



MERAS Report

for

New Zealand College of Midwives Auckland Region AGM 2019

MERAS was established by the New Zealand College of Midwives in 2002 as its 'industrial arm' to give employed midwives their own union.

The growth in MERAS membership has grown in the last couple of years to the point that MERAS now represents around 90% of DHB-employed midwives. There has also been a growth in MERAS membership with the non-DHB primary maternity units within the Auckland Region. The growth in MERAS membership also benefits the College because members have to be members of the College.

Corresponding with the growth of MERAS membership, MERAS has also seen a growth in MERAS workplace representatives in all maternity workplaces and now number around 70. A programme of union education has ensured that the workplace representatives have a good understanding of their role and that of MERAS, how to take advantage of the many opportunities within DHBs to influence service provision as well as working conditions for midwives.

In 2018, MERAS adopted a co-leadership model with Caroline taking on the Midwifery role and Jill taking on the Industrial role. MERAS also has a National Representatives Council (NRC) which has been Chaired by Kelly McConville, and Victoria Christian is the Deputy Chair. Other MERAS NRC members represent MERAS members from around Aotearoa.

Without the collective support of our membership MERAS would not have been able to achieve the outcomes that it has in the past year.

For much of 2018 the focus for MERAS was on settling the DHB Multi-Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) pay negotiations. Following a series of two-hour strikes in November and December, twice a day over two weeks, another one-day strike in February, mediation and facilitation, agreement was finally reached in April 2019.

The agreement will result in the majority of midwives receiving a 17.5% pay rise by August 2020 from their June 2018 pay rates. In addition to the pay increases, the outcome for MERAS members included:

- The introduction of a new step 6 and step 7 for the registered midwife pay scale
- Graduate midwives commencing on step 2 from August 2020
- Encouragement for DHBs to have a designated senior midwife on duty 24/7 in secondary and tertiary maternity units.
- 4 hours paid leave to attend Midwifery Standards Review (previously there was no consistent approach around the country)
- A working party to review the education funding clauses

- A working party to review the roles, pay rates and titles for midwives on the Senior Midwife pay scale
- A Midwifery Pay Equity claim process (separate from nursing)
- A Midwifery Accord (separate from nursing)
- An extension to the term of the MERAS agreement so that it does not align with the NZNO agreement.

The publicity around the industrial action and the negotiations has raised the profile of hospital-employed midwives and increased the understanding for the public and the media about the difference between hospital-employed midwives and our LMC community midwifery colleagues.

Since the pay negotiations settled, work has been underway on the Midwifery Pay Equity Claim, with interviewer training now completed and the locations for interviews finalised. Around 60 midwives will be interviewed in eight DHBs. We are in the process of selecting appropriate male comparator groups to be interviewed. We are both involved in this work along with several MERAS workplace representatives, MERAS members and two Midwifery Leaders, Norma Campbell and Emma Farmer.

Work has just commenced on the Midwifery Accord. The focus for the Accord is the recruitment and retention of midwives and better support for student midwives to create a more sustainable midwifery workforce. The parties to the Midwifery Accord are the Ministry of Health, DHBs, MERAS and NZNO. We are both involved in this work and discussions are currently underway with various midwives to establish a reference group to assist in providing input into the reports that will be produced by October for the Minister of Health.

MERAS is hoping that the Senior Midwife and Education funding working parties will start in August. The Senior Midwife Working Party will assist in creating an improved career pathway for experienced midwives and providing a consistent approach to pay grades and responsibilities for those on the senior midwives pay scale.

MERAS continues to take every opportunity to ensure that midwifery is recognised as a separate profession to nursing and the importance of midwifery leadership within the DHBs is recognised and enhanced.

Within the private birthing centres we have negotiated Collective Agreements with Birthcare in Auckland, River Ridge and Waterford in Hamilton, and Waitaki District Health Services in Oamaru. We are in the process of negotiating new Collective Agreements with a community trust in the Hokianga, Rodney Coast Midwives in Warkworth, and the Bethlehem Birthing Centre in Tauranga. We have also had approaches from MERAS members in a number of other privately run birthing centres.

Working closely with the New Zealand College of Midwives, to which we are affiliated, and the Midwifery Leaders around the country, MERAS ensures that Midwifery continues to speak with one voice in highlighting the needs of the employed midwifery workforce and the symbiotic relationship between employed and LMC midwives.

Caroline Conroy
MERAS Co-Leader (Midwifery)

Jill Ovens
MERAS Co-leader (Industrial)