

PSYCHOLOGISTS

Newsletter

March 2020



NEW DEAL FOR DHB PSYCHOLOGISTS

- **24 month term – 1 March 2019 to 1 March 2021**
- **9.69% to 17.2% pay increases**
- **Read the implementation details [here](#)**

In mid-February APEX members in DHBs voted 95% in favour of the third offer from employers to settle the psychologists' MECA.

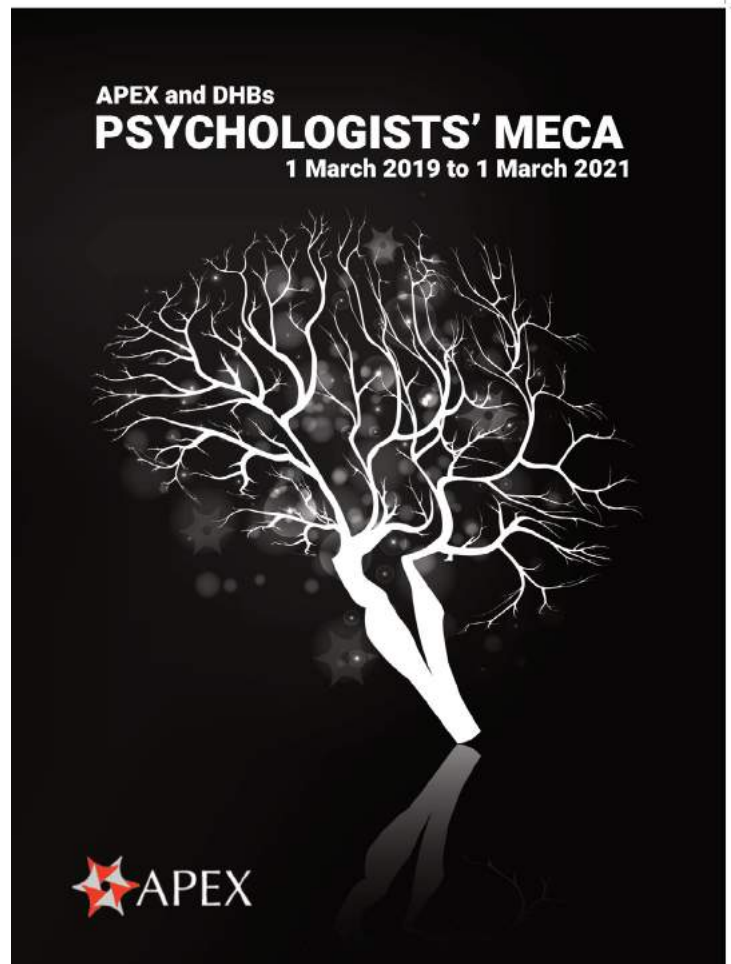
The 95% ratification vote comes after a grinding 12-month campaign for a new psychologist contract that saw members resoundingly vote down two previous pay offers by 90% each time. After a year of bargaining, three months of partial industrial action, two failed attempts at mediated bargaining and a recommendation from the Employment Relations Authority the Government the MECA settles the rumbling discontent that DHBs were not doing enough to address the psychology workforce crisis.

The new MECA provides a strong foundation for the profession, extending APEX coverage to Tairāwhiti, Wairarapa and Southern DHBs, and setting up working groups to investigate and make recommendations to the Ministry of Health on workforce development for psychologists.

The big gains in the MECA were made only because the vast majority of psychologists were prepared

to sustain a long term campaign to overhaul salary rates and put professional development on the agenda.

As implementation of the new MECA begins, APEX would like to thank all of the 600 members, and 32 delegates whose hard work and determination paved the way for the new deal for psychologists.



ROAD TO THE 2019 - 2021 MECA

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

13 February 2020 - The latest offer and signed Terms of Settlement is the culmination of work done for a number of years, and a year's bargaining, three months of industrial action, and the work of delegates in presenting the claims of members to DHBs at mediation and facilitation.

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

6 December 2019 - Facilitated bargaining which occurred on 27/28 November and 4/5 December has concluded and is going to a recommendation from the Employment Relations Authority. The process used in facilitation was an interest-based bargaining approach, which allowed us to make good progress. Although progress was made, there were unresolved issues on which the Authority Member felt that it would be appropriate to make recommendations on.

