report to the United Nations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Economic, social and cultural issues impact everyday life for all New Zealanders. Overall, we consider the Report summarises the important issues well and we are pleased to see rights and issues for older people mentioned specifically in several sections.

Our comments are primarily related to the relevance of the Report for the rights of older New Zealanders and where we consider the content could be strengthened.

As you will be aware, there are a growing number of people aged 65 years and older in Aotearoa New Zealand. Within ten years the over 65 population is expected to reach 1.2 million, with the over 85 age group being the fastest growing. <sup>1</sup> Over 65s are also increasingly diverse with Māori, Pasifika and Asian older populations growing at a faster rate than European / Pakeha seniors.

A common assumption is that older people are mortgage-free homeowners who can live comfortably on their superannuation and life savings. We know from the Retirement Commission that 40% of older people are dependant solely on superannuation with a further 20% having only minimal savings to supplement their pension.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://officeforseniors.govt.nz/better-later-life-strategy/> po

There is also an increasing number of older renters. There are currently about 300,000 renters who are over 65, and many are dependent on private landlords. The number of older renters is expected to double by 2048 which will have a huge impact on the living standards of many older people.

## About Age Concern New Zealand

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Age Concern New Zealand is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to support older people, their friends and whānau. We have 29 local Age Concerns operating in 40 locations throughout the country and a national office based in Wellington.

Our strategic goal is:

*Every older person feels connected, has positive choices and can age well.*

Our values of Dignity. Wellbeing. Equity and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do.

Our core services include advocacy and public awareness, social connection, health promotion, elder abuse and neglect prevention, and providing support through expert information, advice and referrals.

## Our comments and recommendations:

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### 1. Article 3 – Equality between men and women

- a. We agree with the comments made in this section, particularly comments about the Gender pay gap, clauses 91 and 92.
- b. We are pleased to see acknowledgement that the gender pay gap for Māori, Pacific, Asian and disabled women is significantly higher than the overall gap.
- c. If there are any specific actions Government is taking to reduce the gender pay gap we recommend adding them to the Report, especially given the impact of the pay gap on saving for retirement and older age. This would be stronger than simply stating “New Zealand is committed to upholding gender equality and the right for men and women to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights equally and that Government acknowledges there is still work to be done (Clause 88).

- d. We are pleased to see the acknowledgement of the disproportionate share of caring and family roles undertaken by women (Clause 89). Older people provide unpaid caregiving across generations, including for partners with health and disability issues. Older people also provide important caregiving roles for younger generations, for example, grandparents are raising grandchildren in some cases because the parents are unable to safely parent due to their own mental health and addiction conditions. Older people also provide unpaid volunteer roles that benefit the whole community such as delivering 'Meals on Wheels', driving cancer patients to appointments, after school care for working parents, which are not always recognised as contributing to the economic and social health of New Zealand society. (Clause 89). Voluntary roles impact on the gender pay gap and people's ability to save for retirement which clearly negatively impacts on women.

## **2. Article 6 - Right to work - Ageing population - Clauses 106, 113 to 115**

- a. We note that clause 113 states that New Zealand's rate of labour force participation, for people aged 65+ is high. It goes on to refer to evidence that shows some older workers face barriers when seeking or staying in employment. It would be useful to add examples of the over 65 labour force participation rates in similar countries to provide a clearer comparison.
- b. We would like the reasons behind higher number of over 65s still working in New Zealand to be included to the Report or a commitment made to investigate the causes. The Retirement Commission, for example, reported in 2024 that over a third of over 65s still working are primarily doing so due to financial pressures. This is a very different situation to working in older age because you wish to. It also points to superannuation rates being based on people owning their own home and being in a sound financial position before retirement.
- c. We are pleased with the initiatives to address the needs of older workers outlined in Clause 115. We recommend adding how the effectiveness of the initiatives will be evaluated and how the approaches will be expanded.
- d. It is important to recognise the impact that pay equity adjustments for female dominated occupations have on the charity sector where many occupations, including social work, are affected. Many of these organisations provide services for older people and their low comparative pay rates implies older people are less important. Lower pay rates also reduce recognition and the appeal of valuable career

options for working with older adults when compared to working with other age groups (Clause 106).

