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Urgent Call for Funding to Address the Severe Shortage of Psychologists in Aotearoa

Aotearoa is facing a critical shortage of culturally competent, qualified psychologists, which has placed pressure on the public, and current providers. Estimates in the last 6 years suggest that at least 1000 more psychologists are needed to keep up with current need, which continues to rise¹. In response to this pressing issue, leading Aotearoa-based psychological organisations in the field, including The NZ Psychological Society, NZ College of Clinical Psychologists and NZ Psychologists Board, are urging political parties to put increased funding to train more psychologists in their election promises for the new election term.

While an increase in the number of psychologists is needed, a whole-of-system approach is needed to address the multiple pathways that impact on wellbeing. Evidence shows that Māori, Pacific and immigrant communities experience inequitable access to services due to systemic racism². The *He Ara Oranga* (the government inquiry into mental health addictions services report) identified that culturally enhanced therapies and “a whole of government approach to well-being, prevention and social determinants will enhance well-being”.

The shortage of qualified psychologists has reached a critical point, with long waiting lists across the board in mental health, and other health and educational services. Individuals seeking psychological support are facing significant delays – for example in Mental Health, the average is 15 weeks wait time before having an initial appointment³.

“This shortage not only affects those in need of psychological assistance but also places a burden on the existing workforce, leading to burnout and increased stress levels among practitioners,” says Dr Paul Skirrow from the NZ College of Clinical Psychologists.

The demand for psychological services has been steadily increasing driven by a growing awareness of mental health issues, the diversity of educational needs and a reduction in the stigma surrounding seeking help. Further pressures such as the Covid-19 pandemic, increases in the number of unhoused families, job and food insecurity, climate change anxiety, school attendance issues, and drug and alcohol issues have impacted wellbeing for individuals, families, and communities. However, the supply of qualified psychologists has not kept pace with this rising demand, and solutions sourced in mātauranga Māori for Māori are also needed.

To tackle this crisis, leading Aotearoa-based psychological organisations are calling on political parties to urgently increase funding to train more psychologists in Aotearoa New Zealand in the new election term. An increase in funding will enable the profession to commit to ensuring Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations will be met, and that psychological services will be able to meet society’s cultural and ethnic diversity needs.

“By providing more opportunities for aspiring psychologists to gain practical experience and complete their training, we can start to bridge the gap between supply and demand and enhance

¹ Psychology Workforce Task Group, Ministry of Health. (2017). *How many Psychologists? A Discussion Paper about the Number of Psychologists Needed in the Health Service in New Zealand*.

² Talamaivao, N., Harris, R., Cormack, D., Paine, S.J., King, P. (2020). *Racism and Health in Aotearoa New Zealand: a systematic review of quantitative studies*. The New Zealand Medical Journal, vol. 133. No. 1521.

³ Psychology Workforce Task Group, Ministry of Health. (2017). *How many Psychologists? A Discussion Paper about the Number of Psychologists Needed in the Health Service in New Zealand*.

psychological wellbeing for our communities,” says Veronica Pitt, from the NZ Psychological Society – Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa.

Increasing funding for training will not only expand the pool of qualified psychologists but also enhance the diversity of perspectives and approaches within sectors such as health and education. It is essential that future psychologists are well-equipped to meet the needs of Aotearoa’s diverse populations and fulfil our commitments to te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Furthermore, increased investment in the number of culturally competent psychologists will contribute to the overall wellbeing of New Zealanders from all backgrounds.

“By cultivating a strong and sustainable psychology workforce, we can alleviate the burden on existing practitioners, improve access to timely and effective psychological services and ultimately enhance the health and educational outcomes for individuals and communities nationwide,” says Vanessa Simpson, from the NZ Psychologists Board.

Leading Aotearoa-based psychological organisations are urging political parties to commit to taking immediate steps to address the shortage of qualified psychologists. Together, we can work towards a future where every New Zealander has access to psychological support they need, when they need it.

For media enquiries or further information, please contact a representative below:

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