

**families** commission  
kōmihana ā **whānau**

**Briefing to the Incoming Minister  
2008**

---

## BRIEFING TO THE INCOMING MINISTER

# 1. Why Families Matter

*“Family should be a place of strength and security.” (Christchurch parent)*

Families are the foundation of our society and its interests must be enhanced to ensure they are able to raise children in safe, nurturing environments and to fully participate in the economy and society. New Zealanders place a high value on a strong and supportive family life. They have told the Families Commission that being able to cope with challenges, having positive parenting skills and good communication between family members are key characteristics of a successful family. For parents, their strongest hope is that their children will grow into responsible, happy and economically self-sufficient adults.

Families generally perform four functions:

- raising and protecting children;
- providing family members with emotional and material support;
- creating a sense of belonging and identity; and
- passing on culture, knowledge, values, attitudes, obligations and property from one generation to the next.

The New Zealand family has changed considerably over the past three generations. Sixty years ago the norm was for fathers to work, while mothers managed the household and cared for three, four or more children. They generally had a single income they could live on and meet their rent or mortgage payments.

In many families today, both parents are in paid work and fewer people own their own home than they did 60 years ago. People are forming relationships later, having fewer children, there are many more sole parent families, defacto relationships and blended families.

Today, almost a third of children are likely to live in a sole parent household at some point before they turn 17. Twenty years ago, almost nine out of 10 families with children had both parents living in the same household. Today, that number is seven out of 10, with the other three being sole parent households.

Evidence shows that some sectors of New Zealand society remain significantly disadvantaged. Single parent families, families dependent on income-tested benefits, families with at least one non-European adult, and those in rental housing, are likely to have a lower standard of living than other families.

As economic conditions tighten, some families will face increased challenges. The challenge over the next few years will be to find ways to ensure families are well supported financially.

---

## 2. Commission Overview

The purpose of the Families Commission (the Commission) is to advocate for the interests of all New Zealand families. We do this by understanding the issues families face through our consultation, research and analysis. This gives us the evidence on which to provide advice and information to the wide range of government and non-government organisations, agencies and institutions that develop policy or provide services to families.

The Commission is led by a Board of Commissioners who together represent a broad range of knowledge and experience of New Zealand families. Dr Jan Pryor is the Chief Commissioner of the Commission appointed for a three year term effective 22 August 2008. Board members are: Sharron Cole (Deputy Chief Commissioner), Sandra Alofivae, Lyn Campbell, Gregory Fortuin, David Smyth and Kim Workman. The Chief Executive is Mr Paul Curry who has been in this role since 15 November 2005.

## 3. Enabling Legislation

In December 2003 the New Zealand Parliament passed the Families Commission Act 2003, which came into force on 1 July 2004 and set out the Commission's functions and direction. The Commission's main function is to:

- act as an advocate for the interests of families generally, that does not include acting as an advocate for the interests of a particular family or particular families in connection with a particular case or issue; and
  - in performing that function, the Commission must identify and have regard to factors that help to maintain or enhance either or both of the following:
    - a) families' resilience; and
    - b) families' strengths.

Other specific functions of the Commission identified in the Act direct it to:

- stimulate and promote research on matters that relate to the interests of families;
- encourage and facilitate informed debate about families;
- increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters relating to the interests of families;
- encourage and facilitate development and provision of government policies designed to promote or serve the interests of the Commission;
- consider any matter relating to the interest of families referred by a Minister of the Crown; and
- consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies as required.

## 4. What We Do

The Commission is a significant source of specialist knowledge on family resilience and wellbeing. We bring a family lens to policy development.

The Commission works by:

- listening to families (through our face-to-face engagement, electronic polling and through Commissioner public meetings);

- 
- researching the issues identified by families; and
  - advocating for families (using the media, stakeholder meetings, policy processes, and influencing decision makers).

Our organisation works from an evidence base of research, so is neither a service delivery organisation nor a lobby group. The Commission is a catalyst for positive change for families and uses its influence, rather than direct intervention, to achieve change. The Commission utilises its knowledge base and familiarity with issues for families to provide information and advice to Ministers of the Crown and government agencies and to communities, not-for-profit agencies, business and families themselves.

