

Periodic Report on legislation, policy, and other accountability arrangements

**Report to Parliament under section 448B of the
Oranga Tamariki Act 1989**

August 2025

**Prepared by Oranga Tamariki on behalf of Hon Karen Chhour,
Minister for Children**

Refocusing the system on wellbeing and safety

Oranga Tamariki is the last place of safety for children and young people whose wellbeing needs have not been met by their parents, wider family and society. The combination of inadequate legislation and policy settings, a lack of support for children and caregivers, and inefficient delivery of social services have resulted in Oranga Tamariki stretching itself across too many priorities.

The needs of children and young people will only be met fully when we make their wellbeing and safety the first and most important consideration. This report sets out the tangible actions I am taking to achieve this, by:

- improving outcomes for children in care
- better supporting caregivers
- addressing child and youth offending
- delivering better value for public money invested in social services.

The children's system has not always performed well

Every child in New Zealand should be raised in a loving and stable home. Children deserve to be cared for, protected from harm, and to live their lives free of violence. They deserve to be surrounded by adults who stand up for them and support them to reach their potential. They need the adults in their life – family, communities and children's agencies¹ – to recognise when they need help and to act.

We receive regular and tragic reminders that this is not the reality for many children and young people. Over the past year, approximately 4,200 children and young people were in the care of Oranga Tamariki, and 60,000 received social support and services from Oranga Tamariki and its partners.²

Ultimately, these children deserve a dedicated agency that puts them first, makes good decisions, and learns from its mistakes. Good intentions do not improve outcomes, and we need more than just words.

I am making wellbeing and safety the number one priority

We can do better to prevent harm from occurring if the right settings are in place and the right actions are taken.

The warning signs are there if we look for them. These children are not invisible, we know who they are, and we know the risk factors. Help is available for people in danger, for victims, and for those causing harm.

Refocusing the system on harm prevention is complex because New Zealand has higher rates of child abuse than comparative countries. Our issues run deep, and I believe that we are at risk of becoming desensitised to the horrors of child neglect and ill-treatment at the hands of parents, families, guardians and carers.

Children need more from us than yet another review into what went wrong – they need real change that puts their wellbeing and best interests at the heart of every decision about them. This change is what I am driving toward.

Oranga Tamariki is responding to the direction I have set. It is increasingly focused on its primary care and protection role and is aligning its operations to deliver first and foremost on need in line with the expectations of this Government.

¹ Children's agencies are defined by the Children's Act 2014 as Oranga Tamariki, New Zealand Police, the Ministries of Education, Social Development, Health, and Justice. Other agencies are also 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.

² [Oranga Tamariki Annual Report 2023/24](#)

Repealing section 7AA has shifted the focus

When children and young people are at risk of harm, it is critical that Oranga Tamariki makes good decisions about their care and puts their wellbeing and safety first.

Parliament has repealed section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and, in doing so, has clarified that wellbeing and safety are paramount considerations.

The repeal does not prevent Oranga Tamariki from considering the cultural wellbeing of children, nor does it interfere with the principles of sections 5 and 13 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, which promote children being supported to remain in the care of their parents or whānau where it is safe to do so.

Legislation is one of the strongest levers I have for driving change in the system, and this and other changes underway are a strong statement about where we are heading.

The performance of Oranga Tamariki is improving

Oranga Tamariki exercises powers to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people but has not always performed its duties well. It needs clear direction and to face a high degree of public scrutiny. I have therefore set four priorities for Oranga Tamariki:

- supporting children in care through regular social worker visits and timely responses to reports of concern
- supporting caregivers
- addressing child and youth offending
- improving complaint management practices.

Oranga Tamariki reports publicly on progress against these priorities every quarter. This scrutiny appears to be having the desired effect. In its most recent quarterly performance report³:

- 96 percent of children in care received a social worker visit within the target time
- the number of caregiver support plans has improved by 13 percent since reporting commenced
- the proportion of complaints audited that met all quality standards improved by 11 percent.

