



## **Midwives beyond frustration over pay issues**

MERAS is fed up at the delays in Te Whatu Ora's response to our request on 15 December for an interim pay equity settlement for midwives.

MERAS made the request when Te Whatu Ora announced it was planning to pay nurses an interim pay equity adjustment. This has now been implemented, backdated to 7 March 2022.

It does not include NZNO midwives as they are covered by the joint Midwifery Pay Equity claim.

It means that nurses are now being paid in excess of \$11,000 a year more than the midwives they are working alongside, despite the fact that midwives are responsible for directing and supervising nurses in maternity wards.

MERAS had hoped to resolve the issue of an interim pay equity settlement for midwives before Christmas, but the proposed dates are weeks away. Any agreement on an interim pay equity adjustment will not happen before March.

Frustration has boiled over into anger as many Districts have yet to pay out midwifery incentive payments to ensure night shifts were covered during the Summer months.

Midwives are saying they are invisible to Te Whatu Ora, which fails to recognise the skills, knowledge and level of responsibility midwives bring to the women of Aotearoa New Zealand and their babies.

Te Whatu Ora does not seem to recognise that its midwifery workforce is at breaking point. Midwives on the MERAS fb group are talking about walking off the job, picketing Te Whatu Ora offices, or refusing to take on extra shifts.

### **Urgency sought over Pay Equity issues**

MERAS filed in the Employment Relations Authority after months of negotiations reached a stalemate in August last year. We have since filed for our application to be heard as a matter of urgency.

Te Whatu Ora rejected our initial request for mediation and we are now at the point where we believe mediation would be a waste of our time.

The Crown Negotiator, acting on behalf of Te Whatu Ora and the Crown, has made it clear that any settlement needed to be within the Crown mandate.

It soon became obvious there was simply not enough money in the pot to address the undervaluation of midwives that had been established in the exhaustive four-year assessment process.

MERAS has asked the Authority to issue a compliance order requiring Te Whatu Ora to include all appropriate comparators, to use current pay rates for all comparators, and to include superannuation in the calculations of remuneration paid to comparators.

### **PSPA now seems to be a dead duck**

Health sector unions, along with other CTU public sector unions, were to be offered a Public Sector Pay Adjustment (PSPA) of \$6000 over 24 months with \$4000 in the first year and a further \$2000 the following year. This was to be on top of your paid rates.

MERAS co-leaders met with Te Whatu Ora advocates on 1 December to work out how outstanding issues other than pay rates would be resolved. Agreement had been reached on most of the issues we raised.

However, on 7 December we received an email from Te Whatu Ora saying the PSPA was on hold after the Government revised its offer to 3% in the second year.

The revised offer also meant MERAS members employed by Te Whatu Ora would not get the pay adjustment till 3 April 2023, just weeks before the Collective Agreement (the former MECA) expires.

Two months passed, with no word from Te Whatu Ora. We followed up with their advocates, only to discover that a paper had gone to the Board of Te Whatu Ora but that it is "too premature" to tell us the outcome of the Board's decision.

As we are due to initiate to renew the MERAS and Te Whatu Ora Collective on 1 March, it appears that this process is going to override the PSPA.

We will soon be sending out a proposed log of claims for you to consider at workplace meetings and then to endorse in an electronic vote. We will also be seeking your endorsement for our negotiating team.

Because this will mean opting out of the PSPA and negotiating as per normal, we will have the option of taking industrial action, which we can't do now.

**Caroline Conroy MERAS Co-Leader (Midwifery)**

**Jill Ovens MERAS Co-Leader (Industrial)**