MEDIA:

8 November 2019 - They had rejected a pay offer from the DHBs in mid-July. Clare Calvert, a psychologist at Hapai Ora, an early intervention service for young people experiencing psychosis, said the offer did not address APEX's concerns. "They said we could have a [very small] pay increase over a shorter amount of time, but they didn't address any of the other issues about retention or recruitment. They've suggested some working groups to work on that." Workings groups, she said, aren't what the union is looking for. (The Spinoff)

MEDIA RELEASE:

15 November 2019 - "We have been unable to break the impasse with DHBs over key union claims to close the pay gap with Corrections psychologists and commit DHBs to ensure adequate levels of psychologists staffing our health service. After three months of strike action the time has come for us to ask the Employment Relations Authority for their assistance to resolve a dispute which is of national importance."

MEDIA:

18 October 2019 - Even before the strike, youth mental health services in Canterbury were failing to meet national guidelines on assessment times. This week, Stuff revealed some children with suspected autism spectrum disorder were waiting up to 18 months for an assessment. Professional bodies have long raised concerns about the need for more psychologists. In 2017, a workforce task group suggested an extra 940 psychologists were needed across DHBs and primary care to meet demand. (Stuff)

MEDIA:

26 October 2019 - "Psychologists in DHBs earn about 15 to 20 percent less than psychologists in other Government departments like Corrections, and earn far less than psychologists that work for ACC or private practice," says clinical psychologist Dr Emma Edwards. (Newshub)

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

17 October 2019 - This morning we met with the DHBs bargaining team for mediation in Auckland. The DHBs presented the attached offer - essentially their second offer. The explanation from the DHBs is that since our last mediation they had discovered vacancy rates for psychologists of 34% nationwide and had initially proposed a salary scale with 14 steps, and large increases at the beginning of a collective agreement with a 36 month term, to bridge the gap with Corrections, however the Ministry of Health and Cabinet had not approved the additional funding the DHBs has asked for to fund their offer. As such the DHBs were presenting the tabled offer with the hope they could get the Ministry on board with making the changes needed in the next year.

MEDIA RELEASE:

16 September 2019 - "Every week across the country DHB psychological services are being further corroded as the psychology workforce shrinks because the Government is failing to walk the talk on wellbeing."

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

19 August 2019 - "Despite the Government's stated intentions of increasing access to psychological services for New Zealanders, we have not yet seen any new offer from DHBs to settle the national collective agreement for psychologists on terms attractive enough to recruit and retain these specialists."

MEDIA RELEASE:

3 September 2019 - "At the same time as the Prime Minister talks about addressing the mental health crisis, our psychologist workforce is being eroded by a failure by DHBs to address longstanding workforce issues. Patients are inevitably suffering from the refusal of the government to act decisively to fix low pay and poor conditions for psychologists."

MEDIA:

6 August 2019 - "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to realise that those DHB services have had a huge number of people trying to get through the door and the staff are extremely overworked and overloaded. Sadly many people have not been able to get through the door and far too many people are missing out on support." (Radio NZ)

MEDIA:

29 July 2019 - The Ministry of Health and Technical Advisory Services (TAS) were unable to provide figures regarding the total number of psychologist vacancies nationwide. The international benchmark, according to APEX, is that health services have 20 full-time psychologists per 100,000 people. In New Zealand DHBs currently employ an average of 11.8. (The Dominion Post)

MEDIA RELEASE:

16 July 2019 - "The Psychology Workforce Taskforce, set up by the Ministry of Health and Health Workforce New Zealand to address recruitment and retention issues facing the psychologist workforce estimated in 2018 that we need an additional 268 psychologists working in District Health Boards to meet demand for services. Yet in the same year rather than gaining, we lost 73 psychologists from DHB employment."

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

20 June 2019 - The indicative ballot on the offer from DHBs closed this morning. The result was overwhelmingly opposed to the offer, and as such we will write to the DHBs to inform them of the result and resume bargaining. Many of you left comments noting the growing gaps with Corrections, the recent settlements for teachers and nurses and that the offer does not align with the findings of the MH Inquiry, with its emphasis on the importance of psychological intervention.

