



ORANGA TAMARIKI SYSTEM

## Action Plan

# Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan Six-monthly Implementation Report

January to June 2025



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# Introduction

## **Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan is a whole of government response to improve outcomes for core populations of interest to Oranga Tamariki**

The Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan (the Action Plan) is a statutory accountability mechanism which requires Chief Executives of children's agencies<sup>1</sup> to work together to improve outcomes for the core populations of interest to Oranga Tamariki.<sup>2</sup>

The children, young people, their families and whānau that Oranga Tamariki are involved with often have multiple, complex needs, including the impacts of poverty, 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.

No one agency is responsible for making the Action Plan happen. In May 2025, Child and Youth Ministers agreed to rename the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan to the Oranga Tamariki *System* Action Plan to emphasise the 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. There are also other 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.

## **Agencies have been focusing their efforts on where they will have the most impact**

The initial overarching Action Plan and its Implementation plan were 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. Agencies have refined our approach to concentrate limited resources on areas that will have the biggest impact, including those identified through the needs assessments.

In 2024, the Minister for Children agreed to a narrowed set of focus areas that concentrated on improving health, education, and housing outcomes for children and young people in care. These were supported by a focus on improving data and information sharing practices across all three areas. In May 2025, the Minister for Children approved a new set of initiatives for 2025/25 that build on from the previous focus area initiatives and introduce

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> This encompasses the "core populations of interest to the department" as defined in section 5(1) of the Children's Act 2014.

additional actions in response to the findings of the 2023/24 Experiences of Care in Aotearoa report from the Independent Children's Monitor.

# Progress achieved between January to June 2025

## Health Focus Area

### Redesign of Gateway Assessments

**Benefit:** 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 provides a specialist evaluation to comprehensively identify health, disability, and education support needs of children and young people in care or at the risk of entering care. It ensures a coordinated, cross-sector plan is in place to meet those needs.
- In May 2024, agencies completed the review of Gateway Assessment service. In June 2024, the Minister for Children, Minister of Health and Minister of Education endorsed the review's key findings and agreed to re-design the service.
- Agencies completed detailed service design for the future state and developed a service blueprint for approval by Ministers. Agencies have also explored avenues for additional funding to roll out or pilot the full future state.
- In February 2025, the Minister for Children, Minister of Health and Minister of Education endorsed components of the future state that can be implemented within baseline funding. These components include:
  - clearer processes and pathways so children and young people can access supports earlier and more efficiently
  - improved governance and accountability processes and strengthening cross-agency collaboration through clear guidance
  - earlier referrals and access to primary and community health care services
  - improved Education Profile and engagement with schools and education professionals (discussed further in the Education Focus Area of this report).
- Implementation of the national improvements will be incremental with the first tranche, scheduled for delivery by the end of 2025, focused on foundational improvements to strengthen frontline practice and inter-agency coordination. This includes improvements to the consent process, education profile, school guidance, and national governance.
- In parallel, agencies are also exploring funding avenues to pilot the full future state 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**

- Enhancing the visibility of children and young people in the care of Oranga Tamariki within the health system requires secure and regular information sharing between Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand.
- This will enable health services and professionals to identify when a child is in care, allowing them to provide more responsive support to the child's unique needs and ensure access to appropriate health services.
- Key areas of focus include:
  - supporting better conversations between health professionals and children and young people, guided by new frontline service guidance
  - enabling more proactive referrals and follow-ups to treatments
  - improving data on the health needs and outcomes for these children and young people, to inform future investment in areas of greatest impact.
- Agencies have developed policy parameters for information sharing and detailed costings for implementation. Once agencies identify a clear funding pathway, agencies will submit a joint ministerial paper for the Minister for Children and Minister of Health to confirm the key policy settings and implementation approach.

## 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**

- Oranga Tamariki published the 2024 Caregivers Annual Survey<sup>3</sup> and is now considering how to implement the key recommendations. As part of the second insights report from this survey, which focuses on the specific needs of caregivers and the children and young people they care for, Oranga Tamariki established a caregiver panel to create opportunities for caregivers to participate in service improvements.
- Caring Families Aotearoa, a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) that supports caregivers, is offering caregivers bespoke online development on Care Standards.
- Through the caregiver work plan Oranga Tamariki continues to strengthen support for social workers. In May 2025, Oranga Tamariki released a practice note for social workers to better clarify caregivers' rights in receiving health information of tamariki in their care utilising All about Me Plans and Caregiver Support Plans.
- This initiative will no longer be reported on under the Action Plan, as it now forms part of the Minister for Children's priority work programme to improve the experience of caregivers with links to the broader Crown Response work to strengthen support to caregivers for which Oranga Tamariki has received additional funding.
- Implementation of the redesigned Gateway service and enhanced visibility of children in care within the health system will include the development of culturally responsive and trauma informed guidance for frontline staff.

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<sup>3</sup> Valdivia, L. A., & Subedi, K. (2025). Annual Caregiver Satisfaction Survey: Topline Report One. Wellington, New Zealand: Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children.