We work toward four outcomes. They are:

### **Positive Family Relationships and Functioning**

Our focus is on activities that promote the valuing and supporting of parenting and broader family relationships. Our work programme includes:

- providing a web-based parenting resource to provide information to parents that includes links to a wide range of organisations and websites that are able to provide more specialist assistance;
- distributing and updating web and hardcopy resources for parents and caregivers;
- researching the changing role of fathering in New Zealand society to identify what support is required. Working with organisations such as Barnados and Plunket, we are facilitating discussions on fathering in New Zealand;
- researching the changing roles of grandparents (and working with groups such as Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Age Concern);
- disseminating research about how people access information and support for their intimate relationships. We are working with Relationship Services to foster awareness of the importance of strong family, particularly interparental, relationships; and
- developing a policy paper that focuses on the support needed for young people to develop healthy and positive intimate relationships.

### **Physical and Social Environments for Families**

The Commission is committed to ensuring that physical and social environments support families' and whānau wellbeing.

Our activities in this area include:

#### ***Family Violence Prevention***

- **It's not OK!:** developing and leading the Campaign for Action on Family Violence (in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development) aimed at changing the way people act and think about family violence.

The "It's not OK!" advertising component of the Campaign for Action on Family Violence has been highly successful. Reach and retention survey findings show that about 90 percent of people say they remember the television advertisements and their message. Awareness and understanding of the campaign are extremely high overall. Belief that 'change is possible' and 'I can help someone' are also very high. This figure is even higher among Māori and Pacific audiences. One in five people have reported taking action as a result of seeing the advertisements. This action ranges from talking to somebody, including professional organisations, about violence they were worried about, to seeking more information on family violence.

## Mass Media Reach and Retention Summary

	Dec 2007	April 2008	Sept 2008 Overall	Sept 2008 Pacific	Sept 2008 Māori
Recall of Social Norms adverts	87%	89%	95%	89% Female 90% Male	99% F 98% M
Recall of Stories of Positive Change adverts (four men)		66%	90%	82% F&M	98% F 94% M
Helped me understand more			68%	82% F 87% M	71% F 79% M
Change is possible		86%	88%	95% F 92% M	95% M&F
Believe I can help			57%	71% F 76% M	62% F 58% M
Discussed issue	58%	56%	68%	81% F 64% M	84% F 74% M
Taken action	19%	19%	22%	58% F 55% M	43% F 30% M

- **White Ribbon Day:** raising awareness of issues related to men's violence against women by taking a leading role in coordinating resources and promotion of the national White Ribbon Day campaign.

### ***Developing Family-Centred Communities***

We are also working to improve the local environments for families. Our work here includes working with Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) and local authorities (including Kapiti Coast District Council, Waitakere, Porirua, Nelson, and Manukau City Councils, Tasman, Queenstown Lakes, and New Plymouth District Councils) to develop an engagement plan that emphasises the needs of families whenever an urban or rural development is being considered.

### **Economic Circumstances of Families**

This work stream is based on ensuring that families have the income and other resources they need and they have access to high-quality, family-friendly employment.

### ***Even Up***

This programme of work is designed to help families balance their work and family life. We are working closely with the Department of Labour on many aspects of the project. Projects include:

- researching the impact of working long hours on family wellbeing; and
- exploring the issues for migrant and refugee families for the care and education of their pre-school children. The Commission has worked with a number of women from different ethnic communities for whom English is predominantly their second language.

### ***Making Ends Meet***

This programme of work is being done in collaboration with a range of research partners and includes:

- researching family debt and the factors that may contribute to this. We have several work phases that include working with the Retirement Commission, Salvation Army, and the New Zealand Federation of Budgeting Services;
- investigating the adequacy of family income. The Commission has a reference group made up of government, non-government organisations and private sector interests; and

- 
- researching the contact, care and financial arrangements separated parents make on behalf of their children. The Commission is working closely with the Inland Revenue Department on this project.

