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Anxiety over nurse pay equity claim prompts 56 practices to notify PHOs



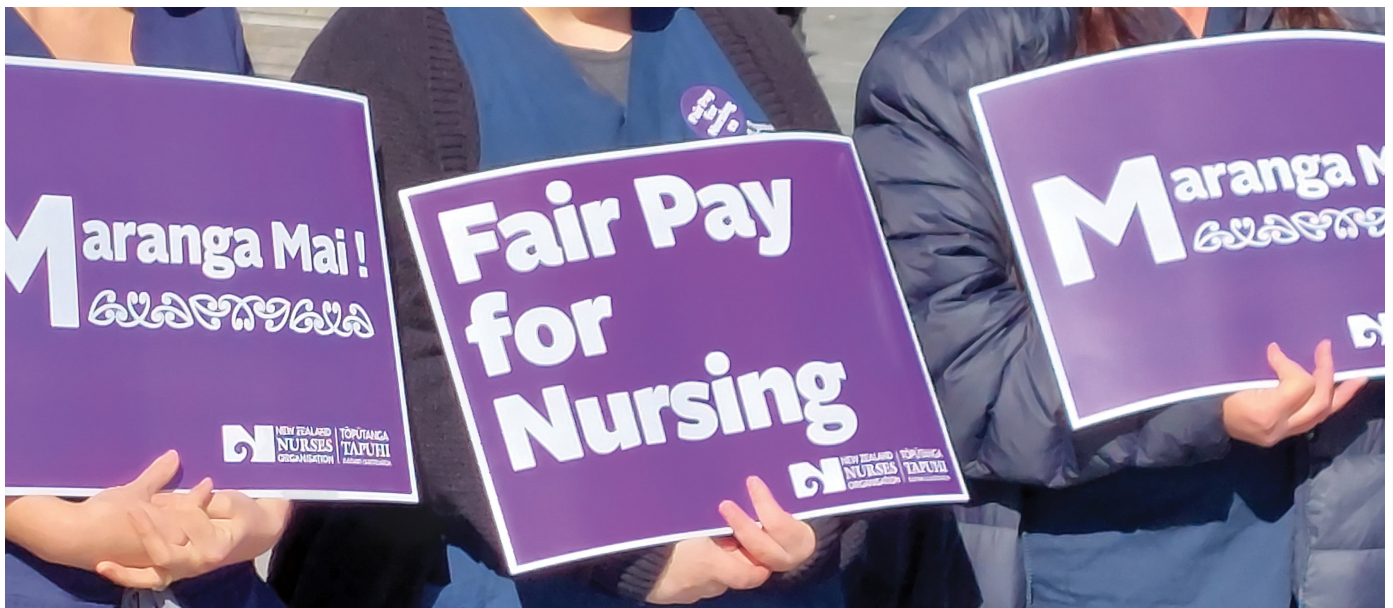
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Many GPs support the practice nurse pay equity claim but are deeply worried about how it will be funded

There's a huge amount of anxiety out there about what this [pay equity claim] means for practices

Anxiety over whether the Government will fully fund the practice nurse pay equity claim has prompted 56 stretched practices to notify their PHOs of financial viability concerns.

The NZNO late last year lodged **two separate pay equity claims on behalf of practice nurse and administration staff members** working at more than 500 general practices and urgent care centres.

At the time, health minister Shane Reti responded to *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* queries on government funding of any resulting pay equity settlement by **saying he was expecting official advice on this and related primary care funding issues.**

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Funding uncertainty threat to viability

General Practice Owners Association chief executive Mark Liddle says the organisation was contacted by more than a dozen practices soon after the claim was lodged, worried about the funding uncertainty.

Mr Liddle says a number see it as “a real potential threat to their viability” if the pay equity claim is settled but not fully funded by the Government.

“There’s a huge amount of anxiety out there about what this [pay equity claim] means for practices.”

A number of practices filed a notice with their contracted PHO, citing concerns about the potential impact on services if the pay equity claim was underfunded.

Under Section 14 of the Contracted Provider Agreement between practices and PHOs, also called the “back-to-back” agreement, practices are obliged to formally notify their PHO of issues affecting their ability to deliver contracted services.

GenPro shared a similar notification template with interested practices and by this morning “56 practices and climbing” had tailored and lodged a Section 14 notice with their PHOs, Mr Liddle says.

Practices were also sharing copies of the Section 14 notices with Dr Reti, Te Whatu Ora chief executive Fepulea'i Margie Apa, workplace relations and safety minister Brooke van Velden, and local MPs, he says.



A number of practices see the practice nurse pay equity claim as a “a real potential threat to their viability” if the claim is settled but not fully funded by the Government, says General Practice Owners Association chief executive Mark Liddle

Pay equity supported

Mr Liddle says practices “absolutely support” primary care nurses having pay parity with their Te Whatu Ora colleagues who received a government-funded \$4 billion pay equity settlement last year.

But without additional funding and without the ability to increase income, he says it is very hard to see how practices can absorb a future pay equity settlement.

The NZNO primary practice pay equity claims follows last year’s failed attempts by the general practice sector and NZNO to get government funding for full pay parity with Te Whatu Ora nurses. The pay gap now stands at \$13,000 between the equivalent pay steps on the practice nurses’ largest collective pay agreement - the NZNO primary health care MECA (multi-employer collective agreement) - and the NZNO Te Whatu Ora nurses MECA.

GPNZ agrees

General Practice New Zealand chair and specialist GP Bryan Betty agrees that practices support pay equity but are anxious about the claim.

“It is absolutely essential that the [resulting claim settlement] is fully costed, that it’s separately funded by the Government and that there is a commitment to funding that in an ongoing way,” Dr Betty says.

“This comes to the heart of the sustainability of general practice.”

Extra practices to be added

The initial NZNO claim was sent to more than 500 general practice and urgent care employers on 8 December and was supposed to go to every practice or centre with an NZNO member.

But Mr Liddle says GenPro was contacted by a number of practices with NZNO members that hadn't received a claim notice, and had passed this on to NZNO.

NZNO industrial services manager Glenda Alexander, confirmed by text that some practices had been missed out as it had been "challenging to get the legal entities of all relevant employers".

Ms Alexander says a second claim or amended first claim would be lodged in February to include the missed employers.

A timeline has yet to be set for the pay equity claim process, which will build on the successful Te Whatu Ora hospital clerical and nurse pay equity claims, with next steps including NZNO and employers agreeing on a bargaining process agreement.

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