



## NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF MULTICULTURAL COUNCILS INC.

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# MNZ Seniors' Council Hui

Saturday, 24 February 2024 at Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington

On Saturday the 24th of February, delegates from 18 Regional Multicultural Councils converged at the Brentwood Hotel in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington for the Multicultural New Zealand Seniors' Council Hui 2024.

Opening the proceedings with a karakia, National President Pancha Narayanan outlined the kaupapa of this important gathering: the development of a roadmap to set the direction and a plan of work for the Multicultural New Zealand Seniors' Council for the next two to three years, to be implemented in all regions.

## Updates from Around the Motu

MNZ Seniors' Council President Ravinder Powar began with a warm welcome to all attendees before introducing the first order of business for the day: the sharing of updates on the activities, aspirations, and concerns of the Seniors' groups from around the motu.

There is a broad spectrum in level of activity from region to region, ranging from weekly get-togethers organised for seniors, through to more generally inclusive events and activities which, while not specifically orientated towards elderly people provide valuable opportunities to socialise. The importance of these meetups cannot be overstated, with loneliness being identified as a major issue facing elderly community members by all delegates in attendance. While some Regional Multicultural Councils have adopted a more structured approach to these events, a simple cup of tea and sharing a meal can be a lifeline for those grappling with feelings of isolation.

Excursions are another activity reported by many Regional Multicultural Councils, with day-long bus trips and picnics being organised for seniors by Waikato Multicultural Council, and Multicultural Council of Rangitikei/Whanganui venturing as far as Rarotonga on an individually funded trip last year, with Malaysia next on their list for this coming winter.

Struggles with adapting to modern technologies were touched on by many delegates. Multicultural Council of Wellington reported a combined Women's, Seniors,' and Youth training event on Digital Inclusion, covering basic internet access, navigating online banking and government services, communication, and cyber security, as well as motivation to use digital technology and building trust in internet use. The newly formed Taupō Multicultural Community Council have been utilising their local Age Concern chapter's Digital Literacy sessions for seniors.

Cooperation with Age Concern and other elderly support organisations was spoken of by many other Regional Multicultural Councils also, with local Senior Citizens' Associations and Grey Power mentioned alongside more general social service support entities such as Presbyterian Support. Te Tai Poutini West Coast Multicultural Council's work with WestREAP and the Salvation Army to organise Defensive Driving classes for migrants, Waikato Multicultural Council's engaging Age Concern for exercise classes for seniors, and Hutt Multicultural Council's connections to Wesley Community Action are all good examples of this fruitful collaboration.

Several delegates cited that many former migrants and former refugees who have settled in their regions are now bringing in their parents to live with them, presenting a real need for a focus on senior services for people for whom English is not their first language. Tairāwhiti Multicultural Council's work producing videos in 23 languages to help spread emergency preparedness messaging in the wake of the Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle was not specifically aimed at seniors but is an excellent example of an initiative to address barriers to language.

Two councils in particular spoke of fostering intergenerational connections as a means of not only providing seniors with an opportunity to socialise, but to also impart knowledge and share their wisdom. Waikato Multicultural Council's active encouragement of mentoring activities between community elders and the younger generation has led to better understanding of different ethnicities and cultures, and Dunedin Multicultural Council's Heart & Soil Community Garden sessions are as much about community building as they are about tending to plants.

Loneliness and isolation, the rising cost of living, elder abuse, and a multitude of other key areas of concern were voiced in this first session, and it was agreed that identifying elders who are in need of assistance is the first step toward addressing these issues. Auckland City Multicultural Council, while not yet having a dedicated seniors' group, has begun work on a small survey on elders in their community to assess the need for support.

In his closing remarks, MNZ National President Pancha Narayanan advised Regional Multicultural Councils that the only way to secure funding for projects is by starting them. Citing the example of Upper Hutt Multicultural Council's purchase of a local sewing club that was slated to close. The UHMC secured the machines from their baseline funds and kept the club alive as a valuable hub for senior community members to congregate and learn from each other. Subsequent funding has now come in for the initiative to continue. Funding is not granted for planned projects; it is granted to existing ones.

The session concluded with an appeal from MNZ Seniors' Council President Ravinder Power to those Regional Multicultural Councils that do not yet have their own Seniors' Council to amend their Constitution and form one.

### **Age Concern - Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention**

The next session was delivered by Age Concern New Zealand Professional Educator Hanny Naus who spoke on the topic Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention.

Hanny's presentation began with an acknowledgement of the commonalities between Age Concern and MNZ, both in terms of organisational structure, with both organisations comprising of several smaller regional bodies throughout the country operating in cooperation and with a central body that serves and supports them, and in terms of shared values and vision. Age Concern's purview is the promotion of dignity, respect, and wellbeing for older people and their

whānau, the delivery of information and support services where needed, and the provision of advice and information to Government and other national bodies on issues of concern for older people.