### **Family Knowledge Base**

Building an evidence base for our work is another key outcome. We do this through an extensive research programme and by engaging directly with families:

- *The Couch* – an interactive website with a membership of just over 4,000 families. In 2007/08, we conducted 11 polls on issues raised by families;
- regional forums with families or with those that work with families;
- working with our Whānau Reference Group;
- working with our Ethnic Reference Group;
- engaging a series of parents panels to provide formal opportunities for parents to raise and discuss issues affecting families; and
- two contestable research grants: the Families Commission Research Fund and the Blue Skies Fund.

We are also undertaking focused research on whānau. The Health Research Council, Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga, Accident Compensation Corporation and the Commission agreed to establish a fund for research on Whānau Ora - whānau health and wellbeing. The partners contributed a total of \$1.5 million. A tender is underway, focused on whānau resilience in the following areas:

- success factors for community based and local initiatives;
- intergenerational contributions to whānau resilience and wellbeing;
- environments that contribute to whānau wellbeing and resilience;
- whānau capacity to promote participation in society and the economy; and
- identification of the links between resilience and cultural identity and participation in Māori society.

In 2007/08 three projects focusing on Pacific families were initiated. The projects explore characteristics of Pacific families in New Zealand, the challenges they face, and the challenges these pose for future policies and services. The projects investigate:

- the changing Pacific household composition and family wellbeing over the past 25 years using census data;
- the relationship between 'family and home' and 'the gang and the street' for south Auckland 'Pasifika' youth who currently find themselves alienated from mainstream society; and
- Tokelau children and teenagers' perspectives of living in an extended family.

We present findings from our research at our annual research seminars. The seminar in June 2008 was attended by over 140 researchers and policy makers and non-government organisations.

---

## 5. Issues for Families

By engaging with families we have identified four key issues supporting or impeding family wellbeing in New Zealand today:

- balancing the need to work with family commitments;
- earning sufficient income for their family;
- living in a safe environment; and
- building healthy relationships within families, especially between parents and children.

### **Balancing Work and Family Commitments**

Many families feel they have too little time with their family members and that being able to balance time alone with the family and partners is essential for achieving family wellbeing. Many parenting couples today are both in paid work. Our research shows many people put family first and only take jobs that will fit in with their responsibilities at home. Many at-home parents also say they would take up a job if it gave them the flexibility their family needed.

*“I can work full-time but I choose not to because of children and because of my husband’s shift-work. I want to also have a wee bit of life myself so it’s choice.”  
(Christchurch parent)*

### **Earning an Adequate Income**

Lack of money is by far the most commonly reported challenge to family life. Having enough income to cover consumption needs and save for the future, enables families to nurture their members and participate in social, economic and cultural life. Families tell us they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. Currently childcare costs, housing, food, power and petrol price shocks are all testing families’ ability to manage. Families tell us the biggest financial concern is paying their mortgage and housing costs. It now takes 80 percent of one median income to pay the mortgage on a median-priced house. One year ago it was 67.9 percent, four years ago it took 43.3 percent (a reading above 40 percent of one median income is considered unaffordable).

*“Money!! Mortgage costs, price of food, electricity, and petrol, insurance, childcare, clothing is (sic) increasing and our salaries remain the same.” (Couch poll participant)*

### **Living in a Safe Environment**

Half of all murders in New Zealand are domestic violence related; on average 14 women, six men and 10 children are killed by a member of their family every year. It is unsurprising that for many New Zealand families living in a safe environment is central to their physical and emotional wellbeing. Family violence affects partners, children, and elderly people, and damages both society and the economy. Families told us they want more information on family violence and on what they can do; how to talk to children and others who are experiencing family violence, who to go to for help, how to challenge or talk to a person causing harm, and what the warning signs of family violence are.

Many families have told us that being able to turn to their family, friends and community support networks helps them to overcome challenges to family life, but single-parent and immigrant families in particular said there was not enough support available to them. Some people thought that community support groups needed more backing to be able to help families. In some cases families can make changes to help themselves; in other cases this is not possible.

*“My son has a short fuse and gets angry, but it’s unpredictable and I live in fear.” (70 year old woman)*

---

## Maintaining Healthy Relationships

In 2006 the marriage rate in New Zealand was 13.9 percent and the divorce rate 11.9 percent. Twelve percent of all households (and 28 percent of households with dependent children) were single-parent families, of which 80 percent were headed by women.

