



**NEW ZEALAND POLICY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE**
TE KĀHUI RANGAHAU MANA TAURITE

7 November 2024
Wellington, New Zealand

2024 NZ Policy Research Institute Symposium



Programme Schedule

09:00 - 09:30 REGISTRATION | Coffee

09:30 - 09:45 OPENING | Professor Gail Pacheco

09:45 - 10:00 GUEST SPEAKER | Dr Craig Jones, Social Investment Agency
Social investment: the importance of data and information for the new frontier of evidence-driven practice

10:00 - 10:30 SESSION 1 | Education and Skills
Dr Leon Lusitini | Intergenerational transmission of human capital in New Zealand
Dr Lisa Meehan | Reading and maths skills and the life-course outcomes of young New Zealanders

10:30 - 11:00 MORNING TEA

11:00 - 11:45 SESSION 2 | Labour Markets
Dr Alexander Plum | Sexual orientation, gender identity and economic outcomes in New Zealand
Alexandra Turcu | Underutilisation in New Zealand: An Underemployment Story
Dr Leon Lusitini | Gender and ethnic pay gaps by industry in New Zealand

11:45 - 12:30 SESSION 3 | Health
Dr Thomas Schober | Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on childhood vaccine uptake
Linda Kirkpatrick | Does a house today keep the doctor away? The impact of urban regeneration on health outcomes
Dr Lisa Meehan | The impact of concussions on labour market outcomes

12:30 - 13:30 LUNCH

13:30 - 14:15 PANEL DISCUSSION | Research gaps and priorities
Dr Bronwyn Croxson | Ministry of Health
Charlie Russell | Ministry of Justice
Gerald Minnee | Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
Barclay Anstiss | Ministry of Education

14:15 - 14:45 SESSION 4 | Crime and Justice
Dr Thomas Schober | The consequences of victimisation: Evidence from linked survey and administrative data
Dr Alexander Plum | The burden of crime victimisation among the LGBTQ+ population in Aotearoa

14:45 - 15:00 CLOSING REMARKS | Current and upcoming research

15:00 - 15:30 AFTERNOON TEA

09:30 - 09:45

OPENING

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Professor Gail Pacheco

Director, New Zealand Policy Research Institute

Gail Pacheco is a Professor of Economics and Director of the NZ Policy Research Institute at AUT. She has also just been appointed as the next EEO Commissioner at the Human Rights Commission.

Gail is an applied econometrician with a passion for evidence-based analysis, particularly in the labour and health fields. The majority of her research focuses on utilising linked administrative data (with particularly strong use of the Integrated Data Infrastructure from Statistics NZ) to inform policy debate.

Gail has extensive experience leading large-scale, multi-institutional funded projects, including work for Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry of Women, Ministry of Education, and Human Rights Commission, all with high policy-relevance. As principal investigator, she has been awarded close to \$17 million in competitive external grants since 2018 - including funding from the Health Research Council and the MBIE Endeavour Fund.

Evidence of the policy impact of her work is highlighted by being the 2018 recipient of the NZIER Economics Award that recognises “outstanding contributions to the advancement of economics and its applications in NZ”, which are of “relevance to the economic welfare of NZ” and “likely to be of long-term lasting importance to NZ”. She was also a Commissioner at the Productivity Commission from 2019 to 2022, and has received the AUT Medal (AUT’s top award) for her research, scholarship and application of integrated data to help inform social policy and wellbeing.

The importance of policy research

What do we do at the New Zealand Policy Research Institute? Professor Gail Pacheco talks us through the humble beginnings of the Institute, what has shaped it along the way, how it has lead us to the work we do today and the important link between academia and the public sector.

09:45 - 10:00

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr Craig Jones

Acting Chief Executive, Social Investment Agency

Dr Craig Jones is the Acting Chief Executive, Social Investment Agency.

Craig has considerable public sector experience both here and in Australia. This includes working as Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive, Data System Leadership at Statistics New Zealand for four years where he stewarded the Integrated Data Infrastructure and promoted the safe, ethical and transparent use of data for decision-making.