After touching on how to identify the common, often denigrating terminology used in reference to the elderly, Hanny spoke of the Human Rights perspective, referring to the Principles for Older Persons as adopted by the United Nations in 1991, specifically Principle 17:

*Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.*

These Principles are yet to progress to ratification as UN Conventions, despite the best efforts of elder persons advocacy groups worldwide. In New Zealand, the Human Rights Act, while providing a definition of an adult person and listing age as a prohibited ground for discrimination, does not specifically address issues to do with old age.

The World Health Organisation's 2002 Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse reads:

*Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.*

While this definition is agreed upon internationally it does not carry legal authority in New Zealand. It does, however, form a basis of mutual understanding that underpins much of the work on combatting elder abuse conducted by Age Concern NZ and organisations of a similar nature.

Age Concern NZ has identified and categorised the following types of elder abuse:

- Psychological
- Financial
- Physical
- Neglect
- Institutional
- Sexual

In many cases several of these types of abuse occur together, with psychological being by far the most common type of abuse experienced by elderly people, underlying all other types. Talking over elderly people, failing to consider their views, coercion, bullying, and humiliation are offered as examples of psychological abuse. Financial abuse, including misuse of power of attorney, unauthorised taking of money or possessions, and use of home and assets without contribution to costs is identified as the second most prevalent type of elder abuse.

Physical abuse is the third most common type identified, with Age Concern finding occurrence in around 1 in 5 cases. A lot of physical abuse is less obvious, often invisible, with under/over medication, and use of restraint or confinement cited as examples.

Neglect of the physical, emotional, or social needs of elderly people is not always a deliberate act. Failure to provide adequate clothing or accommodation can cause undue harm, as can failure to attend to health care needs such as forgetting to collect pharmacy prescriptions.

The term institutional abuse is used to describe cases when policies or accepted practices within an organisation charged with the responsibility for care and wellbeing of older people disregard their rights or cause harm and distress. This can include the implementation of unsuitably rigid routines, or a lack of respect for a person's culture or customs.

Sexual abuse of older people is the least commonly reported type of elder abuse, occurring in around 1% of cases seen by Age Concern. However, being seen as a taboo subject by older generations which is not openly acknowledged, it is unsurprising that discussion of sexual abuse seldom comes to the fore. This is further complicated by the lack of recognition of the sexual activity, needs, and preferences of older people, particularly those in the Rainbow community.

After a brief overview of the history of Age Concern in New Zealand and the presentation of statistics collated over a period of decades, Hanny then spoke of where elder abuse most commonly occurs, and the typical duration of abuse. In many cases, elder abuse and neglect are not easily immediately noticed; the abuse will start subtly and build over the course of many months or years before being identified and an opportunity for intervention presents. In over 75% cases reported to Age Concern, elder abuse is taking place at the hands of a family member, and most often in their own home.

There are many factors contributing to the prevalence of elder abuse and neglect in New Zealand, including inheritance and disputed property rights, changing societal norms, cross-cultural expectations, and the expectations of the role of older people in communities. It is a complex, subtle, and multi-faceted topic, and much work is left to do to foster knowledge and understanding of this issue in the public mind.

Age Concern New Zealand raises awareness of elder abuse during their Elder Abuse Awareness Week (15-22 June) kicking off with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on the 15th of June every year. The message of this year's campaign is **Break the Silence**.

Anyone who would like to raise questions about possible elder abuse and neglect issues can call Age Concern on 0800 65 2 105

To connect with registered nurses who can advise with information and support about elder abuse, call the National Elder Abuse Hotline 'EA NOT OK' - 0800 32 668 65

### **Hon Casey Costello, Minister for Seniors**

Next was an address from the Minister for Seniors, Hon Casey Costello, formally welcomed by Multicultural New Zealand National Treasurer Prem Singh. After a brief round of introductions from the Regional Multicultural Council delegates, Minister Costello applauded the work done by Multicultural New Zealand and gave thanks for the opportunity for public engagement.

The Minister began her talk by echoing the sentiment expressed by many of the delegates in the first session of the day: that the most important work to be done with respect to the wellbeing of Senior Citizens is to overcome isolation, emphasising the need to keep the subject in the public discourse across age demographics, different cultures, and social groups.

The Minister criticised the former Government's culture of disparagement of the Baby Boomer generation. New Zealand has an aging population, with one in 5 New Zealanders set to be over the age of 65 years in a decade's time. There is a steadily increasing number of people reaching retirement who are renting or still paying their mortgage, or who have no stable living situation. This is not a demographic of privilege; the undermining of the Baby Boomer generation ignores reality and must stop. The demographics of our aging population is shifting, with increasing diversity of cultural considerations. We have a significant challenge ahead of us to keep our society protected and working together.