BARGAINING NEWSLETTER:

21 March 2019 - As the DHBs said, "psychologists have different professional development needs at different parts of the career". The implication was that psychologists in years 1-3 post-graduation ("PGY1-3") should be expected to do the majority of CPD within the DHB, or at a local level. When we asked the DHB team what PGY1-3 psychologists could then expect to be provided from the DHB in terms of professional development? A summation of the response from the DHBs was, "A new clinical psych is a highly skilled person who is reasonably unformed. Lots of learning to do. Problematic to view people who have been working for 1 year versus 10 years as the same. They are not the same. A formal programme in-house - agree with you on the need for it but not sure how you attain it for DHBs who have limited resources. Link up every DHB and the grads could attend virtually. But how do we do that? Don't disagree but just not sure how we would practically achieve it. And considering diversity in the workplace too. Idea of national consistency/programme but I end up being concrete about it and asking what would it look like?"

“OUR TEAMS ARE BETTER RESOURCED THAN THEY HAVE BEEN FOR A VERY LONG TIME. WE STILL DON’T HAVE ENOUGH, BUT IT FEELS LIKE WE’RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK.”

An interview with Claire Ewans, an education psychologist and APEX delegate at the Ministry of Education.



areas such as emotional regulation and social interaction, in addition to quite a lot of transition support to primary school. This involves putting together transition plans and supporting parents and teachers with strategies to prepare the child for a positive start to their schooling life.

Building emotional regulation is such a key element at this age, being 4-5 years old, emotions are a big thing for them. A lot of evidence suggests that a child’s socio-emotional skills are more important than reading and writing when they start school. My work focusses on building the child’s ability to manage their emotions and to build their social networks with peers, these are foundations for life. A lot of the strategies we use are based on adult modelling, so adults model the strategies that they use for their own emotional regulation. Children learn so much by watching adults and we can then encourage them to practice these strategies in their play, with their friends and their families.

Do you think it’s ironic, that you went into this job expecting to work with children, and have ended up doing a lot of work with adults?

I have thought about that a few times actually, I specifically trained as an educational psychologist to work with children not with adults. But the focus is the child and we are building capability within adults to be able to support the child to learn life skills which I think is a really sustainable approach. I don’t have a relationship with that child, and I believe the best people to teach a child are the people who have a relationship with them.

What does a good day at work look like for you?

A real mix, I like being being out and about, I love going to visit centres and observing, we see some

great things. Young children have such great attitudes to life, they say the most amazing things and it’s truly enjoyable. I love how young children are able to move on so quickly, two children could be disagreeing over a toy one minute then having an absolute ball with each other the next. It really does give you every opportunity to give each child a fresh start, particularly those we work with. One of the funniest times for me was when a 4 year old wrote and spelt correctly the word “F****” at the centre. You’ve got to admire the spelling! In early childhood kids don’t have many inhibitions and they are really free with the things they say and do, and it never ceases to amaze me how open and friendly a lot of the kids are.

Did the change in government in 2017 make a difference in the working environment and the resourcing within the Ministry?

I feel like it really did. When I first started in 2014, we had a really stable, experienced team. Unfortunately, across the years people have left and they weren’t being replaced, for a while it felt like we were really working on skeleton staff. It was hard to be losing so many fabulous skills that brought so much to our team but no one had come in to replace them. After the government changed, we had a lot more recruitment happen, our teams are certainly fuller than they were during some of those tough years. I feel like our teams are better resourced than they have been for a very long time. We still don’t have enough, but it feels like we’re on the right track.

You have been on the working group, looking at issues within the Ministry of Education? What’s your experience been?

Frustratingly slow! I’m a doer, I find sitting around

the table, and just talking about doing quite difficult, so that part has been really hard. However, I also acknowledge that some of the conversation was entirely needed, and I think that now there is some action happening. I feel like it’s been a useful progress because we needed to address the issues, at least we are addressing them, as opposed to just sitting around talking about them.

We will be back in bargaining early next year, what do you think the priorities will be for negotiations for the psychologists at the Ministry of Education?

Psychologists at the Ministry are the worst paid psychologists in the government sector, I don’t think that’s cool, I don’t understand why we are on a different scale than other government departments. Now that teachers have bargained hard to improve conditions, it’s our turn. So, I would hope that remuneration is up there. I also think that professional development for psychologists is a key priority.

What do you like to do in you spare time?

As a solo mum I spend time with my child, we’re playing lots trivial pursuit at the moment. As we’re heading off for an exciting OE soon, much of my time has been planning this. I’ve got extended leave without pay from the Ministry of Education, so I’ll be back in 2021!

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