

Better TOGETHER

Issue One, June 2011

Better together

This is the first newsletter published for the 45,000 union members who have supported entering into a collaborative national negotiating process with the District Health Board employers.

Union members have voted to work together because they realise that with a major Government squeeze on public health funding we are more likely to be successful in our negotiations if we bargain together.

The bargaining group has taken on learnings from last year's experience with the terms of settlement and have proposed a process that allows for much greater member involvement in the process.

The unions involved have agreed to several principles of respecting each other's members and will be acting together to keep the joint delegates committees in each DHB informed of progress. There will be regular copies of this newsletter so that members are informed.

The Managed Bargaining Process

On 16 June the combined health unions met with the DHBs and the Ministry of Health in a pre-bargaining forum where we discussed the state of the economy and Government plans for the health system.

Union representatives do not accept the line that times are tough and therefore DHB workers should once again prop up the health services by agreeing to a wage freeze, very low pay increases or no improvement to their conditions.

Glenda Alexander, NZNO, said that "Union representatives argued that the Government has made choices in giving billions

away in tax cuts, in bailing out finance companies and in giving loans to private television and radio networks."

"We weren't consulted about these decisions and we should not have to pick up the tab for the lack of Government income because of these decisions," Glenda said.

At a session following the pre-bargaining forum, the unions and DHB advocates discussed the process for the bargaining for the renewal of members' collective agreements, most of which expire between 31 August and 31 October.

The unions involved are the New Zealand Nurses Organisation,

Public Services Association, Service and Food Workers Union, Engineering, Printing and Manufacturers Union, National Distribution Union, Unite, Building Trades Union, and Amalgamated Workers Union New Zealand.



DHB Financial Squeeze

Not only is the Government putting the financial squeeze on the core public service, but despite their spin about "business as usual" in health, they are also applying the blow torch to District Health Boards.

In the last financial year the Government underfunded the health sector and in the next financial year they are planning to underfund it again to the tune of \$108 million. Any of the new initiatives announced by the Minister of Health in this year's budget are to be funded by money that is taken from other parts of the health system.

John Ryall, SFWU, said "The Treasury has forecast in the Gov-

ernment's latest budget that the average ordinary hourly earning will increase 4.1% in the year to June 2012."

"Workers know that cutting back on ward clerks and other administration staff can also lead to inefficiencies as clinicians spend more time on paper work and less on patient care."

The unions involved are concerned that the funding squeeze is forcing the DHBs to cut back on unnecessary backroom services and the front line services are being left intact.

"However, DHB workers know that cutting back on ward clerks and

other administration staff can also lead to inefficiencies as clinicians spend more time on paper work and less on patient care," said Ashok Kumar, PSA.

"They also know that last year the settlement was less than inflation. They played heavily on talk of the recession, and are likely to be looking for something similar this year," said Ryall.



Common Wage Increase or Agreed Financial Parameter

There will be negotiations for each union through until the beginning of August between the unions and the DHBs as part of the managed bargaining process.

The intention is that these negotiations will try to achieve either an agreed common wage increase for all union members or an agreed financial parameter that each union in turn will agree what they want to spend it on. The process allows for subsequent negotiations with the individual unions on specific issues.

More information?

For further information, please contact your union organiser, or take a look at our website:

www.union.org.nz/bettertogether

NZNO National DHB Delegates Committee (May 2011)