The Oranga Tamariki *Strategic Intentions 2024/25-2029/30* outlines its focus on delivering on the agency's core purpose, changing its culture, and getting the basics right. This is supported by a 21-point Implementation Plan led by its Executive Leadership Team which is increasingly focusing the agency on what matters.

This is promising progress, but Oranga Tamariki must do more to build trust and confidence, particularly in how it responds to reports of concern. I expect Oranga Tamariki to intensify its efforts to improve in this area, and I will keep a close watch on how it responds to what the data says.

Clear direction and robust oversight are helping strengthen the system

Since its establishment in 2017, Oranga Tamariki has been subject to more than 20 reviews or reports that have identified problems with Oranga Tamariki and other children's agencies. Some reports identified an agency stretched beyond its core role and faced with conflicting priorities, in a system where bad decisions can have terrible consequences for vulnerable children and young people.

In July 2024, I re-established the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board, which provides quarterly assurance reports and independent advice about how the agency is performing. The Board's focus includes monitoring the Oranga Tamariki strategic direction and organisational culture, so it maintains its focus on delivering child-centric services.

The Board provides an additional line of assurance alongside other oversight system changes made by the Government. These changes include establishing the Independent Children's Monitor as an

³ [Performance Measures for Ministerial Priorities – Quarter Two 2024/2025](#)

independent Crown entity to strengthen its status and ability to take a strategic view of the children's system. Government has also moved to dissolve the Children and Young People's Commission and restore a single Children's Commissioner. The roles of these agencies are related but separate.

The Independent Children's Monitor now has increased powers and duties to provide insights to how the children's system is performing. The Children's Commissioner will continue to advocate for children and young people in care and perform its monitoring function on places of detention, including Oranga Tamariki residences.

The children's system is wider than Oranga Tamariki

Section 448B of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 focuses on how policy, legislation, and other settings impact the accountabilities of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.

I have consistently said that Oranga Tamariki cannot safeguard the wellbeing and safety of children and young people on its own. Agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Justice, New Zealand Police, and Department of Corrections play key roles in ensuring the needs of children are met. It is appropriate that they face the same level of scrutiny as Oranga Tamariki.

Several external reviews have identified a clear need for children's agencies to work together to solve critical system issues. The Ministerial Advisory Board concurs, and is a strong advocate for increased cooperation and accountability across the system.

Improving outcomes for children in care

We know that more tailored support is needed

The primary role of Oranga Tamariki is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are at risk of harm. This means focusing its finite resources on the 4,200 in its care or custody and the 60,000 receiving support or services through Oranga Tamariki and its partners.⁴

The challenges faced by children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki are often complex, compounding, and intergenerational, including the combined impacts of poverty, racism and discrimination, long-term unemployment, low income, poor housing, unaddressed physical and mental health needs, alcohol and drug abuse, and family violence.⁵ Many are further affected by disabilities, including cognitive impairment and neuro-disability.

The reality is that some children and young people have high and complex needs that require more support than the traditional services provided by universal health, education, and social services. These children and young people require the cooperation of children's agencies to provide the necessary targeted support.

There is a shortage of care placements

There is a chronic shortage of care placement options across the system, and in some cases, there are simply no options available. With long transition periods into suitable placements, time out of school increases, behavior becomes more unsettled, and crisis situations can escalate quickly. Impacts are even more acute for children and young people with disabilities and/or high and complex needs, as they often rely on consistent routines, specialised support and stable environments to thrive. For social workers, this cumulative pressure places immense strain on an already heavy workload, contributing to burnout and a decline in the quality of practice.

To address these issues, the Government needs regularly updated data identifying the needs of children and young people at a regional and national level, effective interventions, and availability of services. This ensures the Government can make evidence-informed decisions to address needs and a longer-term plan to improve system capacity.

In the short term, I am taking direct action to improve residences. Budget 2025 invested more than \$21 million over four years to remediate residences, ensuring they are safe and up to code for young people and staff. It also invested \$41 million over four years to professionalise the residential workforce through leadership and training.

