



New Zealand Council Of  
Christian Social Services

## **Auckland Social Policy Forum Discussion Document Submission**

The following is the submission of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) on the Auckland Social Policy Forum Discussion Document. This submission was developed by the Auckland Issues Working Group of Council. The Working Group is made up of CEOs and senior staff from the NZCCSS Auckland Network. These representatives have considerable experience in providing social services and supports to whānau, families, aiga and communities within the Auckland Council catchment.

The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Working Group Convenor, supported by the President, Vice President and Executive Officer, will be the principal spokesperson for this submission.

### **Mission**

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services works for a just and compassionate society in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We see this as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ

### **Values**

In seeking to fulfil this mission, we are committed to:

- Giving priority to the poor and vulnerable members of our society
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi

### **New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services**

The Members of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) are the

- Anglican Care Network
- Baptist Churches of New Zealand
- Catholic Social Services
- Presbyterian Supports Service Inc
- Methodist Church
- Salvation Army

Nationally NZCCSS consists of multiple affiliated social service groups working from almost 640 separate organisational sites, which collectively provide over 1,200 social service programmes throughout New Zealand. Members are predominantly church and parish based organisations, but also include hospitals, rest homes, advocacy groups and community centres. Service provision is diverse, encompassing and geographically widespread. The most prolific areas of involvement are social work,

services for older people, counselling and family support services, provision of social activities, maintaining foodbanks and youth work. Member organisations can also be found providing budgeting services and administering low or no interest loan schemes, providing transportation services, running cultural groups and maintaining off-shore missions.

Collectively NZCCSS represents the New Zealand's largest 'natural grouping' of affiliated social service providers. Through its knowledge of social service practice and extensive flax-roots connections within communities it has a very practical knowledge of what works, what makes for sustainable, positive development for vulnerable people and families.

Within the catchment of the new Auckland Council NZCCSS members deliver approximately 420 support programmes from 102 different sites. In general about 50% of the combined work of these groups is funded by taxes. The remaining 50% is funded by the church agencies or from other philanthropic sources. This does not take into account the huge value of the contribution of the many volunteers who work in the combined Christian social services.

### **Preface to Submission**

NZCCSS is supportive of the concept of taking a strategic and joined up approach to addressing social policy and social services in Auckland. We congratulate Government on this initiative and look forward to working constructively at both local and national government levels to make Auckland Social Policy Forum work as well as possible and make the most positive changes for Auckland's vulnerable peoples. It is in this spirit we provide this submission.

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services mission is to work for a "...just and compassionate society in Aotearoa/New Zealand". The Council asked its Auckland Issues Working Group to consider how this vision could be contextualised within the proposed Auckland Council framework. The following vision statement gives expression to Council's mission particularly in the context of the proposed Auckland Social Policy Forum. The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Working Party has used this vision as a lens to inform its submission on the Discussion Document.

### **“NZCCSS seeks an Auckland society where all people are valued and included”**

The new Auckland Council will be the representative body for a wide range of disparate communities. NZCCSS is most concerned with vulnerable communities whose members are often disenfranchised from participation in decisions that impact on their lives, including policy making and prioritisation of what (and how) services are to be provided. These vulnerable communities include Pacific peoples' communities, low wage worker and beneficiaries' communities and new immigrant communities. Many Maori communities are also disenfranchised and vulnerable and given the status of the Treaty of Waitangi, these communities will require specific focus.

This vision is based on two main premises. Firstly that in developed countries inequality and exclusion is the principle driver of negative social outcomes. Secondly that families and communities are best positioned to know what is needed to assist them grow and become strong. On this basis we believe the Auckland Social Policy Forum should:

- Respond to the imperatives of the Treaty of Waitangi
- Put in place mechanisms to ensure that vulnerable people and communities have direct access to decision making bodies
- Ensure that its policies are based on equitable access to services and supports for all of its people – thus prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable
- Provide and resource processes that empower communities to engage in their development and growth.

We are concerned that the Auckland Social Policy Forum will be made up of only elected members of Council and Government. Due to the vagaries of the democratic process the diversity of communities most affected by social issues in the Auckland area may not be represented in elected bodies. It is our belief that additional membership selected on the basis of informed representation of those most affected by the social issues is essential for the Social Policy Forum's success. This is an opportunity for the Forum to lead in the establishment of a better connected and effective fabric of services, at the heart of which is an informed understanding of the needs of those who are the most vulnerable and disenfranchised. We are most concerned that while it is these groups that often are at the heart of Auckland's social issues their views are not represented at the strategic and leadership level of the Forum.

