

2 December 2014

New Zealand Productivity Commission
PO Box 8036
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Submission to the New Zealand Productivity Commission's Inquiry

More Effective Social Services

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry on More Effective Social Services. Deaf Aotearoa welcomes this inquiry as we see it as critical that Government be able to make well-informed decisions that will have wide-ranging impact on diverse communities nationwide.

Deaf Aotearoa is the representative organisation of the Deaf community and New Zealand Sign Language in New Zealand. Deaf Aotearoa is a Disabled Person's Organisation and the New Zealand representative for the World Federation of the Deaf, the international body for Deaf people. We have over 1900 members, and our Executive Board is elected by and from the Deaf community.

The term 'Deaf' is used to denote those people who identify themselves as part of a linguistic and cultural community and who are likely to use New Zealand Sign Language as their primary communication method. The term 'deaf' or 'hard of hearing' refers to those that have been diagnosed with a hearing loss or impairment but who may not culturally identify as Deaf or may not have engaged with the Deaf community.

While we are not able to respond to all questions in the Issues Paper in this submission, we would like to speak with the Commission to provide further information at the appropriate time.

Q17: What examples are there of contract specifications that make culturally appropriate delivery easy or more difficult?

It is not necessarily the contract specifications that make culturally appropriate delivery more difficult, it is more the lack of funding to ensure staff can work in a culturally appropriate manner that is the issue.

Ensuring services can work appropriately with Maori is a key expectation of Government contracts, and an area which providers strive to work appropriately, however there are other cultural considerations that need to be appropriately funded.

The large Asian population, the Pasifika community, and of course the Deaf community are just some examples of where additional knowledge, expertise and resources are required to ensure services can be effective.

Some communities are similar, but no two communities are the same. Contracts should not be one-size-fits-all and need to reflect the diverse range of services that our communities wish to access.

Q18: How could the views of clients and their families be better included in the design and delivery of social services?

Ask them what their views are! All people should be consulted on issues that affect their lives – this is no different for Deaf people and the wider disabled community. Deaf Aotearoa believes in engaging with the community at all levels and taking on board the knowledge and expertise of those who have made valuable contributions, while ensuring the views and concerns of those most at risk in the community are heard and understood.

Deaf Aotearoa is guided by the Deaf Community Goals, which inform our service delivery, organisational structure, and provision of information. We firmly believe in the slogan *Nothing About Us Without Us*. We believe that it is critical to involve Deaf people in our decision making to ensure that we can be an effective organisation and be responsive to the needs of Deaf individuals and the community as a whole.

In recent times, Government has worked more closely with Disabled People's Organisations which, as well as ensuring disabled people's voices have been heard, has demonstrated to officials and the Government as a whole that the only way they can be effective is to take on board the wisdom, experience and expertise of the people in the community.

We are aware that one Government agency is using the model of engagement that was successful in engaging with disabled people to now engage with another community that has an entirely separate set of issues. Clearly, *Nothing About Us Without Us* is applicable across the country, in all communities, and in all instances where Government needs to see effective social services.

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This may require additional resources, and will possibly take a little longer, but the outcome will be more effective use of funding, healthier communities, and a more productive New Zealand.

Q21: How can the benefits of flexible service delivery be achieved without undermining government accountability?

While contracts need to be sufficiently specific to ensure performance can be measured and assessed, contracts must allow sufficient flexibility that ensures service delivery is responsive to the needs of diverse, evolving communities that are becoming increasingly equipped and empowered with the knowledge and confidence to make their expectations clear.

Consumers who have confidence in a particular provider do not want to be turned away “because our contract doesn’t allow us to do that for you” when the presenting need is an issue that can be dealt with effectively by the provider.

Government needs to increase its engagement with communities to ensure their needs are addressed, and concurrently increase the level of trust it has in providers to perform to the expectations of their communities.

Organisations that have well-established, long-standing service delivery programmes need to be contracted appropriately to respond to changing expectations of consumers. Many of these established providers have strong links with their communities and are well placed to grow, develop and continue to be effective providers of social services.

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