



**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

# The Child and Youth Strategy

## 2024-2027

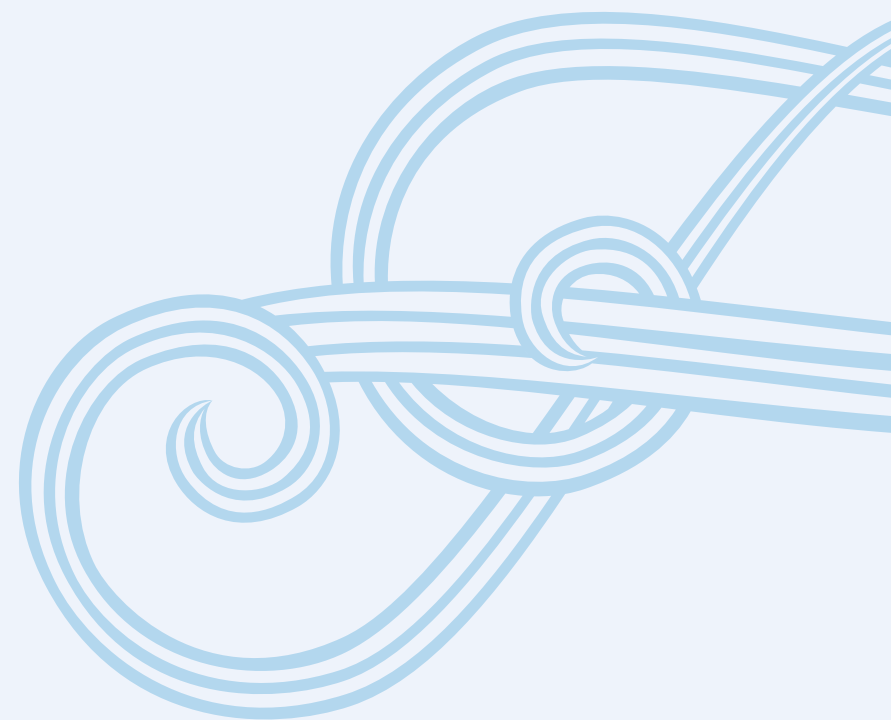
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November 2024

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# Minister's foreword

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As the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction, I am pleased to introduce the Government's Child and Youth Strategy.

This Strategy sets out our Government's plan to improve the lives of children and young people in New Zealand. It identifies a vision, outcomes and three key priorities that will drive cross-government work, inform investment decisions and support us to measure progress. Work to deliver on these priorities will be informed by our social investment approach. There is a deliberate focus on reducing material hardship and intervening early to improve a wide range of outcomes across the life course.

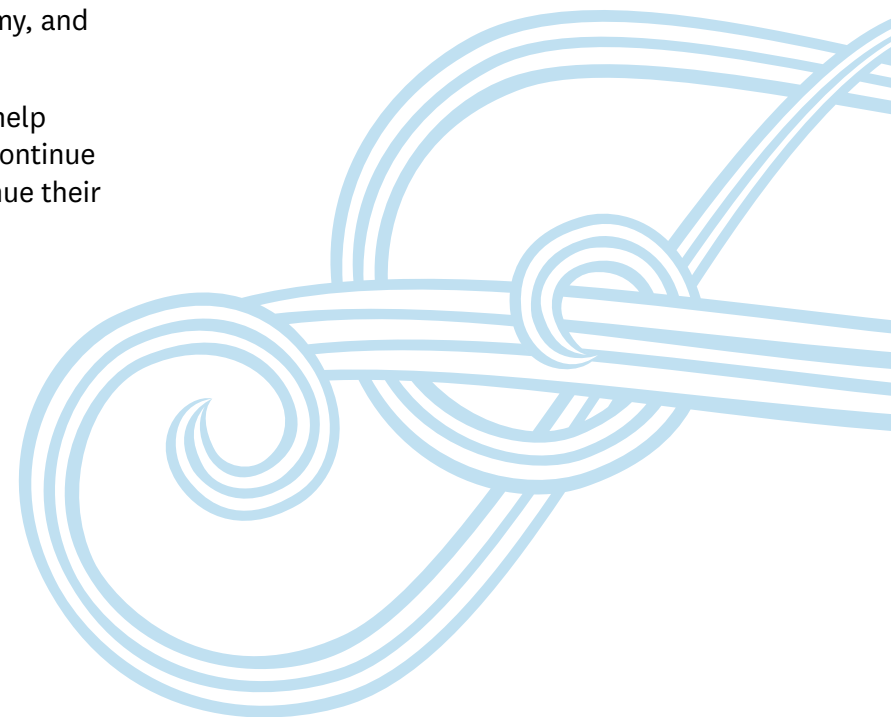
This Government has inherited some major challenges, and a new approach is needed. We are committed to giving New Zealanders more opportunities to get ahead, including investing in children and young people to ensure they experience a good life. We need to focus our investment where it can make the biggest difference for our children and young people's lives both now and in the future.

