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Policy Spotlight: Political parties on overhang, voting and the four-year term **Turn to page 5**

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NEWS



Squeeze 'puts babies at risk'

Survey shows strain on Plunket nurses as funding dispute puts Govt's claims under scrutiny

HEALTHCARE

Andrea Vance
National Affairs Editor

More than 40% of frontline Plunket nurses in a new survey say they are so stretched they cannot screen for mental health or help struggling mothers with breastfeeding, as workforce shortages force staff into rushed, 30-minute "weigh, measure and get out the door" visits.

A nationwide survey of 278 Plunket kaimahi released today by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) reveals nurses are regularly forced to delay or omit critical checks.

The findings raise questions about whether the Government is delivering on its promise to ensure Plunket is "funded to do their job properly".

They accompany an open letter signed by more than 480 Plunket staff to NZ First leader Winston Peters, calling on his party to honour its coalition agreement pledge and warning that an exodus of experienced community nurses is putting babies at risk.

The survey captured more than a third (36%) of Plunket's frontline nursing workforce. It found 35% of direct-care staff reported caring for seven or more children in a single day, while nearly half managed between five and six appointments, on top of travelling between communities.

"Plunket workers say they are so busy rushing between appointments, some only have time to 'weigh, measure and get out the door'," said Dana Struthers, a community Karitane worker and NZNO delegate.

"Plunket is so much more than that. We are often the only health workers to go into homes after a new baby.

"We need to have enough time with whānau to discuss important issues such as safe sleeping, maternal mental health and family violence. Underfunding Plunket means the whānau we support don't get the level of care they deserve."

One Canterbury nurse told the survey they were now far more likely to omit physical checks on babies if growth checks had to be prioritised within limited appointment times.

Another in Waikato said they had to triage questions based purely on whether there was time to answer them. A Mid-Central nurse said 30-minute clinic limits made it impossible to establish rapport with families who had driven significant distances to attend.



Plunket nurses say they are being forced to cut corners on care for mothers and babies, with 60% considering quitting.

> "Some [Plunket workers] only have time to 'weigh, measure and get out the door'."
>
> **Dana Struthers**
> Community Karitane worker and NZNO delegate

The pressure is also taking a toll on staff: 70% of respondents said they regularly missed work breaks, 58% delayed toilet breaks and nearly 69% did unpaid overtime to complete mandatory paperwork.

More than a third reported burnout, while 60% had actively considered leaving Plunket in the previous six months.

The findings come amid a dispute over how much funding the Government has actually given the service.

Internal Health New Zealand briefings released under the Official Information Act show Plunket asked Associate Health Minister Casey Costello in August 2025 for an extra $25 million a year, including $12.5m for frontline care and $10m for pay parity.

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