Historically, New Zealand is a good place to age. To continue that, and to improve upon it, we must commit to being innovative in our approach. The Minister spoke of several issues and proposed solutions:

- Housing
  - Relax restrictions for the building of subsidiary dwellings of up to 60 m2, by way of supporting multigenerational dwelling.
  - Improved connection across agencies
  - There are good Government/non-government support services available but navigating them is not straightforward.
- Economy and the retirement age
  - Raising the retirement age is unnecessary if we have strong economic growth.
  - Supporting businesses, growth, investment.
- Super Gold Card
  - Overdue review. Working with Ministry to increase available benefits.
- Rates
  - Working with Local Government on the rates rebate programme.
- Capacity for Age Care
  - Decades of underinvestment.
  - Look at public/private partnership models.
  - Halt asset sales: urgent intervention needed to stabilise the situation and avoid further capacity loss.
- Health
  - Increase capacity for early intervention solutions.
  - Age care as an investment under the health portfolio, take strain off the hospitals.
  - Build capacity for respite care.
- Refugee programmes
  - Community organisations sponsoring refugees into New Zealand on a specific skill base.
  - Programme in trial stage with first report due in a few months.

The Minister closed her talk by repeating that the essential first step in addressing any of the issues identified in today's hui is discussion; we must talk across all levels and keep talking, keep asking questions, keep engaging.

The Minister reiterated her commitment to open engagement with the community and encouraged anyone who wants to discuss their issues to contact her office.

## **Intergenerational Communication & DiSC**

The third session of the day was twofold: a talk on Intergenerational Communication, and a workshop on DiSC behavioural self-assessment, both facilitated by Tairāwhiti Multicultural Council President Arish Naresh.

Intergenerational communication plays a pivotal role in fostering cohesion and understanding within migrant and ethnic communities. By bridging the gap between different age groups, it facilitates the exchange of cultural knowledge, traditions, and values, thereby preserving heritage and identity across generations. Furthermore, intergenerational communication

promotes mutual respect and empathy, enabling younger generations to learn from the experiences and wisdom of their elders while providing older members with opportunities for continued engagement and relevance within the community.

In the context of recruiting and retaining volunteers, effective intergenerational communication is equally essential. It ensures that diverse perspectives and talents are leveraged to their fullest potential, creating an inclusive environment where volunteers of all ages feel valued and empowered. By fostering open dialogue and collaboration across generations, organizations can tap into a wealth of knowledge and innovation, driving greater engagement and productivity among volunteers while strengthening community bonds.

### **Issues, Actions, and Priorities**

For the final session, the hui broke into five focus groups and set themselves to further discuss the established issues of the day, prioritising them, workshoping viable solutions, and formulating actions in alignment with the NZFMC Strategic Plan. This session was facilitated by Multicultural New Zealand National President Pancha Narayanan, who began by asking the five groups to each identify three issues for the Multicultural New Zealand Seniors' Council to consider.

Unsurprisingly, there were a lot of commonalities in the five groups' thinking, with the subjects of health, poverty/finance, and language being highlighted many times. Other issues included housing and accommodation, elderly as caregivers, and poor transport infrastructure/lack of public transport in rural regions.

With regards to health, one group made the distinction between physical, mental, and emotional health, while another group focussed on discrimination in healthcare, citing wait times in hospitals as a particular issue of concern. Language and technology issues underlie all other problems for many older members of ethnic communities, exacerbating social isolation and increasing the difficulties already faced by elderly in navigating the public health system, social services, access to transportation, and financial literacy.

The next stage in the process was to review the points highlighted in the previous exercise and discuss why they arise, with the third exercise being to discuss what actions need to be taken, and how to prioritise them. The final exercise in this session involved the allocation of these actions to the six Workstream Objectives of the NZFMC Strategic Plan. The chosen Objectives were:

A – Safety for Communities and their Families

B – Improved Inclusion

C – Sustainment and Modernisation

E – Participation in NZ Socioeconomics

The decisions made here today are to be published as the Brentwood Declaration: a ten-point declaration outlining the work of the Multicultural New Zealand Seniors' Council for the next three years. This document is to be incorporated into the Strategic Plan of all Regional Multicultural Councils, should be utilised in meetings with local agencies and authorities, and used to as supporting documentation in funding applications for Seniors' Council projects.

It will be the responsibility of the Regional Multicultural Councils' respective Seniors' Councils to stay across this work and ensure the Federation is prioritising the actions laid out in the Brentwood Declaration.

It will be the responsibility of the Federation to gather the statistics and evidence to support the Brentwood Declaration, and to solicit professional advice for lobbying at all levels of government.

The Federation must work toward attaining the skills requisite to properly analyse and understand all government policy that has an impact of the wellbeing of elders in our communities.

The Federation assumes the mandate of sharing the contact details of Regional Multicultural Councils with the key national agencies with whom we work toward these goals.