New Zealand is stronger when its people are skilled and educated, healthy and resilient, and our families and communities are thriving. Childhood represents a huge opportunity to set people on a positive path so that they lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives, contribute to their communities and the economy, and achieve their full potential.

We undertook targeted consultation with key stakeholders, including children and young people, to help inform the development of this Strategy. While the priorities outlined are the Government's, we will continue to work with and support others who make a difference, including backing our communities to continue their efforts in delivering better outcomes for children.

The priorities contained in this Strategy are a starting point for how our Government is taking action to improve the lives of young Kiwis and create economic and social prosperity for current and future generations. This Strategy outlines what we will do to lift outcomes, and ultimately to achieve our vision that New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people.

**Hon Louise Upston**  
**Minister for Child Poverty Reduction**



# Introduction

This Strategy sets out the Government’s vision and desired outcomes for children and young people in New Zealand. This is the Strategy that responds to the requirement in the Children’s Act 2014 to adopt a strategy to improve outcomes for children. It provides a snapshot of key actions we are taking now, areas in which we will undertake further work, and the measures we will use to demonstrate progress.

Our approach includes:

- setting targets to focus the public sector on delivering better results for New Zealanders. This includes specific targets for children and young people
- adopting a social investment approach to ensure we base investment decisions on research, data, and evidence of impact
- identifying a small number of priorities to focus coordinated cross-government efforts aimed at addressing the underlying drivers of outcomes for children and young people.

This Strategy refreshes the previous Strategy (published in 2019) so it reflects the current Government’s policies, priorities and activities. Information about the previous Strategy can be found online<sup>1</sup>. The policies adopted under the previous Strategy are also set out online<sup>2</sup>. The effectiveness of this package of policies was evaluated through annual implementation monitoring reports, and the Strategy annual reports, which are available on the Ministry of Social Development website<sup>3</sup>. The Strategy will be reviewed again in late 2027.

## The Vision and Outcomes

We continue to aspire to the vision of New Zealand being the best place in the world for children and young people. We are also committed to the six high level and enduring outcomes in the previous Strategy, as set out below. Consultation with representatives of children and young people and other key stakeholders has confirmed these as the key dimensions of a good life now and into the future. Together, these outcomes describe the experiences we want all children and young people to have. **The vision is that New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people**

|  |   |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Outcome 1</b><br>Children and young people are loved, safe and nurtured | <b>Outcome 2</b><br>Children and young people have what they need | <b>Outcome 3</b><br>Children and young people are happy and healthy | <b>Outcome 4</b><br>Children and young people are learning and developing | <b>Outcome 5</b><br>Children and young people are accepted, respected and connected | <b>Outcome 6</b><br>Children and young people are involved and empowered |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|

## Outcomes for children are outcomes for New Zealand

Children and young people aged 0-24 comprise nearly a third of all New Zealanders, with those aged 0-14 making up nearly a fifth (18.3%) of our population.