## Mental health training

**Benefit: Children and young people in care will receive better identification of mental health needs and better wellbeing support**

- Health New Zealand has contracted Whāraurau (infant, child and youth mental health addiction workforce agency) to provide training to Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (ICAMHS) to equip learners with the necessary skills and knowledge for working with infants, children, and young people in the care of Oranga Tamariki.
- Health New Zealand is offering a 'train the trainer' package on infant, child and youth mental health and addiction foundation training to equip Oranga Tamariki frontline with the knowledge and skills to provide further learning opportunities across the organisation. Agencies will focus the training implementation on targeted cohorts within Oranga Tamariki's workforce to ensure it is having the most impact.
- There are opportunities to understand the connection between this action and the wider care workforce initiatives being progressed as part of the Crown Response.

## Improving frontline collaboration between agencies and establishing an escalation pathway

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

- Youth forensic mental health services and ICAMHS play a significant role in supporting children and young people living in Oranga Tamariki care and protection residences. Recognising the need for stronger collaboration, Health New Zealand has established dedicated ICAMHS specialist positions within residences in Dunedin and Wellington.
- Oranga Tamariki is implementing a Clinical Governance approach to provide oversight of the quality of health and disability service provision. This includes improving access to mental health services and to uplift the mental health capability of Oranga Tamariki workforce. A Clinical Governance Committee will be established to provide leadership and oversight of the Clinical Governance approach and will include membership from Health New Zealand.
- To ensure alignment at the national level, senior officials from Oranga Tamariki regularly engage with the national ICAMHS leaders' group, and other Health New Zealand officials who hold national roles in mental health and addiction.

## Education Focus Area

### Redesign of education components within Gateway Assessments

**Benefit: Holistic educational needs of children will be identified and met, and teachers will be better engaged in the Gateway Assessment process**

- The Gateway Assessment review identified the need to update the current education profile, which informs education needs and supports specialist assessments. The updated profile aims to better capture the holistic educational needs of a child and empower teachers to actively participate in Gateway Assessments.
- The Ministry of Education has finalised the new education profile and tested it with frontline kaimahi from Oranga Tamariki, Health New Zealand and the Ministry of Education.

- A system pathway has been documented that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities of agencies and schools throughout the education component of the Gateway Assessment process. The system pathway is being tested through targeted consultation with frontline kaimahi from Oranga Tamariki, Health New Zealand, and the Ministry of Education.
- As part of the rollout, agencies will develop guidance for schools to improve teachers' understanding of their role in the Gateway process and support schools in meeting the education needs identified through the assessment.

## Improving access to learning support

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

- Oranga Tamariki completed a review of Student Aide Support in December 2024. Recommendations from this review have been included in the Education Focus Area for 2025/26.
- The review recommended refreshing the Student Aide Support Joint Agency Initiative agreement between Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education. This refresh will redefine the role and scope of Student Aide Support in line with each agency's legislative obligations.
- To advance this work, the overarching Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is being updated between Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Education. The MoU outlines the high-level roles and responsibilities of both agencies in meeting the educational needs of children and young people. It also establishes an escalation pathway at a site, regional and national level to resolve individual children and system level barriers and issues.
- Under the refreshed MoU, agencies will also update their shared agreements for delivering specific programmes of work, including the Student Aide Support agreement.
- Together, the refreshed MoU and Student Aide Support agreement will more clearly define each agency's responsibilities in supporting children and young people in care, including behavioural support provided by Student Aides.

## Housing Focus Area

### Improving housing services, supports, and access

**Benefit: Children, young people, and their whānau and families, who are receiving support from Oranga Tamariki or who are transitioning from state care or custody have access to safe and secure housing**

- In 2024, Oranga Tamariki reviewed the Young Parent Homes service to assess whether it was meeting its objective of providing young parents with safe, short-term supported housing.
- The review found that the Young Parent Homes service partially achieved its intended outcomes, including:
  - providing short-term accommodation to vulnerable young parents
  - supporting early attachment and bonding
  - promoting good health, education and social outcomes for vulnerable parents and their children
  - promoting economic well-being, independence, and a future focus for teen parents

- supporting and enhancing life skills and parenting skills.
- However, the review also found that some objectives, such as supporting successful transitions of young parents into independent living, were constrained by external factors such as the general housing market and housing supply.
- The review was unable to conclude whether the service was able to reduce the likelihood of vulnerable teen parents and/or their children coming to the attention of, or being placed in the custody of, the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive. This suggests that broader systemic issues may have limited the service's impact in this area.
- The review identified several recommendations to improve and support the future of the Young Parent Homes service. These recommendations will be taken into consideration as part of regional needs assessments for future commissioning and investment decisions, as well as part of a wider programme of work to refresh and refine commissioning and investment approaches for contracted services over the coming years.
- The Housing Focus Area for 2025/26 has been updated to address broader systemic issues related to housing supports. Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and the Ministry of Social Development have identified initiatives to improve housing services, supports, and access.
- Advice on the scope and work required for early intervention housing supports and services was developed, along with advice on improving transitions from state care and custody (a targeted form of early intervention). This advice has been provided to the Minister of Housing and Associate Minister of Housing for consideration.
- The Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki have agreed to share information on respective services and supports to ensure providers understand the suite of products and services provided by each agency to support children and young people with housing and transitions from care or custody.
- Housing education workshops are delivered to young people leaving care. These workshops will now include information for young people on the responsibilities, obligations and entitlements for accommodation support.

