



ORANGA TAMARIKI

Action Plan

Oranga Tamariki Action Plan Six-monthly Implementation Report

July to December 2024



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Introduction

Oranga Tamariki Action Plan is a whole of government response

The Oranga Tamariki Action Plan (the Action Plan) is a statutory accountability mechanism which requires Chief Executives of children's agencies¹ to work together to achieve the outcomes of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy for the core populations of interest to Oranga Tamariki. There are agencies across the children's sector that are not defined as children's agencies in legislation but play an important role in making the work of the Action Plan successful.

The children, young people, their families and whānau that Oranga Tamariki are involved with often have multiple, complex needs, including the impacts of poverty, racism and discrimination, long term unemployment, low income, poor housing, unaddressed physical and mental health needs, alcohol and drug abuse, family breakdown, family violence and sexual violence.

Despite its name, no one agency is responsible for making the Action Plan happen. It is a collective commitment and accountability across the six children's agencies and Chief Executives, for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people at most risk across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Agencies have been focusing efforts where they will have the most impact

The initial overarching Action Plan and its Implementation plan was agreed in July 2022. The 11 overarching actions and the underlying implementation initiatives were ambitious and wide ranging, addressing the overall children's system issues which include health, education, housing, and youth justice.

During the first year in 2022/23, the Action Plan delivered seven in-depth needs assessments. This gave us a strong evidence base for the issues facing the Children's System and highlighted where best to focus our efforts.

In March 2024, the Minister for Children agreed on a smaller set of priority areas with a focus on health, education, and housing outcomes for children and young people in care, supported by improving data and information sharing practices across all three areas.

Since then, we have refined our focus to concentrate limited agency resourcing on areas that will have the biggest impact, including those identified through the earlier needs assessments.

¹ Children's agencies are defined by the Act as Oranga Tamariki, New Zealand Police, the Ministries of Education, Social Development, Health, and Justice. Other agencies can be involved, such as Te Puni Kōkiri, Department of Corrections, Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People, Te Puna Aonui, Kāinga Ora, and the Ministry for Housing and Urban Development.

Progress achieved between July to December 2024

Health Focus Area

Redesign of Gateway Assessments

Benefit: If implemented, changes to the Gateway Assessment process will help improve timely access to services, improve cultural responsiveness, and clarify accountabilities between agencies in meeting the health, disability and education needs of children and young people

- The Gateway Assessment is a tool to understand whether children and young people in care or at the edge of care have unmet health, disability or learning needs.
- In May 2024 agencies completed the review of Gateway Assessments, subsequently, in June 2024, the Minister for Children, Minister of Health and Minister of Education endorsed the key findings of the review along with a proposed approach to re-design the service.
- Since then, agencies have collaborated to complete the detailed service design phase, which was anchored by the review findings and recommendations that have been endorsed by Ministers. These are:
 - Strengthening the role of primary health
 - Strengthened role of partners and community providers wherever possible
 - Delivering on the education commitment
 - Ensuring consistent follow-up, and accountability
 - Child and family/whanau-centred decision making.
- Agencies developed a prototype that was tested with frontline kaimahi from relevant agencies, partners and providers. The proposed changes will shift the service from a one-off, specialist-oriented approach to one that is focused on addressing health needs through earlier access to primary care with regular review and ongoing support, that is delivered by community partners and providers.
- As part of the detailed service design, agencies also developed detailed costing for the future state of Gateway and a service blueprint to inform implementation planning. The detailed costing includes options to pilot the new service model in a few regions.
- Agencies have developed a set of criteria to test if the new model will be successful in different regional settings.

Enhanced visibility of children in care within the health system

Benefit: Children and young people in care will receive a more responsive health service through enhanced visibility between agencies and health systems

- Enhanced visibility of children and young people in the care of Oranga Tamariki within health system would involve secure and regular information sharing between Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand.
- This will let health services and professionals know that the child is in care, with the aim of enabling them to provide the child with care that is more responsive to their unique needs and access to appropriate health supports and services.
- This may focus on:

- improving conversations between health professionals and children and young people, supported by guidance to be developed for frontline services
- more proactive referral and follow-up to treatments
- improving data on the health needs and outcomes for these children and young people, so future investment can be directed to areas that will have the most impact.
- Agencies completed cross-agency and community engagements in July and August, with the insights from the engagements informing the development of policy options.
- Agencies are now finalising a joint ministerial paper for the Minister for Children and Minister of Health to agree on key policy parameters.

Development of culturally responsive health and wellbeing guidance

Benefit: Health and wellbeing mobile resources help caregivers identify and access supports to meet children's health needs

- Children in the care of Oranga Tamariki often have a high level of unmet health needs and are more likely to have a disability.
- In the last implementation report for January to June 2024 we outlined the work Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand had undertaken with KidsHealth to give frontline kaimahi and caregivers access to health and wellbeing guidance through the Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre.
- Caregiver Social Workers introduce caregivers to the information during a regular visit and support them to access it via a QR code.
- This is the first phase of the development of guidance under the health focus areas for the Action Plan.
- Since then, Oranga Tamariki has completed the 2024 Caregivers Annual Survey in October. The insights will be used to scope the mental health training needs for caregivers. The survey included open ended questions to caregivers to inform a training regime tailored to their needs.
- Culturally responsive and trauma informed guidance for frontline will be developed as part of the implementation of redesigned Gateway service and enhanced visibility of children in care within the health system.

