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## **Nurse pay survey hits practices' inboxes: GP leaders divided but most say 'take part'**



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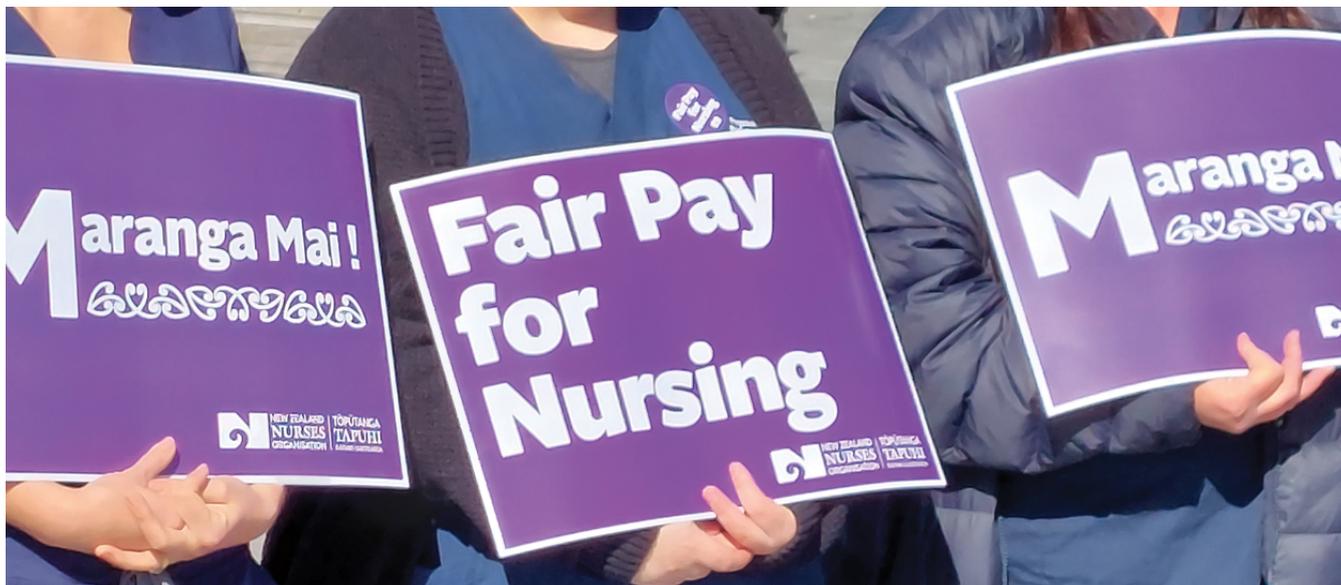
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A Te Whatu Ora survey asking practices how much they pay their nurses is linked to accessing a share of the pay disparities funding pot [Image: NZD]

Sector leaders are divided on urging or discouraging general practices to respond to today's Te Whatu Ora nurse pay survey, which is linked to unlocking disparities funding for nurses.

A first draft of the survey was put on hold on Monday after the three Contracted Provider Caucus organisations said Te Whatu Ora shouldn't ask practices to share confidential and commercially sensitive information about nurse pay.

**Survey sent today**

The revised survey, sent out today, was called for by Te Whatu Ora and Treasury as part of assessing what share practices might get of the Government's \$200 million-a-year nurse pay disparities' funding pot from 1 July.

The General Practice Pay Disparity Workforce Data Request survey asks practices for the number of nurses and kaiāwhina they have on each pay step and the average hourly wage rate they pay staff on those steps. The survey also asks how many current nursing vacancies practices have.

The online survey says taking part is voluntary but adds: "[If] practices are seeking funding for their employees", then Te Whatu Ora needs the anonymised data to calculate the pay disparity gap and any potential funding to "reduce the pay gap".

Te Whatu Ora officials are expected to advise health minister Ayesha Verrall shortly on including general practices in the second tranche of the funding.

### **For and against**

After seeking assurances from Te Whatu Ora on privacy and confidentiality, the RNZCGP, Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Network and General Practice NZ called for practices to respond to the revised survey.

But the General Practice Owners Association recommends practices refuse to engage in the survey as it is part of a “flawed” pay disparities fund process that fails to fully address parity with practice nurses’ hospital colleagues.

GenPro chief executive Philip Grant says the association still has “significant concerns” about the proposal being put forward by Te Whatu Ora and fears it will imbed pay inequity for practice nurses.

Mr Grant says Te Whatu Ora is proposing practices receive a share of the \$200 million fund to “reduce the pay gap” created by the average 14 per cent pay equity increase that hospital nurses got in March. The agency is not intending to fund the full gap (up to 27 per cent) in pay between the primary care multi-employer collective agreement rates and those of hospital nurses.

GenPro is also concerned that 100 per cent of any funding allocated must be spent on nurse pay, saying this has implications for practices that cut services and income to pay higher wages to retain or recruit nurses.

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**Reservations but thumbs-up to survey**

RNZCGP president Samantha Murton says the college still has reservations about the survey and process but is advising members to take part as a means to access funding for their nurses.

“The survey is not ideal,” says Dr Murton. “However, if we’re going to get money to our nurses, this is the mechanism being used. And we will continue to work with Te Whatu Ora to make sure that any data that is gathered is used appropriately and effectively.”

Hauora Taiwhenua chair and specialist GP Fiona Bolden sent out an email to members also acknowledging concerns about the process but recommending members take part.

“We urge you to complete the survey in a timely manner and we will continue working with Te Whatu Ora staff to ensure we achieve as good a monetary position as we can for your practice nurses,” Dr Bolden says in the email.

## **GPNZ: short-term solution**

General Practice NZ chair and specialist GP Bryan Betty acknowledged the disparities fund process does not resolve pay parity but says it is a “short-term” solution. Dr Betty urges practices to take part in the survey.

“We know there is a long way to go, but this represents a real opportunity to get more money to our nurses right now,” he says in a media release.

Dr Betty tells *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* the bigger issue is what happens next with capitation and the funding model “so we don’t continue to run in this problem” and that nurse pay parity is part of any new funding model going forward.

**‘This will not fund pay parity or pay equity’**

The online survey stresses that any funding resulting from the process is intended only to reduce the pay gap with Te Whatu Ora nurses. “It is not intended to cover any wider primary care funding matters, settle collective bargaining, achieve pay parity or deliver pay equity,” says the survey.

“Progress on resolving wider funding and workforce issues will continue through a range of avenues,” it points out.

It says the data being requested is the same asked from other sectors eligible for the pay disparity funding and will be used to create “aggregated and anonymised reports” to advise the health and finance ministers about the scale of the workforce that may be funded.

Practices are asked to complete the survey by 5pm on 27 April.

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