## Data and Information Sharing Focus Area

### Information sharing 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**

- In August 2024, Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education signed an Information Sharing Agreement and two Detailed Data Agreements. These agreements enable regular data sharing between the two agencies, allowing Oranga Tamariki to identify children in care and custody who are not enrolled in or attending education.
- This information sharing will support both agencies to deliver appropriate and meaningful interventions for children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education.
- Since the data matching pilot reported on in the previous six-monthly Implementation Report, agencies have continued testing and achieved a substantive match rate, confirming a reliable capacity to operationalise the data sharing. Agencies expect that data sharing will be operational in September 2025.
- The next phase of work will focus on developing the additional Detailed Data Agreements to enable the sharing of information about children and young people in



Oranga Tamariki care and custody who experience interventions such as stand downs, suspensions and exclusions, or who require educational support.

## **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 are tailored to their needs**

- As part of efforts to enhance the visibility of children in care within the health system, Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand will develop an information sharing agreement.
- In the initial phase, Health New Zealand will share health information required under the National Care Standards with Oranga Tamariki. This includes information on enrolment with primary health care and dental health care providers. Oranga Tamariki frontline will use this information to make evidence-based decisions that ensure children in care are receiving necessary health services.
- Next steps include providing advice to Ministers on funding options and formalising both the agreement and technical solution for data sharing.

## **Development of a Memorandum of Understanding between Oranga Tamariki and ACC**

**Benefit: Children in Oranga Tamariki's care will be better supported to access ACC services and entitlements**

- Oranga Tamariki and ACC are working together to develop a Relationship MoU to ensure children and young people in care, and their families can access the entitlements and services provided by ACC.
- This MoU will establish a framework to promote collaboration, cooperation, and communication between the two agencies as they carry out their respective roles and responsibilities. The goal is to improve outcomes for children, young people, and their families in Oranga Tamariki care.
- The MoU is a priority under the focus areas for 2025/26.
- Oranga Tamariki and ACC expect to formally agree on the MoU later in 2025. The next steps will include scoping the associated agreements and schedules, including those required to support information sharing.

## **Development of a Memorandum of Understanding and information sharing agreements between Oranga Tamariki and Corrections**

**Benefit: Corrections and Oranga Tamariki frontline staff will have better information to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, their caregivers, victims of wrongdoing, people who offend, whānau and communities**

- Corrections and Oranga Tamariki work together to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people serving sentences, as well as the children of parents serving sentences. Both agencies share a duty of care to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect and work together to support smoother transitions between youth justice residences and prison custody.
- To improve outcomes for this cohort, the agencies are developing a relationship MoU that will strengthen partnerships and ensure interventions are better aligned to meet the needs of this cohort.
- The MoU is a priority under the focus areas for 2025/26.

- Once the MoU is agreed, the Oranga Tamariki-Corrections Working Group will commence work to develop the associated agreements and schedules, including data and information sharing protocols.

# Challenges across the system remain

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

- As outlined in our previous update, the Action Plan does not have dedicated resourcing; agencies are currently funding initiatives from within existing baseline.
- Across the children's system, agencies are managing competing priorities and facing challenges meeting increasing service demands.
- Sustained commitment to prioritise resources to progress key initiatives remains critical for delivering key initiatives under the Action Plan.
- Despite these challenges, agencies remain committed to delivering the initiatives under the Action Plan. The Social Sector Chief Executives now provide oversight of the Action Plan's delivery, reinforcing cross-agency commitment and accountability.

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

- Agencies recognise the need to prioritise long-term planning across the sector. Evidence-based planning is essential to ensure the Action Plan continues to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Agencies are working together to provide the Social Sector Chief Executives with timely and relevant data. This will improve insight into how well agencies are meeting the needs of children and young people in care.
- Once key initiatives are implemented, agencies will have an opportunity to refresh the Action Plan to support long-term planning and sustainability.

# 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:

- Implementation of the first tranche of the Gateway National Improvements.
- Advice to Ministers on policy parameters to enhance visibility of children in care within the health system.
- Following Ministers agreement on key policy parameters, information sharing agreements will be developed between Health New Zealand and Oranga Tamariki.
- Completion of the MoU between Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education and commencing reviews of the agreements within the MoU.
- Roll out of the enhanced education profile with guidance for schools to clarify roles and responsibilities between schools and agencies.

- Deliver on the findings of Phase One of the Supported Accommodation review, complete Phase Two, and provide recommendations for future service delivery.
- Provide an update to Ministers on the early intervention housing supports and services.
- Disseminate information on housing supports and services available through the Ministry of Social Development to Oranga Tamariki transition support service providers.
- Completion and signing of the MoU between Oranga Tamariki and ACC, and scoping the associated agreements and schedules, including data and information sharing protocols.