We therefore call for the enacting of deliberate processes to empower Auckland's minority and disadvantaged communities to be directly involved in the development of strategies and the provision of leadership in Auckland's social policies and social services implementation. We believe that through this process Auckland Council, with the support of the central government, can ensure the nation's largest city can provide well educated and capable future citizens who will make a great contribution to New Zealand's future. Without these processes Auckland's vulnerable communities may become a major component of the long tail of disadvantage which creates such a strain on the New Zealand's resources, limits opportunities and contributions and blights our ability to achieve our Nation's potential.

## **Responses to Questions:**

### *1.0 WHAT WILL THE FORUM ACHIEVE?*

The government has agreed on a number of high-level objectives that it wants the Forum to achieve. These include;

- **progressing social issues in Auckland** at a political level
- demonstrating **strong leadership** on social issues

- setting a **clear strategic direction** and identifying **long-term social goals and strategies**
- clearly **identifying the roles and responsibilities** of Government and Auckland Council have in responding to critical social issues
- driving the **alignment of thinking and action** on social issues

*Question 1. 1*

*Is this the right balance of objectives for the Forum?*

Generally this is seen as an appropriate range of activities. The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Group supports the concept of identifying long term social goals and developing strategic directions for the achievement of these. This Group would like to see a set of results and regional measures put in place that would demonstrate that progress was being made.

It is concerning that the Forum appears to be focussed only on identifying the roles of Government and Auckland Council in responding to critical social issues. If this Forum limits itself to this level then the Auckland Issues Group sees it having limited impact as it will be through harnessing the 'hearts and minds' of communities that long term change will be achieved. It is in this area that the Forum will need to demonstrate real leadership – leadership that engages with Auckland's citizens, creates a sense of ownership for the strategic direction and goals and encourages action for change.

*Question 1.2*

*Are there other objectives the Forum should consider?*

The Auckland Issues Group is concerned that the Auckland Social Policy Forum, being a purely politically appointed body, may suffer from a stop/start and veering left/right approach as a result of the outcomes of elections. A process is required to ensure that the strategic directions, goals and associated success measures identified are well accepted and agreed to. On this basis the leadership role of the Forum should include the gaining of political consensus for its objectives and activities.

A principle objective of the Forum should be to utilise research and evidence to identify the most pressing social issues and the most effective responses in order to develop its strategic directions and goals and to inform the leadership processes of the Forum.

A statement at this level about driving the joining up of Government and Council funded social initiatives including health, education, housing, justice, policing, and social development would indicate to all involved the need to take a holistic approach in order to achieve the best results.

## **2.0 WHAT WILL THE FORUM DO TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES**

In order for the Forum to achieve the objectives outlined on in 1.0, Government has identified some specific activities the Forum will undertake. They include:

- **identifying and prioritising social issues** in Auckland, both at the regional level and for specific neighbourhoods
- **discussing and proposed central and local government responses** to priority social issues and identifying best practice examples that work
- **considering and agreeing on joint venture action plans and projects** and who will carry out agreed actions
- **identifying duplication or gaps** in the provision of services
- **identifying activities that undermine good social outcomes** in Auckland
- **influencing wider regional strategies and plans** that can improve social outcomes
- **monitoring and reporting** on agreed Government and Council actions

*Question 2. 1*

*Is this the right balance of activities for the Forum?*

Generally this mix of activities is appropriate. The Auckland Issues Group supports the focus at both regional and neighbourhood level and sees this as a good way of making progress.

*Question 2.2*

*Are there other activities the Forum should consider that would support its objectives?*

The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Group believes the other key activities that would assist the forum achieve its objectives are:

- Establishing a reporting framework to report progress to the Forum's Treaty, community and NGO partners.
- This should include an annual plan – the Group recommends the forum look at the process used by “Tomorrow's Manukau – Manukau Apopo”
- Ensuring the people in the neighbourhoods and communities being targeted are actively engaged with and have their values recognised in identifying priorities and developing strategies
- Maintaining a focus on quality research and effective practice to ensure responses are not ‘knee jerk’ reactions to specific events or politically motivated, populist responses but are based on sound evidence of what works.

### **3.0 HOW WILL THE FORUM WORK? – ISSUES AND PRIORITIES**

*Question 3.1*

*What issues do you think are important for the Forum to consider in its first year?*

In its first year the Forum must focus on its most vulnerable communities. These communities will be known, but the relativity of vulnerability from one to the other may not be. It will be important for the Forum to develop a fine grained knowledge of the different vulnerable communities and the issues affecting them so that it can make effective, evidence based decisions about its leadership focus.

Once it has assembled and understood the evidence on vulnerability issues it should then commence the work of developing its strategic priorities, in consultation with these communities, and instigate a mechanism for receiving feedback on its plans.

The Forum should instigate an open and transparent decision making process. This will assist in ensuring communities and community organisations understand the reasons for the decisions being made and the drivers that affect why different communities and needs received priority. An effective way of achieving this transparency is the use of regional reporting meetings where representatives of the Forum report back to communities on their decisions and the rationale for these.