Childhood is a formative time. We have a responsibility to protect and support our children and young people, ensuring future generations are set up for success. Children are also the most vulnerable members of society, reliant on and shaped by their experiences, their environment and the people around them - parents, whānau, communities and institutions such as schools.

We already invest significantly in New Zealand’s children, but we can do better. By investing in services and supports that make a positive difference and give children the best start in life, we can reduce the long-term costs of adverse outcomes such as preventable hospitalisations, youth offending, poor mental health, and benefit dependency.

<sup>1</sup> <https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/webarchive/20240412190031/https%3A/www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/webarchive/20240412190031/https://www.childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/actions>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.msd.govt.nz/cwpr>

# Early investment will drive positive impacts across a range of later life outcomes

We have already taken action to improve the lives of New Zealanders, including children and young people. We have set ambitious targets to focus agencies on improving services and turning around poor outcomes in key areas such as health, education, housing, and law and order.

Through this Strategy the Government is committing to a coordinated cross-government approach in three priority areas that encompass policies and interventions across ministerial portfolios, sectors and agency responsibilities. We will work together to strengthen prevention and early interventions to reduce risks and strengthen protective factors that influence a wide range of outcomes.

The three priorities are:

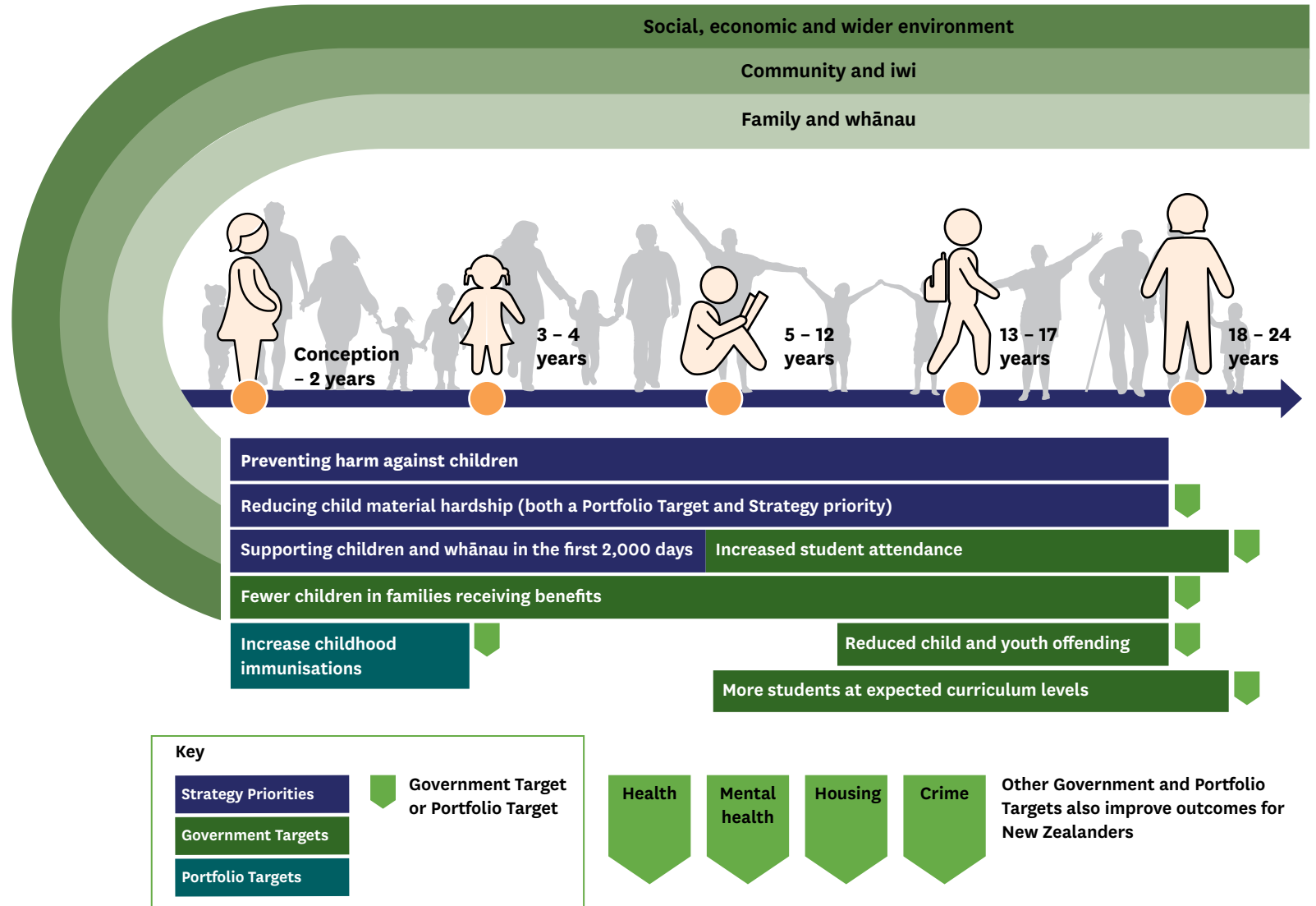
- supporting children and their families and whānau in the first 2,000 days
- reducing child material hardship
- preventing harm against children.

