

We love Aotearoa. We love it and we want to look after the place and the people – New Zealand and all New Zealanders.

We've dedicated this newsletter to people, and to some practical suggestions on how we can promote equality in Aotearoa.

We're known as champions for the environment, but we also want a fair go for all New Zealanders.



Metiria Turei
Co-leader

Russel Norman
Co-leader

Mind the Gap!

Did you know that helping the most vulnerable New Zealanders helps those who are well-off too? The fact is poverty hurts everyone.

We all know it's not fair that some Kiwi kids go without decent housing, shoes and raincoats, and healthy food; now there's new research showing that those kids are not the only ones who suffer because of the growing gap between rich and poor. The evidence is that the bigger the gap between haves and have-nots, the more social and health challenges countries have to face.

Learn more about how and why inequality effects everyone at www.greens.org.nz/mindthegap

These problems affect the privileged and the vulnerable and everyone in between. For example, countries with big gaps between high and low income earners also have high rates of obesity and related health problems, and these problems hurt people in all income brackets.

Greater equality is good for all of us; so, how do we measure up? We have 230,000 children living in poverty and while some New Zealanders are making millions, others struggle on very little. The gap is getting bigger and it's hurting all of us.

So, let's turn it around. In this Green Times we suggest some ways to start making our country fair for everyone. You'll find ideas on lifting our lowest incomes, helping families stay warm in winter, and making sure everyone gets a second chance at education. You can also read about looking after our most vulnerable citizens – old and young. This is just a beginning, so please send us your ideas on how we can mind the gap and make this a country where we look after everyone.



We've been thinking about ways to encourage equality and we've come up with a series of practical steps that the Government can take to help all of us, but especially our most vulnerable families.

Among these ideas:

- Make the first \$10,000 you earn tax free.**
This benefits everyone but it helps those on lower incomes the most, because it puts more money in the hand to pay for the essentials.
- Deliver the In-Work Tax Credit to the 140,000 poorest New Zealand families who currently miss out.**
This change would help improve nutrition and health for our lowest-income families and their kids.
- Build 6000 new state homes.**
This would give some of the most vulnerable New Zealanders a safe, healthy place to live, it would be a great boost to the construction industry (28,000 jobs), and it would take pressure off the rental market which helps a bunch more Kiwis.

We have a broader plan for tax reform that would pay for these measures and still balance the books. It includes a capital gains tax (excluding the family home) that would also help us avoid housing bubbles and encourage investment in the productive sections of our economy.

www.greens.org.nz/mindthegap

Mind the **Gap**.

Tell us what you think:
green.party@parliament.govt.nz



Photograph © Serena Stevenson / Canvass

Are we looking after our elderly?

All across New Zealand support systems for our elderly are failing.

District Health Boards are slashing home help for the elderly due to a lack of funding. In Dunedin, for example, 1600 elderly New Zealanders had house-keeping help taken away earlier this year. Some DHBs are also looking at budget cuts to aged care residential homes.

A fair go for older New Zealanders makes our communities stronger.

Concerned by these recent moves, Green MP Sue Kedgley has teamed up with Labour MP Luamanuvao Winnie Laban to investigate the treatment of the elderly in New Zealand.

Sue and Winnie, working closely with Grey Power, are holding public meetings around the country and talking to Kiwis about the quality of aged care.

They've learned that many aged care facilities are chronically understaffed. Caregivers working with the elderly say workloads are becoming unmanageable and staff turnover rates are as high as 40-50 percent annually.

Part of the problem is the low pay offered to care givers. The average pay rate in the aged care sector is just \$14.40 an hour, according to a recent New Zealand Nurses Organisation survey.

Meanwhile the number of over-65s needing care is set to double in the next 25 years. To deal with this increase, the current aged care workforce of nearly 18,000 needs to grow to more than 48,000 according to the Department of Labour – and yet we're struggling to keep caregivers now.

If we judge a society by the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens, then how would we judge New Zealand when it comes to caring for the elderly?



Photograph © Kevin List

Labour MP Winnie Laban and Green MP Sue Kedgley

Sue and Winnie are holding meetings around New Zealand, and have already heard some incredibly moving stories. Please tell us your own by emailing us: sue.kedgley@parliament.govt.nz



ACC works for all – so why change it?

Our ACC system is a world-leading success story and it's admired in many other countries, so do we need to fix something that ain't broke?

Right now, ACC is there for all Kiwis; the whole idea is that any of us can get help when we need it after an accident, without expensive legal battles over who's to blame or drawn out disputes to make an insurance company pay up.

It is much better than overseas systems where the support you get after an accident depends on your insurance or whether you can afford a good lawyer.