### *Question 3.2*

*What do you think would be the right balance for the Forum to strike between local and regional priorities?*

Once it has assembled its evidence base and developed its understanding of effective practice this balance should become self evident. Often social 'dis-ease' is suffered disproportionately by small sections of communities, at neighbourhood or neighbourhood grouping levels. Where it is apparent that working at this level will produce significant change in Auckland Council's social wellbeing status then this work should be a primary focus.

Where there is a wider issue that affects more people at a Regional level then the level of social wellbeing that may be achieved at this level needs to be measured against the likelihood of success. The comparison of small gains for many as opposed to large gains for a few should be to be carefully considered and weighted.

It is the experience of Christian social service providers that the biggest changes occur when the individual, families, whānau and communities involved take ownership of the change process and the goals. This tends to point to community/neighbourhood level initiatives being most effective – recognising the need for focussing these efforts and joining them up across a regional strategic perspective and set of goals.

This balancing process must be underpinned by effective review, evaluation and feedback so that progress against identified strategic goals is made. This process should also ensure that effective practice is shared and that Government agencies, NGOs and communities work collaboratively to achieve social change.

### *Question 3.3*

*Are there particular issues, communities or locations to which you think the Forum could consider giving priority?*

The communities that are most often impacted by negative social outcomes tend to be grouped in the lower socio economic areas of Auckland. A demographic profile of these areas would reveal a high proportion of inhabitants are young, from Māori and from Pasifika communities.

Christian social service providers have identified secure, affordable housing as being critical to the social wellbeing of this group. Too often providers in our networks are assisting families from overcrowded homes or trying to help get children resettled into new schools, accepted into new health service providers and incorporated into new communities. This type of overcrowding and dislocation results in long-term serious physical and social harm, low educational achievement and a lifetime of low productivity and income

#### **4.0 HOW COULD THE FORUM WORK WITH THE NGO AND COMMUNITY SECTOR?**

##### *Question 4.1*

*What roles do you think the NGO and community sector could have in shaping the roles and priorities the forum considers? How do you think this could best happen?*

The NGO and community sector is Government's and Auckland Council's partners in the work of gaining greater social well-being in Auckland. Through their Government funded activities, their philanthropic funded activities, through their own philanthropy and through the work of volunteers this sector provides the engine room of development and change. They have a depth of on the ground experience and knowledge of the issues within the communities they serve. On this basis it is very important that their voices are clearly heard in the work of shaping roles and priorities the Forum considers.

The NGO sector needs to have a committee that advises the Forum. The Chair of this committee should sit on the Forum. Not only would this role provide direct input and expertise into the Forum it would also provide continuity across periods of political change when new Mayors appoint new Local Board Representatives and when new Ministers of Social Development are appointed.

The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Group is in full agreement with the Forum not being a fund-holding body. With this being the case issues such as conflicts of interest are less likely to arise and the NGO committee with its Chair sitting on the Forum will be able to collaborate fully in both the strategic and implementation processes.

##### *Question 4.2*

*How might the Forum best identify and engage with communities or organisations that have particular interests in issues the Forum is considering*

The NZCCSS Auckland Issues Group is one of a small number of significant groupings of community organisations and NGOs. These groupings are able to canvas and gain the support of a large proportion of the social service organisations servicing Auckland communities. These significant groups should be invited to appoint a representative to sit on a Forum advisory committee, with the committee's Chair being invited to sit on the Forum and provide direct input into the Forum's work.

*Question 4.3*

*How can the Forum ensure the voices and perspectives of Māori are heard in the prioritizing and decision-making?*

This question sits directly with Māori. The Auckland Issues Group believes it is critical the Forum develops a strong and effective relationship with Māori through a mechanism mandated by mana whenua. The Group urges the Forum to work closely with mana whenua to achieve this outcome. The Group believes the most effective result will see Māori representatives sitting on the Forum

*Question 4.4*

*How might the Forum best engage with Pacific and other Ethnic communities?*

The Auckland Issues Group believes that a similar process to that proposed for NGOs, with Pacific and other Ethnic communities having the ability to form advisory committees to the Forum will be the best engagement process. Having the Chairs of these committees sit on the Forum will be the most effective way of including these groups and having them take ownership of the emerging strategies and priorities.

*Question 4.5*

*Where would the best point of connection be between the NGO and community sector and the Forum? What mechanisms or arrangements could best support this?*

It is the belief of the NZCCSS Auckland Issues Group that the establishment of advisory committees with their Chairs sitting on the Forum will provide the best point of connection. Members of these committees could be appointed by significant, recognised groupings already existing within the Auckland Council region.

The model used by Tomorrow's Manukau – Manukau Apopo should be examined as this model is well supported within the Manukau communities and has achieved some effective results.

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