He previously worked as a Deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Education where, among other things, he supported the development of a new student-centred approach to distributing funding to address education inequity (the Equity Index). Craig is a passionate advocate for evidence-driven policy and practice. He has a particular focus on developing more rigorous approaches to impact measurement.

Craig holds a PhD, a Master of Science and a Bachelor of Arts. He is a member of the NZ Institute of Directors.

Social investment: the importance of data and information for the new frontier of evidence-driven practice

We can trace the origins of evidence-based policy to at least the 1850's, yet so much of Aotearoa's social policy and professional practice is still based on guesswork and good intention. Why is this? What are the barriers and challenges to using evidence more freely in social policy decision-making? Social investment is touted by some (including the speaker!) as the revolution that is going to lead us into the light. What conditions must exist for this to occur?

This talk will outline the Social Investment Agency's current thinking and approach to delivering social investment 2.0. It outlines some of the big rocks that must be addressed to build a social sector that continuously learns and improves. The talk proposes that the success of social investment this time around will rest and fall on the safe sharing of personal information.

10:00 - 10:30

SESSION 1 | EDUCATION & SKILLS



Dr Leon Lusitini | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Dr Leon Lusitini is a Senior Research Fellow at NZPRI. He has experience in both quantitative and qualitative methods across a range of social science disciplines. His research has focused on the role of the family in child development, intergenerational wellbeing, and Pacific peoples' health, having worked on the longitudinal Pacific Islands Families Study for 15 years. He completed a Masters degree in political science in 2013 and a PhD on social mobility in New Zealand in 2022.

Dr Lisa Meehan | Deputy Director, NZPRI

Lisa is an applied economist with extensive experience spanning academia, the OECD, the NZ public sector and economic consulting. She has a wealth of experience using integrated data to examine labour market, firm performance, education, health and justice issues. She has led and/or been a team member of several successful funded research projects for Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Women and the Retirement Commission, among others.



Intergenerational transmission of human capital in New Zealand

Dr Leon Lusitini

We use survey data from the Growing Up in New Zealand study to examine the link between the human capital of parents and children. We quantify the gradient between mothers' education level and children's cognitive skills at age 8 years and explore the role played by mothers' parenting behaviours in building children's cognitive skills. We find large disparities in children's cognitive skills by mothers' education level due in part to higher-educated mothers having many books in the home and reading frequently to their children during the preschool years. Being born into a two-parent family in a non-poor neighbourhood helps children of lower-educated mothers develop strong cognitive skills, which can help break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

Reading and maths skills and the life-course outcomes of young New Zealanders

Dr Lisa Meehan

This paper uses Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data linked to administrative data to track the educational and labour market outcomes of young New Zealanders. Those with lower skills have lower rates of participation in further education. While low-skilled men out-earn their higher-skilled counterparts when they are very young, their earnings are overtaken by those with higher skills when they are in their early 20s, and they earn around 15 per cent less by the age of 25. The differences among women are substantially larger – women with low skills earn approximately 35 per cent less than their higher-skilled counterparts by age 25.

11:00 - 11:45

SESSION 2 | LABOUR MARKETS



Dr Alexander Plum | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Alexander Plum (he/him) is a Senior Research Fellow who joined NZPRI in 2017. He is an applied micro-economist with strong IDI expertise. Alex is a lead researcher of the Community Research Group at NZPRI, and his empirical studies aim to identify policy-relevant scope to improve the well-being of traditionally marginalized communities. One key theme of Alex's research portfolio is the well-being of Rainbow+ communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Alexandra Turcu | Research Officer, NZPRI

Alex completed a Bachelor of Laws (First Class Honours) and a Master's in Economics (First Class Honours) in 2021. Her thesis, a policy analysis of non-casino gaming machine regulations in NZ, was funded by the Ministry of Health. Since completing her studies, Alex has worked on a range of projects using administrative data, including analysing NZ's underutilised workforce and the effects of crime victimisation on mental health.