Supportive, loving relationships with immediate and extended family are consistently identified by people as being important to successful family life. Many families have mentioned that they have problems with their family relationships that can create physical, emotional and financial problems for their families. These include separation or divorce, family violence or abuse, addictions or traumatic events. Families thought that a lack of knowledge or skills in managing family relationships (including a lack of parenting skills) and isolation from family support networks were often part of the problem and needed to be addressed.

*“Having someone to love you and be happy about all your achievements. Having a family to love.” (Auckland woman).*

## 6. Future Work

The Commission has several projects that may be of interest to you over the next few months. They are:

### **Families Commission Summit February 2009 - *Making New Zealand the best place for families – from ideas to action***

In February 2009, the Commission is hosting the Action for Families Summit in Auckland. The summit is an invitation only event bringing 150 leaders and decision-makers together from throughout New Zealand to look five years into the future and identify actions and strategies that can lead to positive change for New Zealand families. The theme of the summit is *Making New Zealand the best place for families – from ideas to action*.

The summit differs from a traditional conference, with the emphasis being on participation and identifying actions for change. It will be the beginning of an ongoing process to encourage people to put the role/function of families at the forefront of their decision making.

Topics for discussion will include:

- financial stability and security;
- supporting family relationships; and
- creating a thriving environment for families.

John Allen, Chief Executive, New Zealand Post Group is the opening keynote speaker and Rod Oram (internationally-known business journalist) is the principal facilitator for this event.

Participants are being drawn from a cross-section of people in terms of age, ethnicity and areas/sectors of knowledge and influence. Those who have accepted the invitation to attend to date include Stephen and Margaret Tindall (the Tindall Foundation); Kevin Prime and Jennifer Gill (Chairperson and Chief Executive, ASB Trust); Phil O'Reilly (Chief Executive, Business New Zealand); Helen Kelly (President, New Zealand Council of Trade Unions); Peter Boshier (Principal Family Court Judge); a range of public sector chief executives; the Children's Commissioner and Chief Human Rights Commissioner; Paul Baigent (Chief Executive, Plunket); Murray Edridge (Chief Executive, Barnardos);

---

Major Campbell Roberts (Director, Salvation Army's Social Policy Research and Parliamentary Affairs Unit); and Diane Robertson (Auckland City Missioner).

The Families Commission is leading the planning for the summit. We are working with partners from Barnardos, the Salvation Army, Amokura, the Ministry of Social Development and the Community-Led Development Trust, and others. We have budgeted up to \$200,000 to host this event.

The Tindall Foundation will be sponsoring a series of vignettes capturing the experiences and 'voices' of families, to be interspersed during the two day summit programme.

### **New Publications**

Over the next three months we will be releasing the following research:

- Family-Friendly Communities – a policy paper that presents a 'family perspective' for local government as they plan local environments;
- Early Childhood Care and Education – an exploratory research report on the preferences and priorities of some migrant and refugee families;
- Reaching Out: Who New Zealanders Turn to for Relationship Support – a research report on who New Zealanders turn to for support in their intimate relationships; and
- Understanding the Indebtedness of Some New Zealand Families – a conceptual paper that takes a life cycle approach to identifying the risks factors associated with using debt so that we can support families to avoid the pitfalls.

### **Priorities for 2009/10**

In the next financial year, the Commission's strategic direction will include a focus on:

- Supporting stable relationships;
- Families and justice;
- Local service delivery and support for families; and
- a continued interest in family economics.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these with you in more detail.

## **7. Structure and Operations**

The Commission's Board are statutory appointments. The Chief Commissioner and Board members are responsible for providing overall leadership and shaping the organisation's future. All Commissioners, including the Chief Commissioner (three days/week) are part-time.

### **Board positions and structure**

#### ***Chief Commissioner***

The Chief Commissioner is responsible for:

- leading, chairing and managing the Board;
- providing leadership and guidance for the Commissioners;
- providing the public face of the Commission as its senior public appointment;
- working with, and providing guidance to, the Chief Executive on strategic matters; and
- work programme priorities, public or media matters and any performance matters.

