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Briefing to the Incoming Minister

Minister of Health

Rural Women New Zealand



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Overview

Our rural communities are unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, are inherently resilient and unequivocally hold the economic, social and cultural strength of Aotearoa New Zealand in their hearts. Aotearoa New Zealand's history is populated by rural pioneers and entrepreneurs laced together with Te Ao Māori. Aotearoa New Zealand's rural communities are innovative, tight-knit and supportive. They value their heritage and contribution to our way of life which they hold dear and is the envy of many around the world. Rural women are the backbone of our rural communities and are vital to ensuring the communities in which they live, work and, play are strong and resilient. Rural women are leaders in their local communities, Government policies, legislation and decisions impact urban and rural communities differently.

About RWNZ

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that since 1925 has been reaching into all rural communities and for nearly 100 years has been, and continues to be, a credible, respected voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues.

RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World and as such upholds all United Nations, ILO, FAO and WHO conventions and outcome statements as they relate to women and rural women in particular. RWNZ is a strong supporter of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and seeks acknowledgement of these in its submissions to Parliament.

Role of RWNZ

RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development. Our Members play a vital role as leaders in their communities and as decision-makers at local, national and international level.

Engaging With our Rural Voice

Change begins when a community comes together to discuss issues that affect it. When given the opportunity, this togetherness allows rural communities to discuss the effects of government policy and legislation on those living and working in rural New Zealand. Rural voices must be included in consultation and policy development to ensure positive outcomes for rural communities.

Policy Development

RWNZ sees an opportunity for the Minister to ensure that all policy development includes a rural impact analysis alongside the Ministry's gender analysis tool. It is important to identify and mitigate any potential adverse impacts of the intersectionality of gender and rural living.

Currently there are guidelines for rural proofing at the Ministry of Primary Industries which support basic rural impact analyses and the

Ministry for Women has the gender analysis tool, Bringing Gender In. Using these together should give the desired platform, in the creation of policies and plans, for testing any issues that result from the intersectionality of being a woman, or girl, in rural New Zealand.

Consultation

RWNZ further recommends that the Minister encourages consultation and communication with rural communities to ensure effective participation and analysis.

Consultation can be achieved through the use of such mechanisms as focus groups, surveys and newsletters which are hosted and/or distributed by rural interest groups such as ours.

Leadership

RWNZ sees an opportunity for the Minister to partner with us to identify and encourage rural women to represent their communities on District Health Boards, advisory committees, reference groups and taskforces to ensure the voice of rural communities and the health issues facing women are understood and articulated.

International Instruments

RWNZ would like to see the Government action the United Nations Human Rights Instruments, which have been ratified by Aotearoa New Zealand, as they relate to rural women and girls, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the outcome statement of the 62nd United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62); the Beijing Platform for Action and; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Minister could advocate for actions across Government that include accepting and implementing any General Recommendations and State Party Specific Recommendations to Aotearoa New Zealand by the CEDAW Committee and any health outcome statements from CSW62.

Priority Areas: Health and Wellbeing

Excellent health and wellbeing services are essential for rural communities to thrive. Lack of equitable access to affordable healthcare remains a central issue facing rural women and their families. Currently, many rural New Zealanders are forced to travel significant distances to reach health services often causing serious health and financial consequences for the patient.

Access to mobile health care and online health services remains limited by location, eligibility criteria and, in the case of online services, lack of reliable digital connectivity.

Mental health concerns and suicide rates are alarmingly high in rural New Zealand and access to mental health care is inadequate. The isolation experienced by rural New Zealanders during challenging times and adverse events is a major concern for many rural families.

The lack of adequate maternity services in rural areas places women and their families at risk. The allocation of resources to provide safe, timely and effective maternity care should be available to all mothers regardless of their location.

Well-resourced and professionally supported midwives, nurses and care workers are essential for the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

Recommendations for the Minister:

- Invest in excellent healthcare for rural communities including increasing the availability and range of mobile and local health services and support for all rural health practitioners and providers including midwives, nurses and care workers;

- Advocate for the establishment and maintenance of network connectivity in rural areas to ensure that every rural household has access to reliable internet and cellular coverage which will provide greater digital access to health and wellbeing services.

- Provide increased resources to enable improved access by rural New Zealanders to education on, treatment of and support for mental health, drug and alcohol abuse and wellbeing services;

- Ensure rural mothers and their babies receive the best maternity care possible including access to services and medical care in a timely manner;

- Improve accessibility to localised treatment options (such as screening and diagnostics) in rural New Zealand.

First 100 days

The strategic intentions articulated in the first one hundred days of government are vital to the ongoing success of Aotearoa New Zealand and the transformational leadership needed to lead these intentions should be obvious to all New Zealanders. The economic, environmental, social and cultural strength of the nation is at its most vulnerable as a new Government settles in to its place and we look forward to hearing of the central role rural communities will be playing in those strategic intentions and leadership of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rural Women New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to meet with you in these first one hundred days to discuss opportunities for collaboration and we look forward to hearing from your office to that end.

He waka eke noa

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei