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**The Royal Australasian College of
Physicians' submission to the
Productivity Commission**

Inquiry - A fair chance for all
Here-turi-kōkā 2021

Introduction

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback to the Productivity Commission on the Inquiry - A fair chance for all (the Inquiry) and its Terms of Reference.

The RACP works across more than 40 medical specialties to educate, innovate and advocate for excellence in health and medical care. Working with our senior members, the RACP trains the next generation of specialists, while playing a lead role in developing world best practice models of care. We also draw on the skills of our members, to develop policies that promote a healthier society. By working together, our members advance the interest of our profession, our patients and the broader community.

Consultation Questions

1. What are the main dimensions of persistent disadvantage that should be included in the Terms of Reference as areas to be investigated?

For our whānau in Aotearoa NZ, persistent disadvantage is the result of many historical, institutional, and societal issues¹. Each vector of disadvantage is itself associated with lower life satisfaction, and together, multiple vectors have an additive effect, and in some cases a unique combinational effect resulting in greater life dissatisfaction¹. There is greatest value in expanding knowledge on the intersection of these vectors, and the material circumstances these intersections create. Exploring differing perceptions of what is desirable in life through the lived experiences of people and whānau will also be important to properly understand disadvantage in modern circumstances.

Due to historical and societal circumstances, individual axis of disadvantage in Aotearoa NZ include socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, housing status, educational status, experience of adverse childhood events, experience of mental health problems and many more^{2 3 4 5 6}.

¹ Ministry of Social Development. The impact of multiple disadvantage on subjective wellbeing in NZ families [Internet]. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development; 2019. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/impact-of-multiple-disadvantage/index.html>.

² The Treasury. Reducing Māori and Pacific Inequalities [Internet]. Wellington: The Treasury; 2018. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-01/twp01-30.pdf>.

³ Reilly A. Māori Women, Discrimination And Paid Work: The Need For An Intersectional Approach. Law Rev [Internet]. 2019; 50: 321-339. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <http://www.nzlii.org/nz/journals/VUWLawRw/2019/16.pdf>.

⁴ Child Poverty Action Group. How Social & Income Inequalities Damage New Zealand Children [Internet]. Auckland: Child Poverty Action Group; 2008. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/Publications/LB.pdf>.

⁵ Growing Up In New Zealand. Vulnerability Report 2: Transitions in exposure to vulnerability in the first 1000 days of life [Internet]. Auckland: Growing Up In New Zealand; 2015. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: https://www.growingup.co.nz/sites/growingup.co.nz/files/2019-10/Report06_Vulnerability_Report%202.pdf.

⁶ Ministry of Education. Accounting for educational disadvantage [Internet]. Wellington: Ministry of Education; 2019. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/196001/Accounting-for-education-disadvantage.pdf.

While persistent disadvantage can be a recurring or compounding aspect across the life course, there are specific time periods on which the Inquiry should focus, including the antenatal period and first 1000 days of a child's life⁵. These can be interpreted through individual and whānau-based/collective outcomes, and offer a range of dimensions for analysis, including developmental, biological and physiological; emotional, mental and social wellbeing.

Currently, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of persistent disadvantage from the perspectives of whānau and communities as western research methods have tended to dominate the discourse, underscore assumptions and frame analysis. Research in this space tends to centre western hierarchies and ideals, and it is essential that communities that have experienced marginalisation, including non-English speaking communities, migrant populations, Māori, Pasifika, and gang members have opportunities to contribute. This must be strengths-based and aligned to the outcomes determined by the communities themselves.

Although research exists, enabling participation and co-designing the scope of the Inquiry with those most affected will ensure this work is informed by different perspectives^{7 8 9}.

2. Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

– What do you see as the biggest gaps in our collective knowledge?