Our ACC system is based on the idea that New Zealand as a whole benefits if everyone can get the help they need. We want to enable Kiwis to do things that are good for the country as a whole but have some risk - a job like fire-fighting, for example, or playing sport in your spare time.

Unfortunately, John Key's Government has been cutting ACC services and increasing levies. In other words, people pay more, but get less.

Last year ACC brought in around a billion dollars more than it spent and it has around \$10 billion dollars in reserve. With a healthy financial position, there's no need to cut support to sexual abuse victims, casual workers and people suffering hearing loss. There is no need to cut support to working New Zealanders who get hurt.

The National Government believes in making ACC work

more like an insurance company. In this system, if you have an accident today then ACC must have the full cost of the accident in the bank right now. But we agree with the ACC Futures Coalition, the unions and all the experts who have told the Government that ACC can and should be funded on a year-by-year, pay as you go, basis.

Our ACC system is based on the idea that New Zealand as a whole benefits if everyone can get the help they need.

If you make ACC's finances work like an insurance company, then you're heading down the road to privatisation and only the insurance industry and lawyers win. Insurance companies would like this system where you pay premiums, and they make profits.

We think it's fair that all accident victims get the help they need. We think that levy increases and cuts to ACC services are unfair and unnecessary and we'll fight against those cuts, today, tomorrow and as long as it takes.

We know they are planning more changes to ACC this year, so watch this space.



Everyone deserves a second chance at education

One of the great things about our tertiary education system is that it's open to everyone over the age of 20, even Kiwis who might have missed out on qualifications at school.

There are lots of reasons why some of us don't achieve at school or leave education early, and having open access to tertiary study provides a really important second chance.

Green MPs Metiria Turei and David Clendon are two of the thousands of people who have used this provision to get into university as mature students and change the course of their lives.

"I was a single parent on the DPB and I realised that to get the future I wanted for myself and my daughter I needed to go to uni," Metiria says.

"So I went to law school and I'll always be grateful for that opportunity, which I had thanks to the welfare system and open access to university."

Despite success stories like Metiria's, Tertiary Education Minister Steven Joyce may stop open access to tertiary education for Kiwis over 20.

This is on top of other changes like cuts to Adult and Community Education, which provides another route into education for many New Zealanders.

"I was a single parent on the DPB and I realised that to get the future I wanted for myself and my daughter I needed to go to uni"

It all adds up to a Government making it harder for ordinary Kiwis to have a second chance at learning. Not everyone wants to do tertiary study, but we think all of us should have the chance to use education to change direction, no matter what background we've come from.



If you would like to join the conversation about keeping open access to tertiary education for over 20s, search for our Facebook group: Keep Open Access

Metiria Turei
Co-leader

Let's change how we charge for power

There's a connection between your power bill and the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots in New Zealand. In fact, if we change the way we price electricity, it gives more Kiwis a fair go. Here's how:

Lots of New Zealanders are struggling to keep warm in winter. About 410,000 Kiwi households have to spend more than 10 percent of what they earn to pay the electric and gas bills (that's one in four households)! Paying more than 10 percent is called fuel poverty i.e. paying for heating is making you poor.

We have the means to keep everyone warm and healthy, reducing our power bills and our medical bills.

As fuel prices go up and incomes go down, heating is often the first thing families give up and the result is more illness and less productivity across the country.

This is a problem for all of us – we all pay for higher health spending and so we'll all benefit if we can solve the problem.

Part of the answer is to change how we charge for power; especially when electricity prices have jumped 40 percent in the last 9 years.

Fortunately, there is a way to lock in a low price for a set amount of electricity, an amount that's enough to at least make the average home warm and healthy. The system is called progressive pricing and it means the first part of your power bill is relatively cheap, but everything you use above that amount is at the market rate – meaning more expensive. With progressive pricing more Kiwis will have the minimum they need at an affordable price and we all still have an incentive to save energy.

We can do this in New Zealand because we still own most of the hydro generation assets. The power stations that our grandparents paid for with their taxes are still mostly owned by the Government. As a country, we have the means to keep everyone warm and healthy, reducing our power bills and our medical bills, and we can do it with power that has low greenhouse gas emissions.

The gap between rich and poor is greater in New Zealand than it's ever been. It's hurting us in lots of different ways and the health costs of soaring power prices are just one example.

Of course, another part of the answer is to make New Zealand homes energy efficient and the Green-championed insulation programme is already making good progress there. About 40,000 homes have used the Government scheme to put insulation in ceilings and under floors, with money for another 150,000 to be upgraded. It was such a good idea that we got both Labour and National to support it. Progressive power pricing is the next piece of the puzzle.

Photograph © Nick Servian www.nickservian.com

For details on how progressive pricing can work in NZ and why narrowing the gap between rich and poor is good for all of us go to www.greens.org.nz/mindthegap