---

### **Commissioners**

Commissioners are statutory positions, appointed on a part-time (up to half-time) basis. Commissioners are responsible for carrying out Board responsibilities in their capacity as Board members. They are also responsible for:

- providing expertise, advice and input into issues and work the Commission is considering;
- providing the public face of the Commission through engaging on a regular basis with the community (at national, regional and local levels); and
- undertaking elements of the Commission's annual work programme.

### **Board meetings**

The Board meets monthly. Less formal meetings are also used as an opportunity for Commissioners to discuss strategic and project matters. Additionally, presentations to the Board from community leaders, researchers and others interested in families routinely occur.

### **Board subcommittees**

Sub-committees of the Board are convened to deal with specific governance issues.

The Sub-committees are:

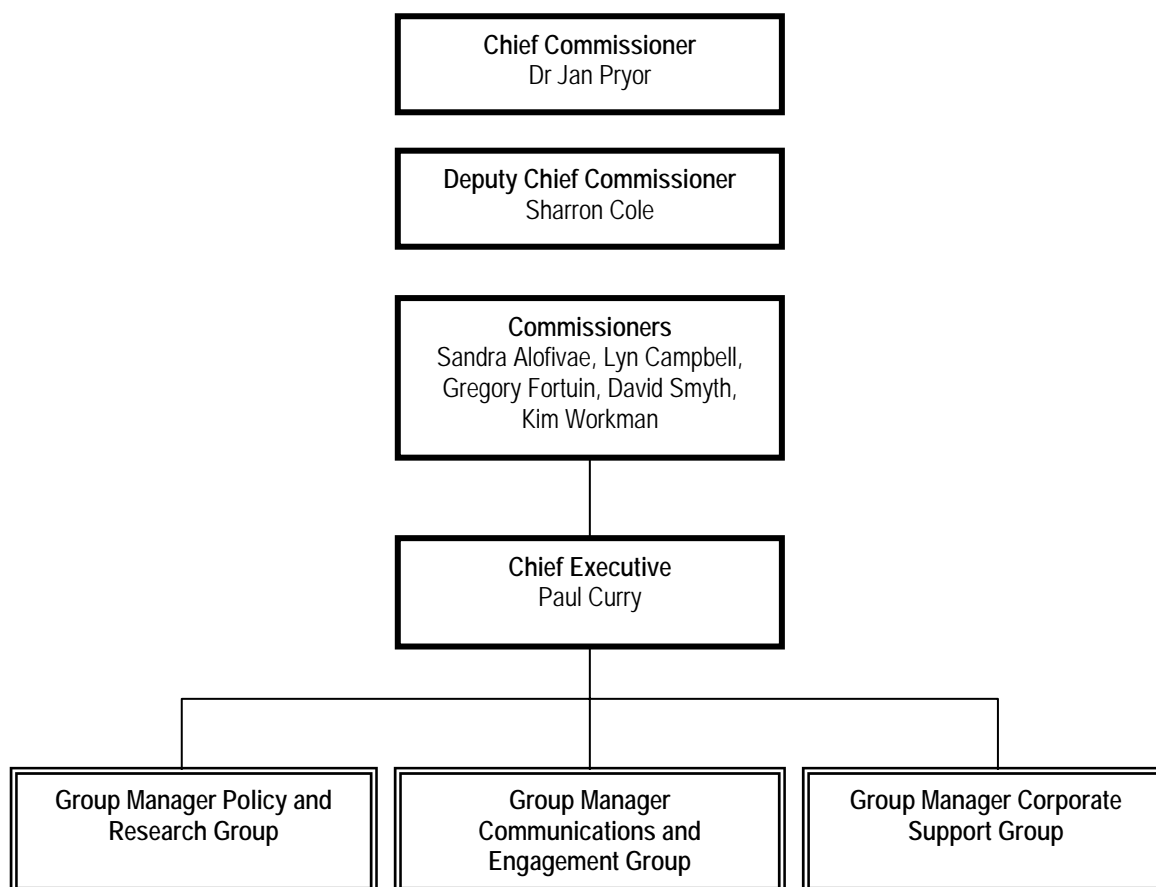
- Finance, budget and resources;
- Audit and risk;
- Positive family functioning;
- Physical and social environments for families;
- Economic circumstances of families;
- Family knowledge base;
- Research ethics; and
- Chief Executive recruitment and performance.

