

New Zealand's Social Investment Approach: A Critical Appraisal

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Since 2010-11, the National-led government has developed a 'social investment approach' to inform public expenditure decisions on a wide range of social services. The new approach is continuing to evolve. Initially, there was a strong focus on selecting policy interventions that were thought likely to reduce the government's long-term fiscal liability. In more recent years the approach has become broader, with a greater emphasis on 'what works' based on the growing availability of administrative data and the increased capacity to match this data across multiple agencies. The social investment approach raises numerous philosophical, conceptual, methodological, analytical, institutional, and policy issues. This presentation critically assesses the strengths and weaknesses of New Zealand's current approach, outlines how it differs from social investment approaches in Europe, highlights the limitations of an 'investment' lens as a guide to the funding of social services, and discusses how current policy settings might be modified in the interests of better long-term societal outcomes.

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