Mental health training

Benefit: Children and young people in care will receive informed and appropriate support to access mental health and wellbeing services

- Oranga Tamariki has developed Te Puna Oranga as a tool for building understanding of the six elements of oranga (wellbeing) relevant to child protection and youth justice settings. This tool was rolled out nationally in November 2023, with further training provided in October 2024 to deepen understanding of oranga. Oranga Tamariki social workers are now using Te Puna Oranga as a tool for building understanding of the needs of tamariki, rangatahi, whānau and families in care or youth justice, including their mental health and disability needs.
- Work is underway on developing the foundational and essential mental health and disability skills training for Oranga Tamariki kaimahi. This training will be included as part of Oranga Tamariki induction programmes.
- As part of implementing the Oranga Tamariki Disability Strategy, the initial framework for improving the capability of all kaimahi and caregivers has been developed. Once the framework has been finalised it will provide essential disability knowledge and skills for all kaimahi.

Improving collaboration between frontline agencies and establishing an escalation pathway

Benefit: Children and young people in care will receive timely access to mental health support

- Health New Zealand contracted Whāraurau² to facilitate workshops with frontline practitioners from Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand. Workshops were held in South Auckland, Waikato, and Hawke's Bay in August, and informed recommended actions to improve collaboration, including:
 - Implementing foundational training
 - Strengthening whanaungatanga
 - Integrating open dialogue principles and approaches in hui-ā-whānau and family engagement.
- A regional escalation pathway with an initial focus on residences has been established. Cross-agency regional management groups have been established for residences in Auckland, Rotorua, Palmerston North, Dunedin, and Wellington. These groups monitor the effectiveness of services and resolve operational issues. Since the establishment of these groups, agencies are better connected and enabled to identify and address gaps of mental health services within residence.
- At the national level, regular meetings between senior officials from Health New Zealand, Ministry of Health and Oranga Tamariki have been established to provide the opportunity for escalation from the regions.

Education Focus Area

Redesign of education components within Gateway Assessments

Benefit: Once implemented, holistic educational needs of children will be met, and teachers will be better engaged in the Gateway Assessments process

- As part of the redesign of Gateway Assessments, the Ministry of Education and Oranga Tamariki have worked together to improve the education components within the Gateway Assessments to address the findings from the review.
- The review found that the current education profile, used to inform education needs and provide information for specialist assessments, should be updated to better capture the holistic educational needs of a child and empower teachers to participate in Gateway Assessments.
- A prototype of a new education profile has been developed and will be tested with relevant frontline kaimahi from Oranga Tamariki, Health New Zealand and the Ministry of Education.
- As part of the roll out of the new Gateway service, agencies will provide guidance to schools. This guidance is intended to improve teachers' understanding of their role in the Gateway process and how schools can better meet the education needs identified in the Gateway process.

² Whāraurau is a government funded organisation that provides workforce development for the infant, child, and adolescent mental health and alcohol and other addictions sector.

Review of Oranga Tamariki provided student aide support

Benefit: children and young people will receive the learning and behavioural support they need to engage in education

- The provision of Student Aide support by Oranga Tamariki is intended to complement the support provided by Ministry of Education. It is intended to provide behavioural support to children and young people in care who are at risk of disengagement rather than to respond to specific learning needs.
- Oranga Tamariki has led a review of Student Aide Support to ascertain whether the service is fit for purpose. In reviewing the service, consideration was given to what day-to-day support is appropriate for children and young people to participate and engage in education.
- The review was completed in December 2024 and found that a lack of clarity in funding arrangements between Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education is creating barriers for children in care accessing education.
- The review has identified five overarching recommendations to drive change:
 - Recommendation 1: Refreshing the Student Aide Support Joint Agency Initiative between Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education, which will redefine roles and responsibilities of Student Aides, pursuant to our respective legislative obligations.
 - Recommendation 2: Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education will develop and publish joint operational guidance on the full range of educational support that is available to children and young people in care, including escalation pathways at a site, regional and national level.
 - Recommendation 3: the Ministry of Education is in the initial stages of creating a data-driven model that will deliver high-quality intervention, programmes, and support. It will be focused on the learner, rather than the service. Oranga Tamariki will engage with the Ministry of Education on this work.
 - Recommendation 4: Oranga Tamariki will undertake a gap analysis to identify what Oranga Tamariki funds in relation to educational support and how many children and young people in care are still not able to engage in full time education.
 - Recommendation 5: Oranga Tamariki will work with the Ministry of Education to ensure that the redesign of Gateway best incorporates the assessment and support needs of children and young people entering the care system, including identifying the scope and timing of key educational assessments, and linking agencies and schools.
- The recommendations from this review are proposed to form the basis of the Education Focus Area for 2025/26.