Our collective knowledge lacks a proper understanding and exploration of intersectional thinking in an Aotearoa NZ context¹⁰. The impacts and interactions between demographic categories are unique to each context and cannot be understood in isolation from each other, resulting in unequal material realities and a lack of ability to properly explore the distinctive social experiences that characterise them¹¹. Aspects of this have been explored in academic research, such as the contribution that intersectionality can make to understanding experiences in the female dominated hotel sector in Aotearoa NZ¹². Despite this, there is much to be gained from a greater understanding of intersectionality in our society, both from the perspective of whānau and from the positioning of our institutions and the professionals who work within them¹³.

⁷ Stillman S, Maré C. The Labour Market Adjustment of Immigrants in New Zealand [Internet]. Wellington: Motu Economic and Public Policy Research; 2009. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.nzae.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Labour-Market-Adjustment-of-Immigrants-in-NZ.pdf>.

⁸ Internal Affairs. Language and Integration in New Zealand [Internet]. Wellington: Internal Affairs; 2013. Accessed 18 August. Available from:

<https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/assets/Resources/7d40a0074e/LanguageandIntegrationinNZ.pdf>.

⁹ Pasifika Futures. Pasifika People in New Zealand How Are We Doing? [Internet]. Auckland: Pasifika Futures; 2017. Accessed 18 August. Available from: <http://pasifikafutures.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PF-HowAreWeDoing-RD2-WEB2.pdf>.

¹⁰ Van Meijl T. Culture versus class: towards an understanding of Māori poverty. *Race Cl* [Internet]. 2020; 62(1): 78-96. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396820923482>.

¹¹ O'Connor C, Bright L K, Bruner J P. The Emergence of Intersectional Disadvantage. *Soc Epistemol* [Internet]. 2019; 33(1): 23-41. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/13474/1/emergence-intersectional-disadvantage%20%281%29.pdf>.

¹² Mooney S, Ryan I. Views from the top and below: an exploration of what intersectionality brings to sectoral research [Internet]. Accessed 18 August. Available from: <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10292/8240/Views%20from%20the%20top%20and%20below.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y>.

¹³ Joy E. "You cannot take it with you": Reflections on intersectionality and social work. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* [Internet]. 2019; 31(1): 42-48. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://anzswjournal.nz/anzsw/article/view/560/620>.

However, this concept must be considered alongside and in conjunction with, a kaupapa Māori lens. Intersectionality cannot be properly applied to Aotearoa NZ without considering the cultural interface between a kaupapa Māori lens and intersectionality, as has been explored in its application to indigenous studies¹⁴. Research methodology consistent with both perspectives and ways of knowing will be key to the proper expansion of knowledge¹⁵.

How and why people move out of persistent disadvantage are aspects the RACP see as being significant gaps in our current collective knowledge. As with the causes of persistent disadvantage, we can hypothesise that the levers to reduce or ameliorate disadvantage are equally multifactorial. Understanding the balance of these factors for different people and whānau across time could contribute to a greater understanding of economic mobilities and how whānau transition across income bands.

- **What areas would you encourage us to undertake further research into, and why?**

Value could be found in positioning this Inquiry to provide insight into traditionally under-researched areas and groups. Instead of duplicating previously completed work, this would provide a complementary approach, and could better focus on the things that are important to whānau.

For example, persistent disadvantage could be explored within non-English speaking communities, communities considered politically dangerous (such as gang members), and migrant communities¹⁶ ¹⁷ ¹⁸. Focusing resources to these areas could contribute positively to the targeting of action aimed to relieve disadvantage and provide the foundation for intergenerational prosperity in these communities. However, studies in this area must be properly resourced to allow for both proper design, and the implementation of culturally safe practices, including the employment of native speaking researchers to properly represent the realities of these communities¹⁹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every person, whānau and community in Aotearoa: it is a societal-wide event, yet the impacts will be experienced differently, and the breadth of economic,

¹⁴ Olsen T A. This word is (not?) very exciting: Considering intersectionality in indigenous studies <https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/14606/article.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

¹⁵ Levac L, McMurtry L, Stienstra D, Baikie G, Hanson C, Mucina D. Learning Across Indigenous And Western Knowledge Systems And Intersectionality: Reconciling Social Science Research Approaches [Internet]. Ontario: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women; 2018. Accessed 18 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/images/userfiles/files/Learning%20Across%20Indigenous%20and%20Western%20KnowledgesFINAL.pdf>.