Dr Leon Iusitini | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Dr Leon Iusitini is a Senior Research Fellow at NZPRI. He has experience in both quantitative and qualitative methods across a range of social science disciplines. His research has focused on the role of the family in child development, intergenerational wellbeing, and Pacific peoples' health, having worked on the longitudinal Pacific Islands Families Study for 15 years. He completed a Masters degree in political science in 2013 and a PhD on social mobility in New Zealand in 2022.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and economic outcomes in New Zealand

Dr Alexander Plum

By international standards, New Zealand is one of the most inclusive countries for LGBTQ+ people in the world. However, empirical evidence on how LGBTQ+ people's economic outcomes in terms of employment and earnings compare to those of the general population is scarce. Using numerous datasets from the Stats NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), we find:

- Men in same-sex couples earn about 7 percent less than otherwise similar men in different-sex couples. However, women in same-sex couples earn about 6 percent more than otherwise similar women in different-sex couples.
- We find large employment and earnings penalties for transgender and gender-diverse people relative to otherwise similar cisgender people. Gaps for gender-diverse individuals with female birth certificates are especially large.

Underutilisation in New Zealand: An underemployment story

Alexandra Turcu

Labour underutilisation has large negative implications both at the micro- and macroeconomic level resulting in substantial loss of human capital, productivity, efficiency and overall well-being. This study compares individual, household, and work characteristics of underutilised and fully utilised workers, and examines how persistent experiences of underutilisation are. We also consider the reasons for underutilisation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gender and ethnic pay gaps by industry in New Zealand

Dr Leon Lusitini

We use Household Labour Force Survey data pooled over 2016 to 2022 supplemented with administrative data to: (1) estimate gender and ethnic (Māori, Pacific, and Asian) pay gaps at the industry level in New Zealand; (2) understand what factors contribute to the gaps by examining group differences in demographic, household, geographic, education, and job-related characteristics (including firm and occupation characteristics). To mitigate small cell counts, we pool HLFS data over two consecutive years and collapse the industry variable to 14 industry groupings. We find that both the level and trend of gender and ethnic pay gaps vary considerably by industry, as does the portion of the pay gaps that can be explained by group differences in observed characteristics.

11:45 - 12:30

SESSION 3 | HEALTH



Dr Thomas Schober | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Thomas Schober is a Senior Research Fellow at the New Zealand Policy Research Institute at the Auckland University of Technology. Before joining the AUT in 2021, he worked for the Department of Economics at the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria. In his research, he uses administrative data to study topics in health, family, and labour economics.

Linda Kirkpatrick | Senior Research Officer, NZPRI

Linda Kirkpatrick is a Senior Research Officer at the New Zealand Policy Research Institute at AUT. She is currently completing her PhD at AUT, examining the wellbeing impacts of urban regeneration using administrative data. Linda specialises in research dissemination, using tools such as dashboards, infographics, visual conference presentations and posters to convey research findings in a manner that is accessible and engaging.



Dr Lisa Meehan | Deputy Director, NZPRI

Lisa is an applied economist with extensive experience spanning academia, the OECD, the NZ public sector and economic consulting. She has a wealth of experience using integrated data to examine labour market, firm performance, education, health and justice issues. She has led and/or been a team member of several successful funded research projects for Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Women and the Retirement Commission, among others.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on childhood vaccine uptake

Dr Thomas Schober

We study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on childhood vaccination coverage and find that the initial phase of the pandemic had, on average, small or nil effects on timely immunisation at the four infancy events, but a large effect at the 4-year event of -15 percentage points. Vaccine uptake at 4 years initially dropped most among children of European ethnicity and of non-beneficiary parents but catch-up quickly surpassed their Māori, Pacific, and beneficiary counterparts for whom sizeable gaps in coverage below pre-pandemic levels remained at the end of our observation period. The pandemic thus widened pre-existing inequalities in immunisation coverage.