These three priorities have been selected because evidence shows these are the areas where we can have the biggest impact. The priorities also recognise the foundational role of the early years in influencing later outcomes, and the critical role of family, whānau and communities in shaping children's lives.

These priorities align with the Government's overall priorities and objectives and support progress towards the Strategy's vision and six enduring outcomes. The targeted consultation we undertook on the Strategy showed strong support for a focus on these areas.

**This Strategy establishes a cross-government programme of work in three priority areas that are critical to improving child and youth outcomes. The priorities will help address the common underlying risk and protective factors that influence the life trajectories of children.**

**Children and young people are supported by family, whānau, communities and wider institutions across their lives from conception to age 24**

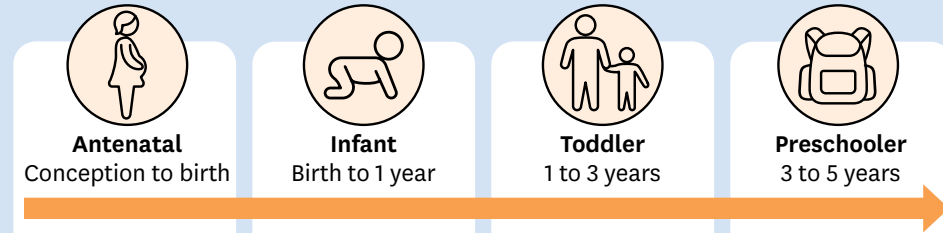


# Priority 1

# Supporting children and their families and whānau in the first 2,000 days

## What we mean by the first 2,000 days

The first 2,000 days means the time from a child's conception through to 5 years of age.



## Why this is a priority

The first 2,000 days is a critical window in a child's development. Experiences during this time shape long-term outcomes including health and wellbeing, education, and socio-economic outcomes.



**Brain and cognitive development:** 90% of a child's brain development occurs in the first 2,000 days. This is also a critical stage for the healthy development of other key biological systems (e.g. immune system).



**Health and wellbeing:** Alongside a child's health, positive maternal, parental and family health affect children's development and long-term health outcomes.



**Educational outcomes:** Educational readiness supports improved school attendance and engagement, and academic achievement.

## A focus on the first 2,000 days will improve outcomes and set children up to succeed

Appropriate investment and intervention during the first 2,000 days helps set children up for success, delivering wide-ranging and positive impacts across all of the Strategy's six enduring outcomes. Getting the early years right can also influence life-long trajectories, and break negative intergenerational cycles.

Evidence demonstrates the value of early intervention in the first 2,000 days, with strong return on investment over a child's lifetime.

## Not all children and their families have positive experiences in the first 2,000 days

- Only 78% of two-year-olds are fully immunised.
- 75% of children receive a B4 School Check on time.
- Research suggest that around 12–18% of pregnant women experience clinical depression.
- 28% of people are not enrolled with a Lead Maternity Carer in the first trimester of pregnancy.
- 20% of children at age 5 are struggling with oral language skills.

