



# Will Government Chip in for Psychologists?



The poster, which features the smiley face of APEX psychology delegate Dr Chris Murray, has been sent out to worksites as bargaining spins into gear with major public sector employers of psychologists, including Te Whatu Ora, Oranga Tamariki, and Ministry of Education.

In the last two years, Government employed psychologists have seen wages cut in real terms as a result of the public sector pay freeze. Now making up the ground lost to inflation is going to require pay increases of at least 15%.

That's going to require central government to chip in extra funding for psychologist salaries.

## Public Service Pay Adjustment

In December 2022, the Government formalised the abandonment of their public sector pay freeze with the roll out of guidance on PSPA, the public sector

Union members may have begun to spot new posters popping up in workplaces covered by APEX contracts.

pay adjustment.

The PSPA guidance proposes pay increases for public servants of \$4000 plus \$2000/3% whichever is higher, over a 24-month term. That is better than nothing, but if inflation continues at current levels, for those on senior psychologist salaries, the approximately 6.6% increase for a 2-year deal will be somewhere close to half inflation. That will be a pay cut in real terms.

We have already seen PSPA type offers for psychologists at OT and MoE. We will probably see the same in Te Whatu Ora shortly.

## Minimum Wage Up 7%

For those on the minimum wage however the Government is making sure their incomes are indexed to inflation. On 1 April 2023 the Government mandated the minimum wage to increase by \$1.50 an hour from \$21.20 to \$22.70. The annual increase will be 7%, broadly in line with current levels of inflation – 7.2% for the last year. Prime Minister Hipkins said of the increase, "An inflation-adjusted lift to the minimum wage will mean that thousands of New Zealanders don't go backwards."

No one begrudges minimum wage workers getting wage increases which match inflation, but the same principle that no one's wages should go backwards must apply to psychologists as well.

If you would like copies of the poster for your office, staffroom or workplace – email us at [psychologist@apex.org.nz](mailto:psychologist@apex.org.nz)

## Mediation for Oranga Tamariki

Mediation for APEX psychologists and therapists at Oranga Tamariki is due to take place in March, after union members overwhelmingly voted down a below inflation PSPA pay offer from the employer shortly before Christmas 2022.

## Explore/Gains Contract Settled for 8%

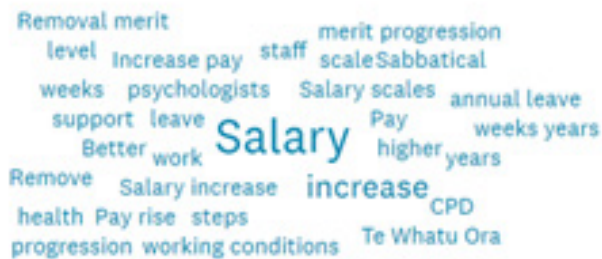
Just before the end of 2022 the collective agreement for psychologists at Explore/Gains settled for a term of 12 months to July 2023, with an 8% increase on all steps and full backpay on the increase.

Thank you to the hard work of our delegates Dr Nicole Winters and Connolly Bourn on the bargaining team who made this settlement happen.

## Engagement at Counties Manukau over Psychology Issues

Meetings have begun between APEX and Counties Manukau management over issues affecting the psychology workforce including issues with run down and overcrowded mental health facilities, delays in CPD/merit applications, lack of access to IT equipment, and frustration with a centralised travel booking process.

## "Times are tough" - Te Whatu Ora Claims Finalised



Most mentioned terms for bargaining

A hundred members responded to our claims survey at Te Whatu Ora with 95% indicating they were in favour of the proposed claims, and almost every person indicated salary as the priority for bargaining. As one psychologist stated their priority, "Increase the pay. Times are tough. Too tempting to do private work only and leave Te Whatu Ora."

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on the draft claims. We have made changes to the claims in response to feedback including:

- Strengthening provisions for parents making flexible working arrangements requests;
- Claiming retiring gratuities for those with 10+ years' service;
- Reimbursement of indemnity subs;
- Including IT provisions within the Workplace Facilities clause.

Union members also provided very helpful informative on merit progression processes with comments such as:

"Arduous long process where approval

can depend on managers/leader who are not psychologists. Response from DHB take months."

"It is cumbersome and time-consuming. Most psychologists at this level are already undertaking far more than the basic requirements and shouldn't have to jump through hoops to have this recognised."

