

Rural Women New Zealand Policy Manifesto 2023 -2026

RWNZ is focussed on five areas of action by government to improve the health and wellbeing of rural families and whānau, acknowledge the worth and enhance resilience of rural communities.



Action Area 1: Health

Our focus for health and wellbeing is the issue of equity and access in rural communities. We are concerned for physical and mental health across rural communities with a special interest in the lifespan of women from maternal and child health through to older and elderly persons.

Key concerns for access to affordable and reliable healthcare for rural women, their families and whānau are:

- Mobile health care limited by location, eligibility criteria;
- Online health services limited by a lack of reliable digital connectivity; and
- The availability of a well-resourced and professionally supported health service including midwives, nurses, care workers, aged care and community health services.



Key calls for government action:

1. Invest in and maintain access to equitable healthcare for rural communities including:
(i) Increasing the availability of mobile and local health services, and rural health practitioners particularly midwives, nurses and care workers; and
(ii) Improved accessibility to localised treatment options including initial screening and diagnostics in rural New Zealand.
2. Establish and maintain network connectivity in rural areas to provide stable and affordable digital access to health and wellbeing services.
3. Provide increased resources to improve access by rural New Zealanders to education, treatment and support for mental health; disability support workers; drug and alcohol abuse, aged-care and wellbeing services.
4. Ensure allocation of resources to provide safe, timely and effective maternity care to all mothers regardless of their location.

Action Area 2: Rural Connectivity and Business

For RWNZ, rural connectivity and business is about improving digital connection, connectivity and capability to advance rural businesses and day to day life in rural communities. This includes other business issues that impact on rural communities.



The lack of high speed reliable, quality and affordable (“equitable” in line with urban internet costs) telecommunication services in rural New Zealand:

- Hinders rural businesses by leaving them unable to undertake basic tasks online with delayed access to resources and information making them less productive, efficient and competitive;
- Creates critical safety issues in emergency situations such as accidents, crime or adverse weather events. Large areas of rural New Zealand still do not have mobile phone service and are especially vulnerable in a crisis;
- Impedes educational opportunities for rural students relying on internet connectivity; and
- Exacerbates inequity for rural New Zealand in relation to health outcomes and social inclusion.

Key calls for government action:

1. Require telecommunication services to provide nationwide access to high speed quality (reliable) and affordable internet connectivity and mobile service.
2. Provide satellite communication coverage for remote rural areas where physical structures to provide internet and mobile services are not viable.
3. Increase rural connectivity and maintain focus on differing needs of rural and remote areas, ie continue to be open/remain flexible about the options offered recognising that one size does not fit all.
4. Support research into new and innovative ways to provide quality, affordable connectivity to rural and remote areas.

Action Area 3: Environment and Land Use

Our attention to environment and land use considers issues pertaining to land, water, and climate particularly in relation to the impacts on rural communities. Finding a balance between urban growth and land use policies which protect our productive land is vital for food production and community resilience.

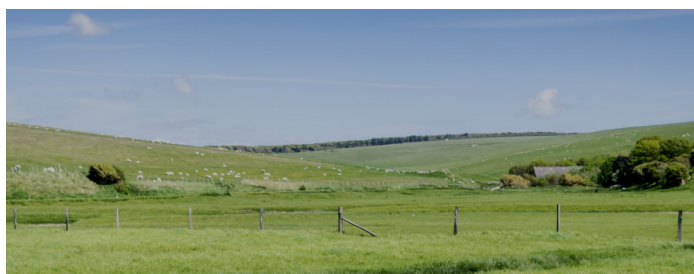
Discussions regarding threats to our environment, and the opportunities to mitigate them, must include rural communities, given that:

- Financially and environmentally sustainable land-based businesses play an important part in protecting our land, water, bio-diversity, and indigenous flora and fauna;
- Maintaining border security is essential to prevent incursions by exotic pests and diseases into our natural environment and avoid the associated potential economic and social impacts; and
- Climate change will affect land use in New Zealand over the coming years and the effects of increasingly volatile weather will significantly impact our rural communities.

In addition, the quality, quantity, availability and equitable access of sustainable water supply must be the cornerstone of all decisions relating to water use for rural communities with responsible use of supply being encouraged.

