



Women's manifesto 2023

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New Zealand has always been at the forefront of fighting for gender equality. New Zealand women campaigned for the right to vote and we led the world with the introduction of the Electoral Act in 1893, giving women the vote for the first time 130 years ago. This law was the first step in progressing women's rights, reducing gender inequalities and acknowledging the importance of women in our political system.

Labour is committed to continuing this work and creating a more equal society for all women. We believe that every woman should have the opportunity to reach her full potential, regardless of her background or circumstances.

We have made a lot of progress over the last 130 years, and Labour has a proud history of women's achievements in government. We introduced the Equal Pay Act in 1972 which outlawed discrimination in wage rates between men and women performing the same job. We amended it in 2020 to replace the court-based approach to pay equity claims with an accessible process based on the existing bargaining framework in the Employment Relations Act. We introduced maternity leave in 1948 and in 2001 we introduced the Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Parental Leave) Amendment Bill to Parliament.

And it's not just the legislation we've implemented - the Labour Party have always walked the walk on progressing the role of women in Parliament. Elizabeth McCombs was the first woman member of parliament when she won the Lyttelton seat for Labour in 1933, Iriaka Rātana was the first woman Māori member of parliament in 1949. Georgina Beyer became the world's first openly transgender member of parliament when she won the Wairarapa seat for Labour in 1999, and Helen Clark was New Zealand's fifth longest serving Prime Minister and second woman to hold the office.

In 2022, Aotearoa New Zealand marked a historic milestone with 60 women and 59 men serving as Members of Parliament. Just a year later, in 2023, the Labour Government achieved gender parity in our Cabinet for the first time.

Unlike other parties who are seeking to scrap the Ministry for Women, we know there is still more work to do, and we are committed to ensuring that New Zealand remains a world leader in women's rights and gender equality.



Women's Innovation and Entrepreneurship start-up programme

Labour will work with business leaders to develop a for women by women innovation and entrepreneurship scholarship programme aimed at lifting women's entrepreneurial pathways for low-middle income women interested in running a small business.

This will be funded partly by the Ministry for Women and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment as well as seeking sponsorship from the private sector through ongoing mentorship and support.

Data from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment showed there were 156,400 self-employed women, compared to 253,700 men in 2017.

We also know that only 12 percent of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and 15 percent of tech SMEs have leadership teams predominantly made up of women.

The barriers for women starting their own small business are not well known and require further exploration. However, there are ways the government can encourage more entrepreneurship pathways for women if support is more targeted.

This will start as a pilot for 20 individuals or groups to access a fully funded developing entrepreneur mentorship programme.

Health

Labour's aim is for all women to live longer with better health. Women are more likely to be carers, sole parents, and to have a low income, all of which contribute to the fact that women live more of their lives in poor health.

We will continue to remove the barriers women tell us they face in accessing healthcare, so they can achieve wellbeing, free from discrimination.

To do this, this year, we developed the first ever Women's Health Strategy as part of the Pae Ora Healthy Futures Act 2022.

The Labour government has delivered the largest ever funding boost for primary maternity services. We have embarked on a transformation of health and social services for whānau, mothers and babies, building an integrated approach across health.

We launched Kahu Taurima - our programme to transform the system across the first 2,000 days of life, so that all mothers, babies and whānau, no matter where they live and who they are, receive the health services and support they need to start and raise their whānau.

We changed ACC legislation to include coverage of birth injuries and we have strengthened support for mothers experiencing mental health issues.

We have put in place a more effective cervical screening test to help reduce cervical cancer rates. The new test is a simple and quick swab that women can choose to do themselves.

We've funded a major upgrade to the breast cancer screening register, meaning the 271,000 eligible women who are not currently being screened will now be on the register.

We've removed the \$5 prescription fee which gives women free prescription birth control, and we increased Pharmac funding, enabling them to expand birth control options for women.

We have put period products in schools, responding to the urgent call from schools and kura to support girls and women to keep coming to school during menstruation and continue their learning. Through this programme we have delivered more than 1.4 million free period packs to students.

Labour took abortion out of the Crimes Act, meaning abortions are now rightly treated as the health issue they are. We have implemented a new national abortion telehealth service, 0800 Decide - a huge improvement in access to safe abortion services.

We also introduced safe areas around abortion service providers, prohibiting behaviours that are distressing to the people accessing or providing these services.

Labour will **implement the women's health strategy to ensure quality care is provided for all women.** The strategy sets out the long-term priorities that will guide health entities towards equity and healthy futures for all groups of women.

One in ten women of childbearing age have endometriosis. Our health system has not listened to women when they've asked for help. On average, women visit the doctor five times over eight years from the start of their symptoms before they receive a diagnosis. Throughout this, women endure pain, reduced quality of life, mental health challenges, and fertility issues. Labour will put this right.

Building on the launch in 2020 of new clinician guidelines for endometriosis diagnosis and management, **Labour will lead a comprehensive approach to address endometriosis,** with a new national action plan to implement endometriosis education and awareness, improve clinical management and care, and support focused research initiatives.

