



**Submission by the PSA in response to
DIA's initial consultation on its long term
insights briefing**

November 2021

PSA submission on DIA's initial consultation on its long term insights briefing

18 November 2021

About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 80,000 members. We are a democratic and bicultural organisation representing people working in the Public Service including for departments, Crown agents and other crown entities, and state-owned enterprises; local authorities; tertiary education institutions; and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors.

People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

We are committed to advancing the Tiriti o Waitangi of partnership, protection and participation through our work. Te Rūnanga o Ngā Toa Āwhina is the Māori arm of the PSA membership. The PSA is affiliated to Te Kauae Kaimahi the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, Public Services International and UniGlobal.

Summary

We support the proposed topic, and we suggest it also addresses:

- better models for public participation
- trust and confidence in public services and democratic institutions
- the relationship between access to public services and participation in democracy
- access to the digital infrastructure and its effect on democratic participation
- the effect of work-life balance on community participation.

We encourage DIA to engage comprehensively with the PSA as part of the briefing, so we can ensure the briefing gains the benefit of workers' voices across a range public and community services, and represents their views.

Responses to specific consultation questions

Question 1 - Please respond to the following statement: "This proposed topic is worth exploring in a Long-term Insights Briefing"

The PSA strongly agrees that the proposed topic '**What is the future of community participatory democracy in New Zealand, and what role could the government's increasing use of digital technology play?**' is worth exploring through a long-term insights briefing.

Question 2 - What aspects of this proposed topic are most important to you or your organisation?

All the questions set out in the consultation document will be important to consider. We have ranked them as follows:

1. How to increase participation in democracy – for example making a submission on a government proposal

We consider this a very important matter for consideration. We recommend, however, that the use of the example provided (making a submission on a government proposal) should not be used to limit the scope or steer the consultation in a predetermined direction. A range of types of participation (such as co-design, governance, public involvement in priority-setting, approaches to participation based used in a te ao Māori context) may be equally or even more important forms of participation than making a submission on a proposal.

2. The impact of the increasing use of digital technology by government

The high level of integration of digital technology into our lives means it is virtually impossible to consider how to increase participation in democracy without also considering the role of digital technology in the system and people's access to the technology to engage in this way. This area of focus will no doubt have a range of practical implications for DIA's work into the future.

3. How to increase people's participation in their communities

This is a question of huge importance, and one that government should be giving a great deal of attention to. It is also a massive question, and one that risks swamping the briefing with content too broad to be of practical use. Any assessment of how to increase people's participation in their communities should look at key barriers to participation that are likely to be in areas beyond DIA's remit (eg, employment, social security, justice and corrections, immigration). DIA cannot address this question alone, so cross-government work in this area may be of more benefit than addressing it through DIA's long-term insights briefing. For this reason we consider this question a lower priority for inclusion, however we think the role of community participation as it pertains to democratic participation should be in scope.

We suggest the following additional aspects are also considered:

- **Better models for public participation:** The focus should be on developing models of public participation that work for people, rather than trying to improve the rates at which people participate in the models that are currently available.
- **Trust and confidence in public services and democratic institutions:** The PSA believes that strong and sustained political and public support for public and not-for-profit community services are at the heart of creating a better Aotearoa. To adequately understand people's participation in democracy we also need to understand where issues of trust and confidence exist and what we can do to address them.

- ***The relationship between access to public services and participation in democracy:*** Almost everyone interacts with the state as part of its role in delivering services (eg, paying tax or rates, applying for a benefit, visiting a library, seeking hospital treatment, registering a birth), while a much smaller proportion actively engage with democracy (other than voting). The PSA supports universal access to high quality public services. The briefing could look at how service delivery interactions are an opportunity to provide people with the information, means and opportunity to participate in democracy in a way and at a time that's useful for them
- ***People's access to the digital infrastructure and its effect on democratic participation:*** The 2018 census found that around 11% of households did not have internet access¹. The briefing could explore the need to ensure internet access as a precursor to accessing digital government services and participating in digital democracy. Through the Aotearoa Wellbeing Commitment the PSA advocates for providing connectivity (free wifi) as standard in public and social housing, and for those accessing disability services and services for those over the age of 75, as well as free public access in all central and local government buildings. The PSA is also a supporter of InternetNZ five point plan for digital inclusion.²
- ***The effect of work-life balance on community participation:*** If the briefing includes a focus on how to increase people's participation in their communities, it should consider issues around how unpaid overtime, work intensification and lack of opportunities to disconnect from work outside of work hours can limit opportunities for community participation.

Question 3 - Do you have any information or insights you think should be used in developing this Briefing?

We represent 80,000 members working across the public service, state sector, local government, DHBs and the community public services sector. Our members are the people who know their sectors best; they have a wealth of insights about the ways they interact with the community, and the way their organisations operate.

We encourage DIA to engage comprehensively with the PSA as part of the briefing, so we can ensure officials have the benefit of workers' voices.

For further information about this submission, please contact:

Andrew McCauley
Senior Advisor, Policy and Strategy
New Zealand Public Service Association
PO Box 3817
Wellington 6140

Phone: 027 2712642
Email: andrew.mccauley@psa.org.nz

¹ https://www.letsdoevenbetter.nz/internet_access

² <https://internetnz.nz/policy/the-five-point-plan-for-digital-inclusion-covid-19-and-beyond/>