

**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**  
**Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers**  
**DHB Social Work Leaders Council**

For release – Tuesday 7 April 2009

## **Social Workers support World Health Day's emphasis on disaster preparedness**

The importance of having well trained and highly competent teams of health workers, including social workers, to respond to emergencies should never be overlooked, say New Zealand's professional body for social workers, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and the District Health Board Social Work Leaders Council.

In a joint statement, ANZASW President Rose Henderson and Marianne Pike, Chair of the DHB Social Work Leaders Council, have supported the disaster preparedness theme for this year's World Health Day and its slogan: 'Save lives. Make hospitals safe in emergencies'.

"Given that New Zealand has a high risk of major disasters such as earthquakes the safety of the health infrastructure of our hospitals should never be taken for granted," said Marianne Pike, who works at Taranaki District Health Board.

"The message for World Health Day this year is that we need to keep investing in that infrastructure, and that we equally need to protect and train health workers to handle emergencies. Without both the physical and human infrastructure and the multidisciplinary health teams we have in New Zealand it would be impossible to withstand hazards and serve people in immediate need", she added.

Rose Henderson of ANZASW said the emergency response to the bushfire disaster in Australia earlier this year illustrated the role that social workers can play in meeting the needs of people over and above their medical needs. "The experience in Australia is one we need to learn from; it demonstrated the importance of mobilising a coordinated response".

Later this year ANZASW will be bringing Dr Michael Cronin, a world-renowned social work expert in disaster responses, to a conference in Auckland. "Michael represents the International Federation of Social Workers at the United Nations in New York. He has expert knowledge about international social work and disaster preparedness which he will be sharing with us at the Asia Pacific Social Work Conference in November," said Rose Henderson.

World Health Day is the anniversary of the foundation of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2008. Some of the examples being used by WHO to illustrate this year's theme for World Health Day include the devastation caused by flooding in Haiti, the importance of infection control measures and the environmental risks associated with temperature extremes, such as the heatwave which struck Europe in 2003 and which impacted heavily on France's health sector (this resulted in systems to give public authorities a three-day warning of a likely heatwave so steps can be taken under a national heatwave plan).

For more information on World Health Day visit [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

For more information about the Asia Pacific Social Work Conference visit [www.swinnz2009.co.nz](http://www.swinnz2009.co.nz)

Media contact: Stephen Olsen, [stepheno@anzasw.org.nz](mailto:stepheno@anzasw.org.nz) or call (027) 216 9999