



Pay Equity for Social Service Workers



Social Service Workers Pay Equity Claim: Introductory Overview

September 2023

What is the Social Service Workers Pay Equity Claim?

In August 2019, five employers received a pay equity claim under the Equal Pay Act 1972 (“the Act”) from the Public Service Association (PSA), on behalf of members who perform social services work in the five community-based social service provider organisations. The claim was confirmed as arguable (i.e., should be investigated) and a bargaining process was agreed with the PSA in July 2020.

The types of social service work roles that this claim covers are broad, including community and residential service delivery roles (excluding social work), those working in organisational support, and administrative and oversight roles.

Who are the parties to the claim?

Initially, the PSA lodged the claim with five employers, Barnardos, Christchurch Methodist Mission, Ngapuhi Iwi Social Services, Stand Tū Māia and Wellington Sexual Abuse HELP. This is the same group of employers that were involved in the community-based social work pay equity claim.

However, since the time the claim was lodged in 2019, changes to the Pay Equity Act have occurred, and the Government has introduced a new Pay Equity Funded Framework, relating to how the Government oversees and funds pay equity claims relating to entire workforces.

Under this Framework, a threshold has been established for pay equity claims involving a representative group of employers to be extended for the relevant wide sector workforce. To reach this threshold, the PSA has had to add new employers to this claim.

Therefore, three additional employer organisations are now also joined to the claim: Anglican Trust for Women and Children, The Open Home Foundation of New Zealand, and The Salvation Army New Zealand. This means there are eight employer organisations that are



party to this pay equity claim, and this enables any settlement reached in the claim to be considered for extension to the whole relevant wider sector workforce.

What is the role of Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa in the claim?

Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa (SSPA) is not a party to this pay equity claim. Its role is to act as the lead advocate/coordinator for the employer organisations involved in the claim, all of which are SSPA members.

The approach SSPA takes generally to its role as the employer coordinator is to act in the interests of the employer group as well as the wider community-based social service sector as a whole.

SSPA is again contracting Brenda Pilott as its Pay Equity Coordinator, to oversee coordination of the employer group. SSPA's Chief Executive supports this work and SSPA National Executive members maintain strategic oversight of the coordination of the employer group and the claim's progress, ensuring a whole of sector perspective on behalf of SSPA members. SSPA keeps in close contact with the PSA and relevant government agencies in its work in relation to the claim.

What stage is the claim at currently?

The following shows the current status of the claim's progress:

- Claim lodged by the PSA against five employers of people working in social service workers roles – August 2019
- Arguability of the claim and bargaining process agreed with the PSA – July 2020
- Three additional employers added to the claim by the PSA – April 2023
- In mid-2023, the 8 employers entered into a new Multi-Employer Pay Equity Process Agreement. This governs how the group works together and makes decisions.
- Preparation and planning phase – currently at this stage, and likely to continue throughout the rest of 2023.
- Next step: research to inform definition of scope and job groupings within the claim – likely to take place in early 2024. Following on from this, the claim investigation phase will begin.

How long will this claim take to reach a settlement?

It is not possible to put an exact time frame on the length of time a pay equity claim takes to reach the settlement phase, given the unpredictability of the work involved, including the involvement of government processes which are outside the control of the claim parties.

However, past experience with the social work pay equity claim shows that the process could take up to a number of years. On the plus side, we will be applying lots of lessons learned through the social work claim to this claim, which should help with making some of the process more efficient.



Will the pay equity extension process apply to this claim?

The Pay Equity Funded Framework now governs how the government oversees and funds pay equity claims relating to entire workforces, and the pay equity extension process is a part of this Framework.

The aim of the extension process is to enable pay equity claims that reach settlement (and which are representative of a wider sector workforce) to be extended to that wider relevant workforce, without new and separate pay equity claims having to be lodged. The Government (Cabinet) is the decision-maker about whether or not to apply the pay equity extension process to a particular pay equity claim settlement.

Therefore, it is ultimately up to the Government of the day to decide if it will apply the pay equity extension process to a settled claim. However, on the basis of the Framework, we are operating on the view that if this claim reaches a settlement, it would be eligible to be considered by the Government for application of the pay equity extension process.

How does this claim relate to the previous social work pay equity claim?

Both claims were lodged by the PSA at the same time in 2019. However, this is a separate claim. It relates to social service workers, therefore a much broader range of workers than those covered by the community-based social work claim that reached settlement in 2022.

How can SSPA members and the wider community-based social sector support the claim?

As with the social work claim, a strong, collective sector-wide effort will be important to ensure this claim reaches a successful outcome, so that pay equity can be achieved for all people working across social service worker roles.

At this early stage, the best thing you can do is to keep updated with the progress of the claim through our communications channels.

Further down the track, if a pay equity extension process is activated, we will need all employers of people in social service roles covered by the claim to participate in this process.

How can I keep up-to-date with progress on the claim?

If you're an employer of people in social service roles in a community-based organisation, for now, keep an eye on the [SSPA website](#) – we will periodically update information. SSPA will also keep its members updated in due course with any key progress and milestones. If you'd like to apply to join SSPA, you can do that via our Join Us form [here](#).