Friday, 29 May 2020, 4:31 pm
Press Release: New Zealand Nurses Organisation

A recently released report by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) and the McGuinness Institute highlights the challenges faced by NZNO members (nurses, midwives, health care assistants, kai māhi hauora and nursing students) working on the frontlines at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on a survey of NZNO members, conducted between 22 April and 4 May 2020, the report reveals an incredibly unprepared health system, and NZNO Kaiwhakahaere Kerri Nuku says the organisations hope this report will give the Government concrete examples of health care workers’ experiences so we can be better prepared for pandemics to come.

"We are where we are, not because the system was working, but because of the bravery and expertise of our members, as well as a rāwhu (lockdown; time for reflection) that was well supported by public health experts, community-based groups and self-organised iwi and hapū.

"The last few months have exposed deep flaws and disconnections in our health system, but responses to our calls for change have often been slow or, in many areas, non-existent.

"Our frontline workers know very well the issues the system faces and how to fix them, so we wanted to ensure those things were captured."

Ms Nuku says that the lack of confidence in PPE supply, shown in the report, indicates a massive flaw in its supply and distribution as well as a disturbing disconnect between high level rhetoric and what actually happens on the ground.

"About half of the nurses surveyed were not confident about PPE supply, and their comments reveal they felt let down in terms of access to PPE and in proper training in its use. And as we clearly saw, their lives were needlessly put in danger as a result.

"Another big issue revealed is the contrast between staff working in district health boards and those in the aged care, disability and primary health sectors. For example, primary health care workers (e.g. GP practice nurses) were the most involved with testing and triaging, but say they felt much less prepared and supported than their colleagues working in public hospitals.

"Unsurprisingly, issues around PPE preparedness and nurses having to go into isolation also highlighted continued problems around inadequate staffing levels.

"While we weren’t surprised to see these results, the survey has reinforced the need to address some fundamental issues around the allocation and distribution of funding and resources, PPE supply and training, and staffing levels."

NZNO is really grateful to the McGuinness Institute, and to those members who gave their time, for helping share such important stories, and Ms Nuku says it is now up to the Government to honour our frontline workers, and all of us in Aotearoa, by making the changes we need for the future.

© Scoop Media

20 years of independent publishing is a milestone, but your support is essential to keep Scoop thriving. We are building on our offering with thedig.nz our new In-depth Engaged Journalism platform. Now, more than ever sustainable financial support of the Scoop Foundation for Public Interest Journalism will help to keep these vital and participatory media services running.

Find out more and join us:

Become a member Find out more

Find more from New Zealand Nurses Organisation on InfoPages.