Cervical cancer is one of the easiest cancers to prevent – as long as you detect the cell changes that cause it early. With already free HPV vaccinations and our new HPV self-test, ultimately we can achieve enough coverage to make cervical cancer a thing of the past. To help us towards this goal, **we're committing to free cervical screening for all eligible people.** We know cervical screening saves lives and it is time that no woman pays for this crucial test.

Labour will continue the transformative programme Kahu Taurima - to create a health system that works for women and their families. We will build on the new models of care we've rolled-out across the country, and expand integrated services so that families increasingly find the system easier to navigate and providers are funded in ways that mean they can help people with complex needs. Services won't take a "one

size fits all" approach - there will be a diverse range of services to choose from.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting Kiwi women. Mammograms save lives by finding breast cancer early before it spreads. **Labour will extend the maximum age of breast cancer screening from 69 years to 74 years** so that more women have access to life saving screening. This will see breast cancer screening offered to an additional 115,000 women aged 70 to 74 years.

Over 2100 schools, kura, activity centres and alternative education providers have opted into the Ikura|Manaakitia te whare tangata Period products in schools programme. We will **continue the programme so women and girls continue to have free access to period products in schools.**

Care and Support Workers, like many other women-dominated industries, have been undervalued and underpaid for a long time. Labour passed Equal Pay Legislation that has enabled these groups of workers to lodge Equal Pay Claims. The Care and Support Workers pay equity claim is nearing the end of the process. **We will ensure the funding is available so that all the workers in this sector can be paid the rate that accurately reflects the skills and experience needed to undertake their jobs.**

Employment

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic shocks disproportionately affected women's employment. Due to the concentration of women in tourism, hospitality and service-based roles, women's unemployment rates rose higher than men's during the pandemic. But the Labour Party's quick response to Covid-19 has seen women's employment levels increase to their highest rates since records began in 2009.

We have taken massive strides for women, including delivering pay equity to more than 100,000 workers, committing to require gender pay gap reporting, increasing leadership for women in the public sector, and extending Paid Parental Leave to 26 weeks.

We have grown women's average weekly earnings by 34.3% since Labour entered government - 6.4% more than men's wages over the same period, and outpacing inflation at only 23.1%.

In 2022 we launched Te Mahere Whai Mahi Wāhine – the first Women's Employment Action Plan. The plan provides a roadmap toward a better future for women's employment and educational pathways and looks at immediate and long-term actions that are needed to help disadvantaged women.

We increased the representation of women on public sector boards to over 50%, and implemented a programme to support more women into governance roles.

We implemented the apprenticeship boost programme, allowing employers to support apprentices to earn while they learn and already over 10,000 women have benefitted from the programme, an increase of 112% since 2019.

We have supported women to upskill and to enter more sustainable and better paid work. We permanently reinstated the Training Incentive Allowance, demonstrating our focus on supporting people receiving a main benefit to participate in higher education and opportunities to upskill. We know that women overwhelmingly benefit from this support - in fact, over 85% of all Training Incentive Allowance recipients have been women.

Early childhood education provides a number of benefits to children and families; it removes barriers to early learning and can contribute to children benefitting later in life, and allows parents to return to work, and pick up more hours.

The Labour Government is ensuring families can access this support, and we are **extending 20 hours early childhood education funding to two year olds**. This will support families, and significantly reduce costs on parents, saving as much as \$133 per week.

We know that losing a baby can be one of the hardest moments in a woman's life. 1 in 5 pregnancies end in miscarriage and 1 in 200 in a stillbirth. That is why we implemented three days' paid bereavement leave for miscarriage or stillbirth. While the recovery from a loss of a baby can take a long time, this leave removes some of the pressure to return to work and enables more time to grieve and access support.

However, there is still much to do. **Labour will provide 4 weeks of Paid Partner's Leave** to provide partners the support necessary to spend time and bond with their child and support the primary carer with childcare.

We will **make the Apprenticeship Boost scheme permanent** to continue to grow apprenticeship pathways for women and ensure they can earn while they learn.

We will lift the pay for ECE teachers to help them move towards parity with their counterparts in kindergartens from 2024. These measures will help Kiwi families facing the cost of living crisis.

Labour in Government will **grow ethnic women's leadership capacity** through the ethnic communities grad programmes so that women of all backgrounds can develop and lead not only in their own communities but in the public service.

Financial independence

Women generally have less financial security than men and retire with less savings. Research from the Retirement Commission found that NZ has a 20 percent gender gap in retirement savings with the widest gap between men and women in their 40s and 50s.

There's a number of factors that lead to this including women being more likely to take time off work to care for children and other dependents, gender pay gaps, and lower wages in occupations that are dominated by women compared to male dominated occupations.

Women are also more likely to be on a benefit, in precarious work, underemployed or unable to work due to childcare demands. Compounded with other gender-based inequalities such as the gender pay gap, women undoubtedly experience an overall disproportionate economic disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

As part of our welfare overhaul, we have taken steps to ensure that women access more of their entitlements and do not face discriminatory sanctions. We've also made substantial increases to abatement levels to enable more people to work while on a benefit, and help families get ahead.