External reviews provide a blueprint for improving wellbeing and safety

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (the Royal Commission)⁶ provided evidence of systemic abuse that was ignored for decades. Children and young people in the care and protection system were failed by the state. I am deeply committed to leading my portfolios in a way that acknowledges the failures of the past.

Budget 2025 provided a significant investment in the care system, including \$16 million over four years for wellbeing and safety improvements in community homes, remand homes, and caregiver placements. This investment will provide a range of benefits, including improved staff training and enhanced monitoring and assurance.

I am making changes to improve safety in secure care and protection and youth justice residences, so these facilities live up to the name they have been given. These include banning strip searches of children and young people in residences and clarifying the amount of time a child or young person can be placed in secure care before they need court authorisation to extend their placement.

⁴ [Oranga Tamariki Annual Report 2023/24](#)

⁵ [Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan](#)

⁶ [Abuse in Care - Royal Commission of Inquiry](#)

The legislation governing care and protection and youth justice residences is complex and out of date. There is an opportunity to consider further changes to modernise this legislation.

The Government has invested in frontline technology improvements

Social workers have told me that their work is made harder by outdated systems that are difficult to navigate and do not support collaboration between agencies and community partners. Because I want social workers to be free to focus on wellbeing and safety, the Government invested \$68.5 million through Budget 2024 to overhaul the Oranga Tamariki frontline technology systems, including replacing its legacy case management system.

This investment means social workers will be able to spend more time with children and their families.

The upgrade to frontline systems will improve data accuracy and accessibility, make recording information faster, and provide for the safe sharing of data between those who need it. This will improve collaboration and support consistent and reliable data and insights for monitoring and evaluation across the system.

The Child Protection Investigation Unit has been established

The Royal Commission highlighted the risk of not acting immediately when safety and wellbeing concerns are raised. Oranga Tamariki will build trust when it shows it is learning from past failures.

Oranga Tamariki has responded by establishing a Child Protection Investigation Unit with the primary purpose of improving and ensuring the safety of children in care. The Child Protection Investigation Unit will carry out rigorous independent investigations into cases where children known to Oranga Tamariki are harmed. It will also identify systemic failures to reform Oranga Tamariki systems and practices.

Action is being taken to improve access to critical support

The Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan (OTSAP) requires the Chief Executives of children's agencies to work together to improve health, education, and housing outcomes for children in care. An example of the work OTSAP facilitates is the establishment of a new Rangatahi Support Accommodation service in Auckland and Hamilton, which provides safe housing and intensive support for young people experiencing homelessness.⁷

Children's agencies like health, education, and housing are working together on a set of focus areas for 2025/26. This includes implementing national improvements to the Gateway Assessment service, which helps identify the disability, education, and health needs of children in care or at risk of entering care. Potential improvements include earlier referrals to primary health, strengthening the role of community providers and development of an improved education profile.

⁷ [Oranga Tamariki Action Plan Six-month Implementation Report July to December 2024](#)

Better supporting caregivers

Caregivers help ensure every child has a stable and loving home

More than 4,000 caregivers provide safe, stable, loving homes for children who need care across New Zealand. They are a vital part of delivering wellbeing and safety and Oranga Tamariki cannot succeed without them.

Caregivers and their families open their hearts and their homes to care for children when they need it. I know from my discussions with caregivers that their role can be both extremely rewarding and incredibly challenging.

While caregivers tell me that they love what they do, they also tell me they don't feel trusted and enabled to make appropriate decisions for the children in their care. I am making changes to ensure caregivers feel valued, have the autonomy they need, and feel comfortable recommending becoming a caregiver to others.

Feeling like a trusted partner is a significant factor in caregiver satisfaction and retention, so this is something I am keen to enable. The current focus is on operational changes, but I have not ruled out strengthening legislation that governs caregiver decision rights.