Does a house today keep the doctor away? The impact of urban regeneration on health outcomes

Linda Kirkpatrick

The physical environment in which people live can affect their health and wellbeing. By regenerating urban areas (“urban regeneration”) that people live in, we have the potential to improve health and societal outcomes. This study uses housing intensification data from Kāinga Ora to measure urban regeneration and health-related datasets from the Integrated Data Infrastructure to construct physical and mental health indicators. A staggered differences-in-differences model is used to examine the impact of urban regeneration on area and individual-level health outcomes between 2015 to 2021. The study finds no short run impacts of urban regeneration on health outcomes for the overall population – however, there appears to be some positive impacts for social housing in high-growth areas.

The impact of concussions on labour market outcomes

Dr Lisa Meehan

Even mild traumatic brain injuries (mild TBI), like concussions, can lead to a long-term loss of earnings. This study uses Stats NZ’s Integrated Data Infrastructure to examine the impact of mild TBIs on labour market outcomes. It finds that the average earning losses over the first four years after injury amount to \$25,000. This equates to a staggering \$600 million in lost earnings for the roughly 25,000 New Zealand adults who experience a mild TBI each year. Rather than recovering over time, earnings continue to decline over time – the average earning losses increase from \$3,000 in the first year to \$9,000 by the fourth year. These results highlight the need for timely diagnosis and treatment of mild TBIs.

13:30 - 14:15

PANEL DISCUSSION

Public policy research gaps and priorities: health, education, justice, labour markets and cross-cutting issues

What are the pressing and pertinent public policy research priorities? We are joined by panellists working in health, education, justice and labour markets within the public sector to discuss research gaps and priorities in their respective fields.

Professor Gail Pacheco will facilitate the panel.



Dr Bronwyn Croxson | Ministry of Health

Dr Bronwyn Croxson is the Chief Economist for the Ministry of Health. She leads a small team focussed on building economics capability, providing economic insights and evidence to support colleagues' work programmes, and using health and cross-agency data to carry out analysis. Bronwyn has a background in research and teaching public and institutional economics. She maintains academic connections, to support her knowledge of developments in evidence and methods, and to support evidence-based decisions. She has a PhD in Economics, and an Adjunct Chair of Practice at Monash University School of Business.



Barclay Anstiss | Ministry of Education

Barclay is the Manager of the Educational Measurement and Assessment team for the Ministry of Education. His team directly operates several large-scale international educational studies and surveys (PISA, TALIS, TIMSS and PIRLS), and manages the contract for the Curriculum Insights and Progress Study a national study of New Zealand's English-medium curriculum. From a health science background (Physiotherapy), Barclay has an emphasis on taking research and data and turning it into action.

**Charlie Russell | Ministry of Justice**

Charlie Russell has 14 years of experience working across a range of public policy and data roles. Currently serving as the Manager Research & Evaluation at the Ministry of Justice, his team is charged with delivery of the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey, providing evaluation expertise, and targeted research insights. He has a broad background with roles in the Beehive, Te Arawhiti – Office for Māori-Crown Relations, the Tokelau government, and as a policy manager at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Conservation, and Stats NZ.

Gerald Minnee | Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment

Gerald has been employed as a Policy Director in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, working mainly on labour market and immigration policy issues, since 2018. His public sector career has included advising Ministers on a wide range of social policy issues (such as education, labour markets, welfare, justice, and health), helping design and implement important institutional changes and negotiating human resource/industrial relation changes across the public sector. He has held leadership positions in several government departments, including heading the Economic Research and Analysis team at the Treasury.



14:15 - 14:45

SESSION 4 | CRIME & JUSTICE



Dr Thomas Schober | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Thomas Schober is a Senior Research Fellow at the New Zealand Policy Research Institute at the Auckland University of Technology. Before joining the AUT in 2021, he worked for the Department of Economics at the Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria. In his research, he uses administrative data to study topics in health, family, and labour economics.