Housing Focus Area

Establish a new supported housing service for young people with multi-layered needs

Benefit: Children and young people with higher and more complex needs have access to more housing options

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development committed to establishing a new supported housing service for youth with greater support needs.
- In the previous implementation report we outlined that this initiative has now been completed with the Rangatahi Supported Accommodation service being established

in Auckland and Hamilton seeking to meet the needs of 16–25-year-olds with greater support needs who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness.

- This service has begun to fill an identified gap in intensive longer-term support for young people to exit homelessness. It will also increase the provision of immediate access to safe, warm, and stable longer-term accommodation, along with age-appropriate intensive supports.
- Availability of appropriate housing supply for young people has been a constraint in getting places contracted and stood up.

Review of Young Parent Homes

Benefit: Vulnerable teen parents have a safe place to live and receive better support to care for their child

- Young Parent Homes or Supported Housing for Vulnerable Teen Parents (as they were initially known as) were set up with the intention of providing early support to reduce long-term disadvantage for teen parents and their children.
- Seven homes were set up in areas with high rates of teen pregnancies and high rates of deprivation, namely Auckland (in Onehunga and Manurewa), Christchurch, Gisborne, Hastings, Rotorua, and Whangarei.
- Oranga Tamariki has been leading the review of this service with an aim to assess whether the service achieves what it was set up to do which was to offer young parents supported housing that will provide them with a safe place to live as short-term accommodation.
- The review has been completed and Oranga Tamariki is currently finalising its recommendations.

Data and Information Sharing Focus Area

Information sharing agreements between Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education

Benefit: Children and young people in care or youth justice are supported to be included in the education system through agencies working better together

- Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education developed an Information Sharing Agreement and two Detailed Data Agreements, that were signed by both agencies in August.
- These agreements will facilitate regular information sharing between the two agencies allowing Oranga Tamariki to identify children in our care and custody who are not enrolled and/or not attending education.
- This information sharing will enable the agencies to work together to provide appropriate and meaningful interventions and support to children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of becoming disengaged from education.
- Since signing the agreement, Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education have completed a successful data matching pilot using a sample of 800 individuals. Agencies are now working on a larger test sample, which is designed to test system capability between the two agencies to ensure the process is reliable before operationalising the data share to be used by frontline kaimahi.
- Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education are progressing the development of further Detailed Data Agreements to enable the sharing of data regarding children and young people in Oranga Tamariki care and custody who experience an intervention (e.g., stand downs, suspensions, expulsions, exclusions, applied for an

early leaving exemption, or referred to Attendance Support Services), or who require educational support.

- A Detailed Data Agreement about educational achievement is also being considered.

Development of information sharing agreements between Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand

Benefit: Health and Oranga Tamariki frontline will have better information to ensure that children in care and youth justice will receive health services that is tailored to their needs

- As part of enhancing the visibility of children in care within the health system, Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand will develop an information sharing agreement.
- The initial phase of health information proposed to be shared with Oranga Tamariki will focus on health requirements under the National Care Standards such as information on enrolment with a primary health care and dental health care providers. This information will be utilised by Oranga Tamariki frontline to enable data driven decision making that ensures children in care are receiving necessary health care, which supports compliance with the National Care Standards.
- Development of the agreement and a data sharing solution will begin once advice on options for identifying children and young people in the health system have been delivered and agreed by Ministers.

Challenges across the system remain

System capacity and funding continue to present a risk to successful delivery

- The Action Plan does not have dedicated resourcing, with current resources funded from agencies' baseline.
- Across the children's system, agencies are facing competing priorities and facing challenges to meet the demand on services.
- Reprioritisation of resources is key to delivering key initiatives under the Action Plan.
- Agencies remain committed to delivering the focused set of priorities under the Action Plan. This commitment needs to be sustained to improve the wellbeing of children and young people that are, have been or may come into contact with Oranga Tamariki.

Planning for the long term needs to be prioritised across the sector

- Long term planning that is underpinned by evidence is required to ensure the Action Plan will continue to deliver on its intended outcomes to improve the wellbeing of children and young people.
- Once key initiatives under the current set of priority areas have been implemented, there is an opportunity to redevelop the Action Plan to ensure long term planning.

What's coming up

The next six months

The next six months will include seeking final policy decisions on and progressing implementation of key initiatives such as:

- Policy parameters to enhance visibility of children in care within the health system requiring Ministers agreement
- Following Ministers agreement on key policy parameters, information sharing agreements will be developed between Health New Zealand and Oranga Tamariki
- Implementation of national improvements for Gateway Services that can be progressed within agency baselines while continuing to explore funding avenue to pilot the new model
- Operationalisation of the data sharing agreement between Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education.

A refreshed set focus areas for 2025/2026 have been developed for consideration by the Minister for Children, which will include new initiatives to progress that will address several of the recommended actions from the earlier needs assessments.