Accountability reports highlight critical gaps

Part Three of the National Care Standards and Related Matters Regulations 2018 sets out the support caregivers can expect when they open their homes to children and young people, including access to information and financial and non-financial support. Oranga Tamariki compliance is measured through the Independent Children's Monitor's annual *Experiences in Care in Aotearoa* report.

These reports, undertaken since 2020/21, highlight the pressures the system is under. The reports tell us that:

- there is a nationwide shortage of approved and pre-approved caregivers, leading to delays finding suitable care and the number of children being placed with unapproved caregivers
- caregiver assessments are mostly compliant with requirements but are taking longer to complete. This leads to delays and uncertainty for everyone, as well as reduced financial assistance until the approval process concludes
- some caregivers are not being visited by their social workers as often as they should be. A small proportion received no contact during the 2023/24 reporting period.⁸

The Oranga Tamariki annual survey of caregivers highlights similar challenges. In the 2024 survey, while over 70 percent of caregivers said they felt supported by their social worker, satisfaction with the support received from Oranga Tamariki remained less than half. Caregivers highlighted the need for more assistance.⁹

I am considering whether a national strategy for caregivers is needed

The Ministerial Advisory Board advises me that there is an urgent need for more tailored support for caregivers, alongside training for Oranga Tamariki staff in how to meet caregivers' needs. The Board's view is that this needs to be considered as part of broader system change supported by a clear strategy and plan.

My view is that we need a planned and deliberate national approach to supporting caregivers. I see this encompassing:

- recruitment targets based on identified geographic and skill needs
- clear guidelines for identifying and delivering training that caregivers need to feel supported

⁸ [Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2023/2024](#)

⁹ [Oranga Tamariki Caregiver Survey 2024](#)

and be successful

- retention incentives and targets
- quality assurance measures.

A national strategy is one way of focusing the system on these objectives. Developing a national strategy is a significant undertaking. It will require cross-agency collaboration and has resourcing implications for Oranga Tamariki. I intend to seek initial advice from officials about the benefits of such a strategy and any work programme or resourcing implications, in due course.

Oranga Tamariki is taking immediate steps to support caregivers

Better supporting caregivers is one of the priorities I have set for Oranga Tamariki, and it is working quickly to respond to my expectations.

There has been a strong focus on operational improvements, particularly in relation to how social workers interact with and support caregivers. This has seen the following improvements:

- more children are being placed with approved or partially approved caregivers
- more caregivers have a support plan in place
- more social workers are carrying out the actions in the support plan
- strengthened guidance and processes for higher foster care allowance and financial support.

This is positive progress but there is one area where my expectations are still not being met: the number of caregivers receiving social worker visits at the frequency specified in their plan. Oranga Tamariki has incorporated consistent visits with caregivers into its *Care Standards Action Plan*, which involves experienced staff at each site monitoring and supporting social workers to ensure these visits take place.

Oranga Tamariki is focusing on improving these figures as a priority, and I look forward to seeing progress in the next Oranga Tamariki Annual Report and the upcoming *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2024/25* report by the Independent Children's Monitor.

Addressing child and youth offending

The Government is committed to addressing serious and persistent offending behaviour

Child and youth offending is a safety and wellbeing issue that impacts everyone, including the young people, their victims, and the wider community. Recent years have seen an unacceptable spike in offending, and this has highlighted that the system does not have the tools to respond adequately. I am committed to changing this so that children and young people do not become adults who offend.

Each year, more than 3,000 children aged 10 to 13 and 6,000 young people aged 14 to 17 come to the attention of New Zealand Police for offending behaviour.¹⁰ Approximately 90 percent of children and 70 percent of young people are diverted from offending without escalation, but a proportion continue to offend. We need to do better for these children and young people because the personal and social cost of offending is high.

This is why the Government set a target to reduce serious and persistent child and youth offending by 15 percent by 2030 (Target 3). Reports on the achievement of the Government's target show a steady reduction in the number of children and young people with offending behaviour. This is promising progress and an example of what can be achieved when the right interventions are in place. It will be important that this is sustained through the implementation of legislative and non-legislative initiatives under the Target 3 delivery plan.¹¹

Youth Justice has been strengthened

Youth justice is often the last opportunity to break the cycle of offending before entering the adult criminal justice system. Holding young offenders to account and turning their lives around is possible with the right mix of consequences, support, and willingness to grasp the opportunities that are presented to them.