We repealed section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018, which unfairly penalised sole parents by reducing benefit entitlements for those who had not named the other parent in child support applications. Removing this punitive sanction lifted the incomes of nearly 12,000 sole mothers by an average of \$34 per week.

We removed the subsequent child policy, which disproportionately impacted women in our welfare system, and undermined the value of parenting and the unpaid work many women are in.

The Labour Government has started work to ensure that child support payments are passed on to sole parent beneficiaries, who we know are more likely to be solo mothers, rather than collected by the Crown. This change is estimated to lift as many as 14,000 children out of poverty and give families a median of \$20 extra a week.

We will keep going on this work to ensure our welfare system is fairer to women and all sole parent beneficiaries.

We will not stop there. In our next term of Government, the Labour Party will **review the impact of relationship status on benefit entitlements** to ensure they reflect the expectations of modern-day relationships. We know that under current settings, individuals may see their benefits reduced or cut entirely, if they enter into a relationship.

We will keep going to improve the financial independence of women. This is further protected through our commitment to

expand the financial literacy programme in schools.

A re-elected Labour Government will ensure that employers **provide KiwiSaver contributions during Paid Parental Leave**. We know the unpaid nature of childcare can have an impact on people's retirement, and that this is one of the main reasons women fall behind, and we are taking steps to address this.

Labour will also work to **streamline the Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act and update entitlements to reflect modern families**.

Pay Equity

In Government, Labour has taken significant progress in addressing the gender pay gap. We've made significant progress to reduce the gender pay gap through our commitment to mandatory pay gap reporting, and 11 pay equity settlements. The public sector pay gap has reduced to 7.7 percent, while our overall pay gap sits at 8.6 percent, compared to 12.5 percent and 9.7 percent respectively six years ago.

We have made significant progress on pay equity, with more than 100,000 people receiving pay equity pay increases to date. We have also made progress towards financial parity through funding the extension of Kiwisaver employer contributions to those on Paid Parental Leave, and amending the Equal Pay Act to create a pathway to equal pay.

A re-elected Labour Government would continue to **make progress on pay equity** to end gender-based pay discrimination in female-dominated industries.

Labour will **introduce pay transparency legislation** to require businesses to publicly report their gender pay gap, to encourage them to address the causes of those gaps and increase transparency for workers and outcomes for women. We will also explore how ethnicity would be included in pay gap reporting, so that Māori, Pacific, and ethnic women don't face the compounding impact of gender and ethnic pay gaps

Justice

Our collective responsibility is to create a society that not only holds offenders accountable for their actions, but also places victims at the centre, ensuring their rights, well-being, and path to recovery are prioritised and fully supported.

Labour believes that the levels of family and sexual violence in New Zealand are unacceptable. We have made significant progress on highlighting the issue, with the establishment of Te Aorerekura, a cross-government strategy to target the issue, dedicated funding across agencies, and have increased accountability for offenders by introducing new criminal offences such as non-fatal strangulation. This is a deep-seated problem that we are committed to working even harder on.

Labour is committed to breaking the cycle of family and sexual violence, which is why in Government we delivered the largest ever investment in family and sexual violence support services which gave providers funding security, while making available significant extra resource to break the cycle of violence and provide more women, men and children the help they need.

We introduced and passed the Sexual Violence Legislation Bill to reduce the trauma sexual violence victims experience in court, and we have progressed and boosted the Victim Assistance Scheme to provide financial support to victims of serious crime.

Labour in Government will adopt and pass the current member's bill that seeks to protect women and girls by amending the Crimes Act 1961 and **introduce new offences that criminalise virginity testing and the related practice of hymenoplasty.**

We will give victims more rights and support including in regard to name suppression settings for victims of sexual violence, victims of litigation abuse in the Family Court, and victims of child sex offending.

We need to strengthen our stalking and harassment laws and bring them into line with overseas jurisdictions. Adding an offence of stalking to the Crimes Act, if aligned with laws in Australia and the United Kingdom, could entail a penalty of between 12 months to 3 years imprisonment - with stronger penalties if the person has possession of a weapon, for those who engage in behaviour of stalking a victim, and loiters near the person's place of residence or work with intent to intimidate. We will work with victim advocacy groups and legal experts as we progress these changes.

In August 2023, Parliament's Justice Committee considered a petition on consent law reform, advocating for an affirmative consent model and a positive definition of consent. The Committee, made up of Labour, National and ACT members, agreed that the law on consent is due for re-examination, and that the Government should consider examining offences involving sexual conduct and consider including a definition of consent in legislation.

We acknowledge there is work to be done in this area, and commend advocates for their work to shine a light on this issue. If re-elected, **we will modernise consent law, drawing on the experience of sexual violence survivors, victims advocates and legal experts in the field.**

Labour has also made good progress in reviewing outdated adoption and surrogacy settings, including through extensive engagement with the public. We will continue to work to make these laws more accessible and streamlined for all.

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