## Current government policies and actions supporting the first 2,000 days

- Implementing FamilyBoost to help low-to-middle-income households with the costs of early childhood education (ECE)
- Kahu Taurima – implementing improved and integrated maternity and early years services
- Reviewing model of care for neurodevelopmental disorders including fetal alcohol spectrum disorder
- Supporting quality, accessibility and choice in the ECE system
- Implementing a food programme in targeted ECE services
- Ngā Tini Whetū – whānau-centred, early intervention support in first 1,000 days

## Where we will focus within the first 2,000 days

To improve outcomes in the first 2,000 days we will take a cross-government approach focused on three key areas:

### Supporting positive parenting practices

This is key to enabling healthy growth and development, including cognitive development, socio-emotional learning, and building relationships.

We will support positive parenting practices and strong, nurturing relationships between parents/caregivers and their children, in addition to wider social networks.

### Supporting development of cognitive and behavioural skills

These are the building blocks for a range of important skills which enable positive behaviour and healthy decision-making.

We will support children to develop the key cognitive and socio-emotional skills that help them to learn and manage everyday life.

### Supporting maternal mental health

Positive mental health and reducing toxic stress during pregnancy and post-birth support healthy child growth and development.

We will support positive mental health during pregnancy and post-birth.

# Priority 2

# Reducing child material hardship

## What we mean by material hardship

Children in material hardship live in households that don't have access to the basics. Material hardship is a non-income measure of poverty. It is a Portfolio Target for child poverty reduction.

We measure material hardship by looking at the percentage of children living in households reporting that they can't afford six or more of seventeen basic essential items on the Deprivation-17 index.

### This includes

Not being able to afford two pairs of shoes

Going without fresh vegetables often

Not being able to pay bills on time

## Why this is a priority

Material hardship directly impacts on children's outcomes in the short term through reduced access to necessities. This can lead to poorer health and toxic stress in the household, negatively affecting children's development and wellbeing across all six enduring outcomes.

Material hardship in childhood can negatively affect longer-term outcomes, including in adulthood.



**Cognitive and social-emotional development:** Poverty and hardship can negatively affect how a child's brain develops.



**School attendance and achievement:** Poverty and socio-economic disadvantage are associated with lower educational achievement.



**Health outcomes:** Poverty and hardship are associated with worse physical and mental health in the present and in the future.



**Justice outcomes, including youth and adult offending:** Experiences of poverty and hardship are correlated with poorer future justice outcomes.

## Too many children are experiencing material hardship

- 12.5 percent of children in New Zealand experienced material hardship in 2022/23.
- Rates of material hardship are now similar to what they were in 2017/18.

The rising cost of living and increased housing costs have made it harder for families to afford the basics.

### Material hardship is not evenly distributed across all groups of children:

**2x** higher rate amongst Māori and Pacific children than rates for all children.

**2x** higher rate amongst disabled children and children in disabled households than rates for all children.

**3x** higher rate amongst children in sole parent households than two parent households.

Children in benefit-receiving households are 3.5 times more likely to be in material hardship than children in working households. However, overall more children in material hardship are in working households (around 55% of all children in material hardship), as there are many more children in working households than in benefit-receiving households.

## Current government policies and actions to reduce material hardship

### Grow household incomes

- Increasing the In-work Tax Credit
- Changes to income tax thresholds
- Supporting people into employment

### Assist families into stable housing

- Prioritising families in emergency housing on the social housing waitlist
- Going for Housing Growth
- Better Social Housing system investment

### Reduce other household costs

- Addressing cost of living
- Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme

### Reduce long term disadvantage

- Making progress on the Child Poverty Related Indicators
- Employment Action Plan
- Attendance Action Plan
- Changes to New Zealand Curriculum

## Where we will focus to reduce material hardship

We need to take a coordinated approach to address the complex drivers of material hardship. In addition to the actions identified above, we will focus on:

### Addressing additional household costs

Additional household costs impact on a household's ability to afford basic essential items. Costs are not the same for all households, with some facing higher or additional essential costs, such as costs associated with disability.