There is a clear gap in the justice system for the most serious and persistent youth offenders. The Government is responding by delivering stronger, faster, and more targeted responses through legislation enabling a Young Serious Offender (YSO) declaration and a Military-Style Academy order.

A young person will be eligible for a YSO declaration if they are 14 to 17 years old at the time of offending, have committed at least two separate serious offences and are likely to go on offending. It unlocks a range of new powers for the New Zealand Police and Youth Court to respond to serious and persistent offending, such as more intensive monitoring and enhanced rehabilitative support from government and social service providers. A declaration lasts for two years to allow experts to work with young people intensively over a sustained period.

Some young people declared a YSO may receive a Military-Style Academy order. This requires the young person to participate in a structured programme that combines time in a youth justice residence with intensive support to transition back into the community. Military-Style Academy orders are the most restrictive Youth Court sentence available but are underpinned by intensive trauma-informed therapeutic support alongside family/whānau involvement. They involve holding young people accountable for their offending, while also prioritising their rehabilitation as part of the response.

The Military-Style Academy pilot was launched in July 2024. The first cohort is now in the community phase, supported by dedicated mentors and a range of community services. An interim evaluation of the pilot released in February 2025 identified several strengths, including an effective needs assessment process that informed participants' therapeutic care. A second interim evaluation, released in June 2025, focused on the first three months of the community phase. It highlighted progress made by some young people, particularly in education and work experience. A final evaluation of the full programme will be released by the end of 2025.

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice data as at June 2024.

¹¹ [Target 3 – Reduced Child and Youth Offending Delivery Plan](#)

Poor behaviour is no longer tolerated in youth justice facilities

Youth justice facilities must support safety and rehabilitation, and no staff member or resident should be subjected to violence and intimidation in a residence. Some previous high-profile incidents in youth justice facilities revealed a lack of assertive decision-making in response to disorder events, hindering both their safe resolution and the prevention of repeated behaviour by the participants.

There have been several reviews of youth justice residences in recent years, including a rapid review led by Mike Bush that was published in late 2023.¹² Oranga Tamariki has responded to these reviews by making significant operational changes, including improving staff training and strengthening health and safety. These changes appear to be having a positive impact: in 2024 there were two rooftop incidents, compared to 15 similar incidents in 2023.

I am closing a gap in legislation that meant visitors, staff and contractors entering youth justice facilities were unable to be searched for harmful items. I am also repealing the existing powers to strip search children and young people, which were rarely used but nonetheless needed to be addressed. The new search regime means that harmful items can be prevented from entering the facility, keeping everyone safe.

These are practical changes that put wellbeing and safety first, assist rehabilitation and reduce the risk of harm to young people.

¹² [Secure residences and community homes review | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

Delivering better value for public money

Investing in partners to deliver better outcomes

Oranga Tamariki cannot meet the needs of children and young people alone. The system must empower communities to lead their own responses, grounded in local knowledge, tikanga, and trusted relationships. Enabling Communities is the centrepiece of this shift by decentralising Oranga Tamariki functions into the community, enabling partners to design and deliver solutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of their people.

In regions such as the Eastern Bay of Plenty, iwi-led partnerships are taking on key responsibilities, including receiving reports of concern and leading early decision-making. Community-led contact centres have been established to provide localised, tikanga-based responses, with calls and referrals now being handled directly by trusted community providers. These centres are already demonstrating the benefits of local leadership, including earlier intervention, reduced need for statutory involvement, and increased trust from families to seek help.

