

Putting people at the centre post COVID-19

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We have watched as our world has turned upside down over the past few months as New Zealand responded to unparalleled changes to our social, cultural and economic ways of working and living.

While the COVID-19 health crisis may have receded in Aotearoa New Zealand, our attention now turns to the urgent need to rebuild the economy, offering a rare opportunity for a change of focus to ensure social and economic benefits all New Zealanders, wherever they might live and work. COVID-19 has focused our attention on what's best for our people and our communities.

Post-COVID Aotearoa New Zealand is not about getting back to normal, because normal was never good enough for majority of our people. Many Māori, Pacifica, and migrant families have been living with the impacts of deprivation, poverty and social inequity for too long and this needs to change. If we are going to flourish as a nation post-COVID, the Crown and Māori, public and private sector must put our people at the centre of our conversations, discussions and deliberations.

We know women have adversely affected by COVID-19 — in employment, and also within their whānau and homes. Women often juggle work with the bulk of family responsibilities including care of the sick or elderly within their whānau. And when times are tough, measures to support and progress women's equality are often at risk. This crisis has shown more than ever what work is truly valuable and how 'undervalued' those essential workers have been – think nurses, care workers and support staff. Decision and policy makers must recognise and remunerate women in these historically under-valued sectors, where a high proportion of employees are Māori, Pacific and migrant women.

We need a joint approach to the economic recovery plan that includes the perspectives of women, Māori, Pacifica, ethnic community and business leaders, and government. To get this right, we must consider how we achieve equity and equality in terms of gender parity, pay equity through the entire employment, policy and legislative framework. Let's talk



about and plan for creating an equitable environment for our women to stand and participate.

The Government's post COVID-19 economic support package must include a specific focus on and investment in training, education, apprenticeships and free-child care for women to ensure we have fair, equal and equitable access to employment and business opportunities. In doing so, we are more likely to come up with a comprehensive, collaborative strategy that ensures all New Zealanders enjoy a better quality of life now, and for our mokopuna, and their mokopuna.