### Addressing drivers of long-term disadvantage and hardship

The drivers of long-term disadvantage and hardship are complex and take time and sustained effort to address. We will investigate opportunities to address deeper drivers of material hardship, including in relation to health, housing, education and employment.

## What we mean by preventing child harm

In this Strategy, preventing child harm means preventing child abuse and neglect within families and whānau, by addressing early risk factors and strengthening protective factors.

The drivers of child harm are complex, but there are some common risk factors that create toxic stress for families, affect parents' ability to cope, and get in the way of positive, nurturing relationships.



**Low Income**



**Housing instability**



**Drug and alcohol abuse**



**Mental health challenges**



**Community disadvantage**

## Why this is a priority

Experiencing abuse and neglect in childhood can have significant negative effects on physical, mental and emotional health and development. This can have flow on impacts across all six enduring outcomes as well as longer term and intergenerational impacts. Within te ao Māori, harm is acknowledged as a violation of mana and ora (life, health and vitality).



**Brain development:** Physical, verbal and emotional abuse can detrimentally affect brain development in children and young people. Exposure to violence, abuse and neglect can also affect the nervous, metabolic, immune and emotional systems of the developing child.



**Interactions with the justice system:** 97% of 10-13-year-olds who committed serious offences had been the subject of a prior child welfare notification to Oranga Tamariki.



**Educational outcomes:** Exposure to and experience of child harm can negatively affect school attendance and achievement.

## Too many children are experiencing abuse and neglect

**It is challenging to get an accurate picture of the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Current data doesn't provide a true picture of the extent of this issue. Nevertheless, we know that every year thousands of New Zealand children experience abuse and neglect at the hands of loved ones.**

From the data we have, we know:

- there were 10,426 substantiated Oranga Tamariki findings of abuse or neglect in 2022
- 23.5% of children born in 1998 had been the subject of a report of concern to Oranga Tamariki by age 17
- some groups of children (Māori, Pacific, disabled children and those in low-income households) are over-represented in the data on children who experience abuse and neglect.

## Current government policies and actions to prevent child harm

- Second Te Aorerekura Action Plan, which includes a focus on ensuring children and young people are safe and appropriately supported
- Changes to strengthen the child protection system, following Dame Karen Poutasi's report into the death of Malachi Subecz
- Response to the findings from the Royal Commission into Abuse in State Care
- Changes to strengthen oversight of the care and protection system
- Oranga Tamariki-led actions to improve systems responses to harm once it has occurred, to better protect and support children and prevent harm from re-occurring
- Delivery of MSD programmes, including E Tū Whānau and Pasefika Proud

## Where we will focus to prevent child harm

The wide range of factors that contribute to child abuse and neglect means a coordinated, cross-government approach is needed. We will focus on prevention and early intervention using a life course lens to address factors that contribute to child abuse and neglect within families. Our collective efforts will focus on three areas:

### Addressing underlying stressors and risk factors

These include material hardship, housing insecurity, and lack of social supports. We will identify opportunities to improve core services and better support those with the greatest needs.

### Strengthening protective factors, including supporting nurturing, positive parenting and caring practices

There is good evidence about the factors that protect children from harm, and we will explore opportunities to strengthen these.

### Effective and responsive early intervention for those with early indicators or risk factors for child harm

We know the factors that can increase the risk of abuse and neglect, and we can do more to ensure families have the support and skills to prevent harm from occurring. We will look at ways to improve prevention and early intervention programmes and services and to ensure those who need them most can access them.



# How we will know if we're making a difference

## The Strategy is supported by a measurement framework to monitor and report on progress

The Strategy measurement framework includes a set of key indicators which we will use to measure progress. The indicators are aligned to the Government and Portfolio Targets that are relevant to children and young people and in some cases can provide a more direct measure of the progress we are making towards the enduring outcomes. The indicators include the Child Poverty Related Indicators (CPRI), which in particular enable us to monitor the impacts of policies that aim to address the drivers of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, and seven additional Strategy Indicators to further monitor progress on the Strategy priorities and outcomes.