Other partners, such as Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated, are leading innovative approaches to commissioning. Through the Te Ara Mātua prototype in Hawke's Bay, Oranga Tamariki is testing the devolution of commissioning based on assessed need. This includes reinvesting baseline funding into a co-designed, community-led care and protection model. Early joint assessments between Oranga Tamariki and community kaimahi show that fewer children and young people require further statutory intervention, and a collaborative data tool is being developed to support joined-up reporting and evaluation.

These examples demonstrate the potential of Enabling Communities to deliver faster, more effective and trusted responses for children, young people and their families. I am committed to continuing this shift, and to ensuring that Oranga Tamariki supports communities to lead in ways that are sustainable, accountable, and grounded in mana-enhancing practice.

Oranga Tamariki and its partners must deliver value for public money

Oranga Tamariki spends around \$537 million a year on social services procured from more than 550 providers. This money pays for care and care support, youth justice initiatives, early intervention, and family and sexual violence services.

Funding the right intervention at the right time can make a big difference for children and their families. Achieving our goals relies on Oranga Tamariki prioritising spending that improves wellbeing and safety, as well as being an effective steward of the public money entrusted to it.

I also expect that organisations receiving this funding to deliver against their commitments and keep wellbeing and safety at the heart of their work. Where this does not occur, I support Oranga Tamariki taking swift action to address the situation and, if necessary, return funding so that it can be redirected.

I am addressing issues caused by poor contracting processes

Earlier this year I was contacted by several social service delivery organisations concerned by how Oranga Tamariki was handling the contract renewal process. One such organisation was Barnardos, which delivers the critical 0800 What's Up hotline.

After seeking information from Oranga Tamariki, it became clear that its handling of the process had not met expectations. This resulted in Oranga Tamariki extending its contracts to the end of 2025 to maintain service delivery while process deficiencies are addressed.

The Auditor-General's report into these concerns showed that Oranga Tamariki has more to do to restore its credibility with providers. As the report notes, when contracts for services are not managed well by Oranga Tamariki, it creates the possibility that children and their families do not receive the support they need. This is not putting wellbeing and safety first, so I expect Oranga Tamariki to improve

its contract management at pace.

Oranga Tamariki needs to change the way it manages contracts with social service providers. Accordingly, Budget 2025 invested an additional \$23.7 million to extend contracts with social service providers, in response to the Government's expectation that Oranga Tamariki design and implement a refined commissioning approach in partnership with the Social Investment Agency.

As a result, Oranga Tamariki is now putting into place a *Commissioning and Investment Future Plan*. Developed with input from key stakeholders, the overall purpose is to improve the agency's approach to commissioning services, ensuring public money is well spent and focused on those with the greatest needs. Key features of the Plan include:

- a standardised commissioning process with clear timelines and decision-making criteria
- enhanced data collection and analysis to support evidence-based decisions
- strengthened communication and engagement with service providers for transparency and collaboration
- improved contract management, linking performance monitoring to outcomes.

Recent engagements with central agencies, social sector agencies, strategic partners, national providers, over 170 Social Service Providers Association members, and the child and family policy group of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services have yielded cautiously optimistic feedback.

Concluding remarks

The future of care: Transforming lives and systems

This Periodic Report summarises the breadth of work underway to make wellbeing and safety the number one priority for Oranga Tamariki. It also signals new work that I am considering progressing once my current legislative and policy priorities are delivered.

Improving outcomes for children and young people in care can transform not only their individual lives but also the broader systems that support them. When children in care experience stability, consistent education, and emotional support, they are more likely to thrive academically, socially and spiritually. This leads to better mental health, stronger relationships and increased confidence in navigating adulthood. Children with positive care experiences are also more likely to pursue further education or employment, reducing their risk of homelessness, involvement in the justice system, or long-term reliance on social services.

From a systemic perspective, better outcomes reduce the strain on overloaded services such as health, housing, child protection and justice. Social workers can shift from crisis management to proactive, high-quality support, improving job satisfaction and retention. Over time, this creates a more sustainable care system, lowers public spending on reactive interventions and fosters healthier, more resilient communities. Investing in improved outcomes for children and young people in care is not just a moral imperative, it is a strategic one that benefits us all.