¹⁶ Labour and Immigration Research Centre. Learning the Lingo: The Challenge of Gaining English Proficiency [Internet]. Wellington: Department of Labour; 2012. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/2742-the-challenge-of-gaining-english-proficiency-pdf>.

¹⁷ Gilbert J. The Rise And Development Of Gangs In New Zealand [Thesis] [Internet]. Christchurch: University of Canterbury; 2010. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10092/9400/gilbert_thesis.pdf.

¹⁸ Controller and Auditor General. Immigration New Zealand: Supporting new migrants to settle and work [Internet]. Wellington: Office of the Auditor General; 2013. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://oag.parliament.nz/2013/new-migrants/docs/oag-new-migrants.pdf>.

¹⁹ Bernard H R. Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches [Internet]. London: Pearson; 2009. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://books.google.co.nz/books?hl=en&lr=&id=7sZHuhyzBNQC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Social+Research+Method+Qualitative+and+Quantitative+Approaches&ots=eeNLX0hESy&sig=KNbCToD27AyeP3dglJ6RnnZ58vI#v=onepage&q=Social%20Research%20Methods%3A%20Qualitative%20and%20Quantitative%20Approaches&f=false>.

social, mental, emotional outcomes will provide important insights for the Commission and the Inquiry.

Another area of particular interest is the role of unpaid work and its continued contribution to our economy, and wealth distribution in our society. The recently-released Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa highlights that although the popular conception of unpaid work, or volunteering, is incompatible with a Pasifika world view and values – particularly *vā* (the sense of spiritual and cultural wellbeing); Pasifika people contribute a very high proportion of work in this category throughout Aotearoa NZ²⁰.

Inclusivity, and the development of culture within Aotearoa NZ contributes to this, and in turn, this influences the ability to gain resources within our westernised economy. Further inquiry into topics such as this could provide significant value.

3. Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

- **What are the key barriers preventing New Zealanders from reaching their potential?**

The RACP has consistently advocated for the importance of the social determinants of health, across the main areas of healthy housing, good work, whānau wellbeing and health equity, as key issues facing our whānau through our campaign #MakeItTheNorm²¹. It is our belief that the compounding impact of aspects across these dimensions, including preventable disease, low incomes, long hours, and institutional racism, significantly affect the lives of many in Aotearoa NZ^{22 23 24 25}. However, there is little to be gained in contributing further to an existing wealth of literature which outlines these effects. We know what must be done, but as a society, we lack the political will required for change. Inquiring further in these areas will only provide a rationale to further delay action, as research continues to reinforce what we fundamentally know.

We contend that it is not any one specific barrier, but an intersection of many contributing factors which creates persistent disadvantage in Aotearoa NZ.

²⁰ Ministry for Pacific Peoples. Pacific Economy Research Report on Unpaid Work and Volunteering in Aotearoa [Internet]. Wellington: Ministry for Pacific Peoples; 2021. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Pacific-Economy-Research-Report-on-Unpaid-Work-and-Volunteering-in-Aotearoa.pdf>.

²¹ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make It The Norm [Internet]. Wellington: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/make-it-the-norm>.

²² The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make It The Norm – Healthy Housing [Internet]. Wellington: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/make-it-the-norm/healthy-housing>.

²³ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make It The Norm – Good Work [Internet]. Wellington: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/make-it-the-norm/good-work>.

²⁴ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make It The Norm - Whānau Wellbeing [Internet]. Wellington: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/make-it-the-norm/whanau-wellbeing>.

²⁵ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make It The Norm – Health Equity [Internet]. Wellington: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/make-it-the-norm/health-equity>.