Key calls for government action:

1. Ensure that economic and environmental land use decisions are made in partnership and consultation with landowners, land users and rural communities.
2. Improve biosecurity protocols to reduce incursions and strengthen monitoring, response and management of any incursions. It is critical to primary industries viability to ensure systems are robust in preventing breaches, especially at the border.
3. Develop strategies for effective water storage and supply systems which ensure high quality, sustainable and equitable water supplies keep pace with the impacts of climate change and population growth.
4. Invest in programmes that support rural communities to address the impacts of climate change.



Action Area 4: Education

RWNZ maintains oversight of all components of the education system from early childhood through to tertiary studies with a strong focus on access to education for those living rurally. This includes associated issues such as school transport, boarding allowances and remote learning.

Rural schools continue to play a vital part in the social cohesion and economic viability of rural communities. However:

- Education for rural students is compromised by distance, isolation, telecommunication limitations and workforce recruitment and retention;
- Awareness of rural needs in decision-making and allocation of resources is limited by a lack of rural representation on school boards and government advisory committees; and
- Economic viability relies on families, whānau and employees being attracted to rural communities.

Rural schools also act as a vital and valuable community hub especially where there is no other community facility for this purpose.



Key calls for government action:

1. Ensure rural voices are consulted during the development of education policies, procedures, regulations and delivery for lifelong learning opportunities.
2. Develop and retain a skilled and multi-disciplinary rural education workforce that ensures equitable quality of learning for students through career support and advancement for educators.
3. Ensure rural communities have effective access to all education services (and financial aid) including special needs assistance, early childhood education, school boarding and tertiary study support as well as fit for purpose transport options.
4. Maintain and improve rural schools' access to amenities including reliable and speedy internet connectivity, school property (buildings and facilities), and health and wellbeing services for students, staff, families and whānau.

Action Area 5: Community and Social Inclusion

For RWNZ, community and social inclusion focuses on a wide range of social issues impacting people's lives including access to community services, community inclusion and engagement, safety and security. We consider access to services and social support are fundamental to attracting and retaining a rural workforce and sustainable communities.

New Zealanders who work and live in rural communities need to feel safe and secure. Unfortunately, rural communities are increasingly vulnerable due to lack of resources for roading and policing as well as poor workplace practices. Examples include:

- The inconsistent quality and irregular maintenance of rural roads combined with unsafe driving behaviours, poor signage and a diverse range of road users leads to higher rates of serious injuries and fatalities in rural communities; and
- Issues facing rural women experiencing family violence are exacerbated by rural isolation. Rural isolation is an impediment to seeking and receiving urgent help when it is needed.

Key calls for government action:

1. Improve the safety of rural roads through increased funding for maintenance, driver education and effective road signage; ensure safety is a key consideration for school bus services.
2. Fully resource agencies and communities to protect women and children from violence and provide safe houses and support close to rural communities.
3. Enhance safety and security for rural communities through:
 - (i) Adequate emergency services support for those who live in rural areas including recognition of volunteers;
 - (ii) Regulations for use of drones; and
 - (iii) A focus on rural workplace safety through awareness initiatives and support for employers and employees.
4. Promote and invest in initiatives that support community inclusion including education and support to prevent digital exclusion as more reliance is placed on digital services.



Promoting Community

We encourage and support policy development by central and local government that includes both a rural impact analysis and a gender impact analysis to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts of proposed policies on rural communities.

Contributing an international perspective

We add a global perspective to our work from affiliated international agreements and associations. This includes work undertaken with ACWW (Associated Country Women of the World) and through our involvement in the International Women's Caucus including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

A specific example is championing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing policies that better the lives of rural women, their families, whānau and communities.

Foundational actions for RWNZ in this capacity:

1. Encourage central and local government to incorporate the SDGs in all policy development including giving effect to these goals.
2. Support adoption by government of international recommendations that empower women, in particular rural women and communities, such as government progress on Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) periodic reports.



Our Vision

We empower and support women to be the glue that binds together our whānau and communities.

Our Mission

Strengthening, supporting and connecting people and communities.



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