### **3. Article 9 – Right to social security - Clause 146:**

- a. We fully support New Zealand retaining ongoing universal entitlement to superannuation for all New Zealanders aged 65 and over who meet residency requirements.
- b. We acknowledge and support the inclusion of Clause 146 in the Report about New Zealand Superannuation. One thing that would strengthen this clause would be to add that increasing the age of entitlement would adversely impact women, Māori, Pasifika and manual workers.
- c. We recommend the report includes a statement of intent to develop an across party accord on superannuation so that New Zealanders have clarity and assurance for their future.

### **Article 10 - Protection of family life – Clause 167 to 183**

- a. We recommend including elder abuse prevention in this section of the report. Although elder abuse does not entirely fit within the Te Aorerekura Framework (National Strategy for the Elimination of Family and Sexual Violence) some attempts are being made to include issues around harm of older people (Clause 168-9).
- b. The second Te Aorerekura Action Plan (2025-30) was launched on 15 December 2024 with a focus on a reduced number of specific goals. We recommend updating this in the Report (Clause 168).
- c. The report from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care recommends significant change, including in disability support services, but not necessarily care requirements of older people who can be placed permanently in large residential care facilities. (Clause 180). We recommend broadening the focus to cover older people living in care institutions.

#### **4. Article 11 – Right to housing and adequate standard of living – Housing for older person’s clauses 217 and 218**

- a. We are pleased to see this section in the Report but would like to see it strengthened. For example, the Report needs to recognise the lack of affordable, accessible and secure housing for older New Zealanders and the decreasing number of older homeowners, along with the increasing number of older renters (20% in 2020).
- b. Although the Report refers to social housing and community housing providers Government itself needs to play a lead role in expanding housing options through action such as developing strategies to increase home ownership rates for Māori and Pacific people, ensuring local planning promotes age-friendly environments, mandating universal design and standards in building regulations, and embedding secure tenure in legislation.
- c. We would support local government playing a role again in providing pensioner housing. Local body councils used to provide low-cost rental housing for older residents on fixed incomes who are unable to pay commercial rents. In most cities and towns councils have relinquished these responsibilities to social housing providers.

#### **Article 12 – Right to physical and mental health – Addressing health inequities**

##### **For Māori – Clauses 235 to 238**

- a. We would like the Report to include recognition of health inequities experienced by older Māori, many of whom require additional older people services before the age of 65 due to ageing health co-morbidities. These services need to cater appropriately for the cultural, spiritual and social wellbeing of kaumātua.

##### **For disabled people – Clause 244**

- b. We would like to see reference in the clause about the Ministry of Health’s three-year work programme’s focusing on tāngata whaikaha Māori, Pacific and intellectually disabled groups) to the fact that older people within these groupings may require additional considerations.

### **Use of seclusion and restraint - Clause 255**

- c. Although not necessarily named as ‘mental health services’, older age residential care, including dementia care, needs to be covered by the work to review and update issues and processes of seclusion and restraint.

### **Rainbow rights to health – Clause 266**

- d. The rights-based approach to healthcare that New Zealand is currently developing for intersex children, young people and their families would ideally also cover older Takatāpui and Rainbow people so that they have their health needs met appropriately in older peoples’ services.

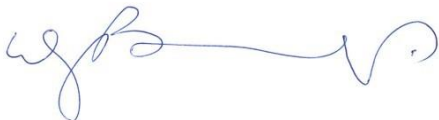
### **Closing comment**

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Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our feedback on the Fifth Periodic Report to the United Nations under the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

This is an important process, and we look forward to hearing the outcome of the consultation and the response of the United Nations to the Report.

Nāku Noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen  
Chief Executive  
Age Concern New Zealand