In addition the Commission has two advisory groups – the Whānau and Ethnic Reference Groups.

The day-to-day operational leadership is managed by a Chief Executive and three Group Managers. As of 30 September 2008, the Commission had a core team of 34.43 FTEs, or 38 staff. The predominance of researchers and policy analysts and communications experts reflects the key strategies adopted to achieve our goals.

---

## 8. Commission's Organisational Chart



The Commission is divided into three key work groups:

### ***Policy and Research Group***

The Commission's policy and research activities are combined under one group with policy analysis and research undertaken on a project basis. Many research projects have a significant engagement component, which is managed in collaboration with the Engagement and Communications group.

### ***Engagement and Communications Group***

This group is responsible for family, community, business and non-government organisation engagement activities (including the co-ordination of public consultation exercises and regional networking); internal and external communications (including media management and corporate publications); website management; the co-ordination of the Commission's public engagements; and publishing reports produced by the Policy and Research group.

### ***Corporate Support Group***

The Corporate Support Group is responsible for managing the Commission's activities relating to financial management, organisational development, human resources, accountability reporting, IT systems, operational policies and general administration.

---

## 9. Finances

The 2008/09 financial year is the fifth year of operation for the Commission. When the Commission was established on 1 July 2004, it was given an annual budget reflecting a fully operational organisation. The Commission built up its capability to become fully operational over three years and during this time strategically built up reserves of \$4.5 million.

The reserves allowed the Commission to invest in a number of specific projects which will make a significant difference for families. This included \$2.5 million over three years to the development and implementation of the mass media component of the "It's Not OK!" Campaign for Action on Family Violence.

Of the \$4.5 million in reserves on 1 July 2007, \$3.5 million had been used as at 30 June 2008. The 2008/09 work programme, which includes the final year of funding for the "It's Not OK!" media campaign, will use the balance of the reserves. 2009/10 will reflect a steady state budget of \$8.17 million, plus any interest earned from short term deposits.

### Prospective statement of financial performance

	2008/09 \$000	2009/10 \$000	2010/11 \$000
<b>Income</b>			
Revenue from Crown	8,170	8,170	8,170
Interest income	150	100	100
<i>Total income</i>	<b>8,320</b>	<b>8,270</b>	<b>8,270</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Commissioners' fees	411	411	411
Personnel expense	3,774	3,756	3,756
Other expenses	4,967	3,930	3,962
Depreciation and amortisation expense	187	174	141
<i>Total expenditure</i>	<b>9,339</b>	<b>8,270</b>	<b>8,270</b>
<i>Net surplus/ (deficit)</i>	<b>(1,019)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

---

**Prospective statement of financial position**

	2008/09 \$000	2009/10 \$000	2010/11 \$000
<b>Assets</b>			
<b>Current assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	733	674	796
Debtors and other receivables			
<i>Total current assets</i>	<i>733</i>	<i>674</i>	<i>796</i>
<b>Non-current assets</b>			
Property, plant and equipment	236	177	85
Intangible assets	66	34	4
<i>Total non-current assets</i>	<i>302</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>89</i>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>885</b>	<b>885</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Creditors and other payables	650	500	500
Employee entitlements	140	140	140
Provisions			
<i>Total current liabilities</i>	<i>790</i>	<i>640</i>	<i>640</i>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Equity</b>			
General funds	245	245	245
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>

---

**Prospective statement of changes in equity**

	2008/09 \$000	2009/10 \$000	2010/11 \$000
<b>Balance at 1 July</b>	<b>1,264</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>
Amounts recognised directly in equity:			
Surplus/ (deficit) for the year	(1,019)	0	0
Total recognised income and expense	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>
Capital contribution	0	0	0
<b>Balance at 30 June</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>245</b>