

MEDIA RELEASE - 10/04/2024

### **PSNZ Calls for Urgent Action on Disability Funding and Support**

The Paediatric Society of New Zealand | Te Kāhui Mātai Arotamariki o Aotearoa (PSNZ) is issuing a strong statement in response to the current state of disability support and funding for tamariki and whānau in Aotearoa, highlighting significant disparities and calling for immediate government action.

Support for our children with disabilities and chronic illnesses is alarmingly inadequate, and access to essential services such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, psychological support, and school support is markedly lower in comparison to ACC-funded service provisions.

This situation is especially pronounced within our Māori and Pasifika communities, where disability rates are higher, and health inequities are more acute. Affected families are more likely to be impacted financially and have lower educational outcomes. PSNZ is concerned about the inequitable impacts that these restrictions will exacerbate across the lifespan. It is our duty under te Tiriti o Waitangi to ensure this doesn't happen.

The disparity in treatment between those with Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) funding and those without, and the struggle for families with lower health literacy to access necessary services, underscores a deep-seated inequity in our healthcare system. Recent restrictions on carer support funding, which is already below the minimum wage, exacerbate these challenges, making it increasingly difficult for families to find adequate and much-needed support.

PSNZ President Owen Sinclair emphasised, "Caring and supporting those most in need is the hallmark of a successful society. Our current approach to disability support falls short of this standard. We must ask ourselves, what kind of society do we want to be?"

Sinclair adds, "A society that values all its members equally and provides for their needs is within our reach, but it requires decisive action and commitment from all of us, starting with our government."

Adding a personal perspective, Amy, a lived experience spokesperson for the Cerebral Palsy Society, shared, "What the Paediatric Society has outlined are not 'fair weather' ideas. Stabilising disability funding and reaching comparable levels with our international counterparts is a matter of necessity, long overdue with successive governments."

PSNZ is calling on the government to:

- **Engage** in meaningful dialogue with the disability community to ensure flexibility in the use of supports, aligning with the Enabling Good Lives principles.
- **Increase** carer support payments to at least the minimum wage to reflect the essential nature of this work.
- **Benchmark** disability entitlements against the ACC-funded service provision, to ensure that children in New Zealand receive comparable and adequate support.

This call to action is not just about improving funding levels; it's about recognising and addressing the systemic inequities that currently exist. It's about ensuring that all children in Aotearoa, regardless of their abilities, have the support they need to thrive.

ENDS

**Contact:**

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