- **What are the key triggers or circumstances that can result in people becoming stuck in persistent disadvantage?**

Persistent disadvantage is a systemic issue, stemming largely from historical circumstances and political motivations, enacted through the institutions of Aotearoa NZ²⁶. This has been explored in detail throughout the health sector, as Māori and Pasifika face consistently worse health outcomes due to systemic factors²⁷. From an economic perspective, disadvantage has been explored on a geographical level, with the entrenchment of disadvantage within marginalised regions and communities plain to see²⁸. The problem before us is not at the behest of individual triggers and circumstances, but a systemic issue that is larger than any one barrier. To improve the lives of New Zealanders, this must be acknowledged and addressed at the system level.

Public perceptions and a relative political consensus reinforce these systems and stand in the way of progress to address disadvantage. Contentment with socio-economic disparities and inequity perpetuates the seat of power in our society, and if we are to focus on individual barriers, this is where we should direct action²⁹.

- **Are there key windows of opportunity in a person's life course where positive changes are easier to secure, or where they are more likely to endure?**

The RACP believes that childhood is an incredibly formative and important time a person's life-course, with implications for opportunities further in life^{30 31}. The first 1000 days of a child's life are a categorical example of a critical period, where neurodevelopmental, cognitive and physical growth trajectories are set, and have the potential to impact on later life. Further, the first 1000 days can be expanded to include the epigenetic and environmental factors – including in the perinatal and even preconception period. This means the whānau, particularly the child's parents and immediate caregivers, have important roles to support optimal growth and development³¹.

As part of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group's Whakamana Tāngata report, these impacts have been laid bare³². Children and adolescents who experience poverty have worse cognitive, social-

²⁶ Came H A. Institutional Racism and the Dynamics of Privilege in Public Health [Thesis] [Internet]. Hamilton: The University of Waikato; 2012. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

<http://www.communityresearch.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/formidable/community-research-version.pdf>.

²⁷ Waitangi Tribunal. Hauora Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry [Internet]. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal; 2019. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_152801817/Hauora%20W.pdf.

²⁸ Johnson A. Mixed Fortunes The Geography Of Advantage And Disadvantage in New Zealand [Internet].

Auckland: The Salvation Army Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit; 2015. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/sites/default/files/uploads/20150511SAMixedFortunesReport_0.pdf.

²⁹ Carroll P, Casswell S, Huakau J. The Widening Gap: Perceptions Of Poverty And Income Inequalities And Implications For Health And Social Outcomes. Social Policy Journal of New Zealand [Internet]. 2011; 37: 1-12. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj37/08-carroll-et-al.pdf>.

³⁰ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Inequities in Child Health Position Statement [Internet]. Sydney: The Royal Australasian College of Physician; 2018. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/racp-inequities-in-child-health-position-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=6ceb0b1a_6.

³¹ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Early Childhood: The Importance of the Early Years Position Statement. Sydney: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2019. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/early-childhood-importance-of-early-years-position-statement.pdf?sfvrsn=e54191a_4.

³² Welfare Expert Advisory Group. Whakamana Tāngata Restoring Dignity to Social Security in New Zealand [Internet]. Wellington: Welfare Expert Advisory Group; 2019. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

behavioural and health outcomes, partially due to lower family incomes, but also due to a correlation with household and societal circumstances faced³³. Evidence also suggests a neurobiological component to the impact of poverty³⁴.

Increasing income for overburdened whānau has been shown to have a greater impact on life course outcomes when compared with higher income whānau, and can influence adult employment, education, income, health, and cognitive outcomes³³. This is a key point of intervention to improve the lives of Aotearoa NZ whānau.

- **Which aspects of government policy are most important to focus on? For example, secure housing, mental health treatment and supporting new parents.**

Focusing on any single aspect of government policy will not be sufficient to properly address persistent disadvantage. The RACP's understanding of persistent disadvantage is based both on intersectionality, and a system-based interpretation of the ways that government institutions and policies interact with the people of Aotearoa NZ. Despite this, raising incomes for overburdened whānau is key to alleviating many of the causes and effects of poor wellbeing, and other related problems for these groups.

