

NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL) / HEALTH

## Nationwide strikes: Govt told to give pay parity to community nurses

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Nurses on a protest march in central Christchurch. Photo: RNZ / Rob Dixon

Nurses in primary healthcare are striking to win the right to be paid the same as their hospital counterparts.

Protests are happening in several parts of the country.

The government has been told it needs to find the money for parity for community nurses, as thousands strike for four hours today. But the Minister of Health told RNZ the problem was being addressed, and nurses could expect a solution this year.

Primary health care and Plunket nurses are taking the action because **their pay remains up to 20 percent less than hospital nurses**, while Māori and iwi provider

es are worse off with 25 percent less.



Some primary healthcare nurses said they could not keep up with the cost of living on the money they were being paid, and it was driving some out of the profession.



The Christchurch protest. Photo: RNZ / Rob Dixon

College of Primary Health Care Nurses chair Tracey Morgan, who is on the picket line in Rotorua, told *Midday Report* pay parity funding needed to come from the government.

About 30 nurses were protesting in Rotorua and the atmosphere was "amazing" because of the support from the public, Morgan said. Many of the supporters were patients who recognised the contribution nurses made during the pandemic.

Morgan said they did not want to be standing on corners making a protest: "But if we don't do it now we'll never be able to make a statement for us all."

About 70 nurses lined up along Auckland central's Victoria Park facing a main street, campaigning and getting a lot of encouragement from cars driving by.

Motorists have offered support to nurses in Auckland. Photo: RNZ / Lucy Xia

One nurse told RNZ that she was unable to work fulltime in primary care as it did not pay her mortgage.

She was having to combine it with hospital work to make ends meet.





Minister of Health Andrew Little said he expected pay parity for primary healthcare nurses would be resolved soon, with a solution by the end of the year.

"We do need to do something about it. We've been working on this for some time.

"We've been working with the New Zealand Nurses Organisation for some time. We're still a wee way to go to get a solution in front of both employers and the unions - I'm confident that we'll have something for them soon."

Despite wet weather, about 40 people have been protesting in Ōtepoti next to State Highway 1, calling for equal pay for nurses in primary health care and Plunket.

One nurse told RNZ the government needed to properly fund general practices so they could improve staff pay rates.

Practice nurse Lynette Robinson works in a Dunedin medical centre, and said nurses in primary health care were being paid less than those working in other parts of the health sector.

"We've always lagged behind but it's particularly bad at the moment," she said.

"The bigger picture is that general practice is not funded properly by the government so our employers are constrained in what they can pay us so this is really, for me, a protest to the government to do something about general practice funding."

Nurses were a limited resource and if they had to choose between jobs, they would not choose the lesser paid jobs like practice nursing, she said.