Dr Alexander Plum | Senior Research Fellow, NZPRI

Alexander Plum (he/him) is a Senior Research Fellow who joined NZPRI in 2017. He is an applied micro-economist with strong IDI expertise. Alex is a lead researcher of the Community Research Group at NZPRI, and his empirical studies aim to identify policy-relevant scope to improve the well-being of traditionally marginalized communities. One key theme of Alex's research portfolio is the well-being of Rainbow+ communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.



The consequences of victimisation: Evidence from linked survey and administrative data

Dr Thomas Schober

We use data from the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey linked to administrative data to track individuals over time and estimate the consequences of victimisation. We find that victimisation leads to a decrease in employment and earnings, and that the effects are larger when we consider victims of interpersonal violence and serious offences. The decline in earnings and employment is mirrored by an increase in benefit receipt. The negative effects persistent even three years after the victimisation event. We also find increases in injury claims, but the effects tend to be short-lived.

The burden of crime victimisation among the LGBTQ+ population in Aotearoa

Dr Alexander Plum

This study examines the differences in crime victimisation between sexual and gender minorities (identified as LGBTQ+) and the general population in Aotearoa New Zealand. We compare the risk of victimisation between LGBTQ+ individuals and non-LGBTQ+ individuals, controlling for differences in sociodemographic characteristics. We use the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey and our key findings are:

1. LGBTQ+ individuals report higher rates of crime victimisation in the past 12 months than non-LGBTQ+ individuals (45.5% vs 31.8%).
2. Differences in sociodemographic characteristics between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ individuals in regression models has minimal impact on the crime victimisation gap between these two groups.
3. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to report that the perceived reason for crime victimisation is their sexual orientation or their sex compared to non-LGBTQ+ individuals.

14:45 - 15:00

CLOSING

Dr Lisa Meehan, the Deputy Director of NZPRI, will provide closing remarks and an update on current and upcoming research projects at NZPRI.

Current and upcoming research

Beyond the pandemic: Applying complexity science in child immunisation services

Three-year Health Research Council Grant

This multi-method research, underpinned by complexity science and informed by kaupapa Māori and Talanoa principles, will quantitatively and qualitatively analyse the interconnected factors influencing childhood immunisation uptake. By understanding which children are missing out and why from multiple perspectives, we can inform ways forward for equitable immunisation services that are also resilient to future health shocks.

Boosting productivity growth by creating equal workplace opportunities for all

Five-year Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment Endeavour Grant

Our programme adopts a mixed-methods approach utilising disparate administrative, survey and qualitative data to create an evidence-base for policy and practice to improve workforce diversity. It will estimate the productivity benefits to NZ of improved diversity. The role of workplace policies and practices, diversity in organisations' leadership, indigenised workplace, structural levers within and between occupations and industries will also be analysed. It will also evaluate public policies aimed at improving diversity and equity.

Health and wellbeing of older New Zealanders

Commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development

We are undertaking the first national prevalence study of abuse of older people in Aotearoa, involving a multi-method, multi-disciplinary approach. The project is collecting and/or using four data sources:

1. A nationally representative survey to identify the scale and nature of the issue.
2. Stats NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure to examine the issue using existing data from the NZ Crime & Victims Survey and administrative data sources.
3. Deep dive individual interviews to better understand the nuances of abuse that may be occurring, with a focus on European, Māori and Pacific populations.
4. Interviews with finance industry professionals familiar with consumer vulnerabilities to examine the issue of financial abuse in more depth.

About NZPRI

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NZPRI provides high-quality research across a broad multidisciplinary programme concerned with people and work. The Director of NZPRI is Professor Gail Pacheco, who is supported by Dr Lisa Meehan (Deputy Director), Katherine Ravenswood (Associate Director, Human Resource Management) and leaders of our specialist research groups.

Our research groups enable research experts to provide research (at both the national and international level) that ticks the boxes for both academic rigour, as well as being relevant to policy makers in business, government, and the community in general.

Our research themes

We place emphasis on a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach and rank engagement with external stakeholders as a high priority.

The research themes diagram illustrates the broad nature of research streams encompassed at NZPRI, and the overlapping nature of many topics across research groups.