"I undertook merit progression this year from 11 to 12 and it was a difficult process. My workplace did not undertake the stated process and it went to a panel not involving myself or my manager. It was an awful process to go through and also not culturally appropriate - with a lack of tikanga and values such as whakawhanaungatanga."

Bargaining for the APEX and Te Whatu Ora psychology agreement will be initiated on 3 April. Negotiations are scheduled for 26 and 27 April in Auckland, followed by 10 and 11 May in Wellington.

# 94%

Said current salary scales are insufficient to recruit and retain psychologists at Te Whatu Ora

# 95%

In favour of APEX raising proposed claims



## Ministry of Education Bargaining Team



## Ministry of Education Bargaining Begins

Bargaining at the Ministry of Education for the APEX psychologists contract has begun, with the first round of discussions taking place on 1/2 March in Auckland. A pay claim has been tabled to match the salary scale to the results of a job sizing review carried out in 2022.

And just a week after bargaining began for psychologists at the Ministry of Education, the Secretary of Education has written to us to notify they are suspending accelerated advancement applications until a new collective agreement is reached. Some psychologists had been waiting up to 6 months for managers to make decisions about these applications, and now they are being told to keep waiting.

# "Double staffing to meet demand"



**Dr Rikki Thompson is an APEX delegate at Te Whatu Ora Canterbury.**

**Where do you work and what do you do?**

I work for Te Whatu Ora Canterbury at the Adult Community Mental Health service, and I have also just recently started a secondment at the University of Canterbury working in the Clinical Psychology Training Programme.

**How did you become a Clinical Psychologist and what was your reason for becoming one?**

Fresh out of high school, I actually studied filmmaking. While I was doing that I noticed that a lot of my friend group would come and talk to me about their struggles and what was going on for them. I found that I really enjoyed supporting people in that way, but I also felt like I needed to upskill myself to make sure I was doing a better job at it. I had always been a fan of science, so I saw clinical psychology as a nice way to blend helping people with an empirical science background. I retrained in psychology and have now been working in mental health for about five years.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I mainly enjoy doing psychological treatment and therapeutic work with people, though recently I've also really started to enjoy supervising interns and supporting new colleagues. The thing I enjoy the most about clinical psychology is the flexibility and range we have to do a lot of different things. I feel strongly about advocating for clients, colleagues, and for psychology as a profession, which I think has never had the voice that it should have within the health system.

**Why did you become an APEX delegate?**

I became a delegate in 2020. I had always been passionate about



advocacy and so I remember quite early on in my career thinking that I might at some point become a union delegate. I initially held back because I felt like I was too new to the profession and so didn't have the credibility to be representing my peers. I had a very helpful supervisor at the time though who encouraged me and who reminded me that the whole idea of representation is to be 'representative'. She pointed out that delegates should reflect the workforce and so should include both those who are very experienced and also those quite new to the profession.

### **What are duties you've had to do as a delegate?**

Providing advice and guidance to members around employment and contractual matters—letting people know what they are entitled to and how they can go about ensuring that they receive those entitlements. A big part of it too is communication, and keeping the membership updated about major changes or workforce developments and plans. Other times it is just being there as a support person—being another person in the room at meetings with management.

### **What do you think the priority is for bargaining, and why?**

Recognition and support. An obvious one is being fairly compensated for the work we do. Working for Te Whatu Ora is almost the worst-paying option you can choose as a clinical psychologist.

### **What would Te Whatu Ora get if they paid psychologists better?**

They would get a wider range of people applying for available positions, which

would increase the range and depth of experience in the workforce. Better retention of senior staff, which would have a flow-on effect on supporting, supervising, and training newer staff. There is such a ripple-effect when you compensate people fairly. In an environment where people have so much choice, Te Whatu Ora needs to be more competitive.

### **How is psychology staffing at Te Whatu Ora Canterbury?**

We do not have nearly enough FTE for our existing specialist mental health services. Waiting lists are months or years most of the time, though even these don't really capture the need well. In my service, for example, the waitlist is so long that many would-be referrals simply do not originate in the first place because the referrers know that their clients realistically won't be seen. FTE for psychology has not increased here for as long as I have worked here. If you doubled the staffing levels tomorrow for the Adult Community Mental Health team at Canterbury that would at least allow us to keep up with current demand.

### **What do you enjoy doing when you're not at work?**

I am involved in softball and am now an international softball umpire. You get the opportunity to travel around the world and New Zealand each year for national tournaments. I certainly get the opportunity to call on my psychology skills with umpiring, particularly with managing coaches and players on the diamond with often-heated disagreements on decisions!