Many of the indicators look at the key factors and conditions that contribute to achieving positive outcomes for children across the Strategy's six enduring outcomes. By monitoring the full set of indicators together, we can determine if we are making progress towards the Strategy's priorities and the outcomes.

## We'll know we're making progress when we see:

Reduced child hardship and long-term disadvantage. To monitor this, we've established five Child Poverty Related Indicators (CPRI) and a Material Hardship Portfolio Target measure.

|   |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Indicator is aligned to an existing Government Target (GT) or Portfolio Target (PT) | <b>Fewer children in material hardship</b> <span>PT</span>  | <b>More children in affordable housing (CPRI)</b> <span>GT 8</span>  | <b>Fewer children in families on benefit (CPRI)</b> <span>GT 5</span>              | <b>Fewer avoidable hospitalisations (CPRI)</b> <span>GT 1</span>                       | <b>Increased school attendance (CPRI)</b> <span>GT 6</span>                | <b>Improved educational achievement (CPRI)</b> <span>GT 7</span>                             |
|   | Percentage and number of children and young people aged 0-17 in households scoring 6 or more on the DEP-17 material deprivation index | Percentage of children and young people aged 0-17 living in low-income households spending more than 30% of the household's disposable income on housing | Number of children and young people aged 0-17 in households receiving main benefit | Rate of potentially avoidable hospitalisations for children and young people aged 0-17 | Percentage of students aged 6-16 who are present more than 90% of the term | Percentage of school leavers with at least NCEA Level 2 as their highest level of attainment |

Better outcomes for all New Zealand children and young people. To further monitor progress on the priorities and the outcomes, we've established seven additional Strategy Indicators.

|  |  |  |   |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Increased access to maternity care</b>  | <b>Improved immunisation</b> <span>PT</span>                       | <b>Reduced food insecurity</b>   | <b>Better coping with parenting</b>   | <b>Prevention of child abuse</b>   | <b>Better mental health</b>  | <b>Reduced child and youth offending</b> <span>GT 3</span>        |
| Percentage of people enrolled with a primary maternity care provider in the first trimester of pregnancy | Percentage of children who are fully immunised at 24 months of age | Percentage of children aged 0-14 living in households where food runs out sometimes or often | Percentage of children 0-14 with parents reporting they are coping well with demands of raising a child | Number of children and young people aged 0-17 with at least one substantiated finding of abuse in the past 12 months | Percentage of children aged 2-14 who experienced emotional and/or behaviour problems<br>Percentage of children and young people aged 15-24 who experienced high or very high rates of psychological distress in the last 4 weeks | Rate of offending per 10,000 children and young people aged 10-17 |

## We will report back on progress through the Annual Report

The Strategy Annual Report will use these indicators to report on progress for all children and young people and (where possible) for identified populations, including Māori children, disabled children, and children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The Annual Report will help us measure progress being made towards achievement of the Government Targets, the Strategy priority areas, and the six high-level Strategy outcomes.

Agencies will continue to monitor a wider set of indicators and use these to track progress and report publicly and/or to Ministers, as appropriate. More information is available here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/child-wellbeing-and-poverty-reduction/reporting.html>

# Putting the Strategy into action

## Taking a social investment approach

Social investment is about getting better results from our current investments, particularly those focused on our most vulnerable. Our Government is taking a different approach to breaking cycles of disadvantage: through greater use of evidence to understand needs and what works to address them, putting more power in the hands of communities, and having a clearer focus on ensuring there's value for money spent.

Cross-government work in the three priority areas will be one of the ways the Government will give effect to its social investment approach.

### Investment principles

The following principles will guide our actions and decisions in the three priority areas. These principles reflect the core building blocks of the social investment approach and have regard to the child- and policy-related principles in the Children's Act 2014. They also take account of feedback received through targeted consultation to inform the development of this Strategy.