- **Are changes needed in the ways that government services are provided? For example, devolving responsibility for services, joining up service provision and helping those most in need navigate the system.**

The changes needed in government services have been well documented in recent years. Many expert groups have convened, providing extensive and detailed reports to government on the problems in specific services, and solutions which aim to solve them. Examples of this include the aforementioned Whakamana Tāngata report of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group, the Health and Disability System Review, and the continued documentation of failings in the provision of housing³²³⁵³⁶. Institutional racism in the health system, and the continued failure to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi continues to be extensively explored by the Waitangi Tribunal through Wai 2575 - the Health Services and Outcomes Inquiry, laying bare wide-ranging impacts across the full spectrum of life in Aotearoa NZ³⁷.

<http://www.weag.govt.nz/assets/documents/WEAG-report/3a22acc869/WEAG-Executive-Summary-with-QR-code-160419.pdf>.

³³ Ministry of Social Development. Rapid Evidence Review: The impact of poverty on life course outcomes for children, and the likely effect of increasing the adequacy of welfare benefits [Internet]. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development; 2018. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from:

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/weag-report-release/rapid-evidence-review-the-impact-of-poverty-on-life-course-outcomes-for-children-and-the-likely-effect-of-increasing-the-adequacy-of-welfare-benef.pdf>.

³⁴ Lipina S J, Evers K. Neuroscience of Childhood Poverty: Evidence of Impacts and Mechanisms as Vehicles of Dialog With Ethics. *Front Psychol* [Internet]. 2017; 8 (61). Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5266697/>.

³⁵ New Zealand Health and Disability System Review. Final Report [Internet]. Wellington: Health and Disability System Review; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://systemreview.health.govt.nz/final-report/download-the-final-report/>.

³⁶ Johnson A, Howden-Chapman P, Equb S. A Stocktake of New Zealand's Housing [Internet]. Wellington: new Zealand Government; 2018. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-02/A%20Stocktake%20of%20New%20Zealand%27s%20Housing.pdf>.

³⁷ Waitangi Tribunal. Health Services and Outcomes Inquiry [internet]. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal; 2020. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://waitangitribunal.govt.nz/inquiries/kaupapa-inquiries/health-services-and-outcomes-inquiry/>.

The recent announcement detailing the establishment of the Māori Health Authority, alongside widespread structural changes to the health system is a first step to addressing this³⁸. A Māori Authority with commissioning power, working for Māori whānau, hapū and iwi provides a blueprint that can be built upon throughout other areas in Aotearoa NZ, for better outcomes.

The breadth of pre-existing research on desirable forms of government services is such that it cannot be properly contained within a submission of this type. However, we maintain that for many of the issues referred to in this consultation, and within the wider inquiry, we know the problems, and we know the solutions. What we lack is the political will to implement them and continuing to produce documents in this manner will not change this reality. Instead, it legitimises a lack of action by obfuscating the existing basis of knowledge we possess.

4. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the Terms of Reference for this inquiry?

The RACP believes that there is a need to consider whether this inquiry is necessary in its current form. Reformulating the inquiry to better acknowledge the systemic realities of persistent disadvantage, and to focus on areas where value can be added, could produce an inquiry that is relevant to Aotearoa NZ as it is today. The RACP does not believe that the inquiry, in its current form, would be a valuable use of resources, and that it would only provide further rationale for the delay of action to address the disadvantage the inquiry intends to study.

Conclusion

The RACP thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide feedback on this consultation. To discuss this submission further, please contact the RACP's Aotearoa NZ Policy and Advocacy Unit at policy@racp.org.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



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³⁸ New Zealand Government. Establishment of the new Māori Health Authority takes first big step [Internet]. Wellington: New Zealand Government; 2021. Accessed 19 August 2021. Available from: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/establishment-new-m%C4%81ori-health-authority-takes-first-big-step>.