- Investment decisions are informed by government priorities and strategic context.
- Investment decisions are informed by data and evidence. Where evidence is lacking, consideration is given to innovative approaches that will improve the evidence base.
- Investment will improve outcomes for children and young people who data and evidence identifies have the greatest needs and/or are at risk of poor long-term outcomes.
- The effectiveness of investments will be monitored and evaluated.
- Investment will seek to address disparities in outcomes.
- Investment will seek to prevent and minimise negative outcomes for children and young people.
- Investment aims to deliver long-term value for money, taking into account wider benefits and costs to government and society.
- Investment will provide opportunities for decision-making, design and delivery of services and interventions to occur at local and iwi level.
- Investment to improve outcomes for children and young people will recognise the importance of family, community and whānau-centred approaches.
- Investments will respect and uphold the rights of children in New Zealand law and acknowledge their intrinsic value and inherent dignity.

## Implementing and evaluating policies

The Government is implementing a wide-ranging work programme that contributes directly and indirectly to the priorities in the Strategy and the six enduring outcomes. This includes, but is not limited to, the policies identified on pages 6-8. Further policies may be identified as the Strategy is implemented.

Consistent with the Government's wider approach to social investment, there will be a strong focus on testing, evaluating, learning from and adapting policies and programmes to ensure they are making a difference. The impacts of the package of policies will also be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis through the Strategy Annual Report, which will be available here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/child-wellbeing-and-poverty-reduction/reporting.html>

Some previous policies will be ongoing and will be included in the next Annual Report on the Strategy to evaluate effectiveness.

# Putting the Strategy into action

## Working with and supporting others to make a difference

This Strategy sets out the Government's priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people. We also recognise the critical role that those outside government play in making a positive difference in children's lives. We will continue to work with and support others who work directly with children, young people, families and communities. We will look for ways to fund and commission services that provide greater flexibility and responsiveness to local needs. We want children and young people, iwi Māori and communities to have a greater say in determining the kinds of services and supports that work for them.

Thirty percent of New Zealand's children identify as Māori. We will ensure that our approach to implementing the Strategy takes account of te ao Māori and iwi perspectives and experiences, and supports improved outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori, including by working with Pou Tangata (National Iwi Chairs Forum.)

## Working together across government

Collective and coordinated efforts across multiple government agencies are required to make the changes needed so that all children and young people have the opportunity to thrive and succeed in life.

The Minister for Child Poverty Reduction oversees the implementation of the Strategy and works closely with other Ministers with responsibility for funding and delivering services to children and young people and their families.

The outcomes in the Strategy also provide the framework for other important cross-agency work, including the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan and the Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action.

### Addressing greater needs

The three priority areas contribute to improving the outcomes of all children, with a particular focus on children with greater needs. We know some groups of children experience worse outcomes during childhood and across the life course, and that there are disparities in outcomes for some groups of children (for example tamariki Māori and disabled children). The work on the priorities will focus on children who are more likely to be experiencing negative outcomes in the first 2,000 days, material hardship, or child abuse and neglect.

The material hardship priority area focuses on reducing poverty and mitigating the impacts of poverty and disadvantage. This priority, and the policies to reduce hardship and long term disadvantage, will support the Strategy's intent to reduce child poverty and mitigate the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage and poverty on children now and in the future.

In prioritising material hardship, we will consider economic changes and how these are influenced by, and can affect, policies. The latest annual Child Poverty Budget Report assessed the likely impact of specific policies, including policies identified to reduce material hardship, and economic conditions on child poverty and material hardship. The report identified that these policies would lift the incomes of working households and are expected to have a positive effect on future child poverty rates within current and forecast economic conditions. More information is available here: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/child-poverty-report/child-poverty-report-2024>.

The priorities also support improving wellbeing for children who are at risk of involvement in and have experience in the care and protection system.

**For more information on the implementation of the Strategy, see the Strategy web page here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/cwpr>**



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