

## **Address from Hon Karen Chhour: Whakamanawa Social Service Providers conference**

I am honoured to be here today in my capacity as Minister for Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence, and Minister for Children.

I want to acknowledge:

- My Parliamentary colleague, the Hon Marama Davidson.
- The Centre for Family Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention, Chief Executive, Emma Powell,
- Deputy Chief Executive Benesia Smith from Oranga Tamariki,
- And Children's Commissioner Claire Achmad.

Since attending last year's conference, a lot has been achieved – I am eager to share with you the latest updates on Te Aorerekura and the Action Plan, as well as changes taking place in Oranga Tamariki.

We all share the same ambition - a better future, where violence and all other forms of harm are no longer tolerated and our children are nurtured to reach their full potential.

Everyone deserves to live a life free from violence, and to have the chance to reach their full potential. We need homes filled with love and care, communities that lift whānau up, and a system that supports those who most need it.

The effects of trauma can be lifelong - many of those abused as children or experiencing violence in their lifetime have ongoing physical health challenges like heart disease or addictions and mental illness, and need for support decades.

Children and young people are uniquely vulnerable members of our society - their physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual development is shaped by their experiences in their early years.

Prevention is by far the most effective and efficient way to avoid the trauma associated with child abuse and other forms of family violence and sexual violence.

But we also need an effective response system, and this is a priority in the government's work, which I'll say more about shortly.

Oranga Tamariki has a critical role in child protection, where families are unable to appropriately care for their children.

Alongside the National Strategy on Family Violence and Sexual Violence, is the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan.

The cross-government action plan, that drives how we support children and young people with the highest needs, is evolving – including a refreshed name and approach.

Previously known as the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan, it is now called the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan.

This updated name better reflects the shared ownership of the work across government agencies and the wider government children's system – which has always been the purpose of the plan.

While Oranga Tamariki leads coordination, the plan belongs to all children's system agencies.

The name may be a symbolic change, but it represents real, cross-agency progress across the system.

My fellow Ministers and I have agreed new focus areas for the Action Plan:

- Providing improved practice guidance for trauma-informed health services.
- Improving education support with the new Gateway education profile, including student aide funding.
- Improving housing transitions by helping young people access the right accommodation.
- Establishing data and information sharing agreements between agencies (including Health NZ, Corrections and ACC).

This work reflects the priorities of ministers and leaders across the system.

The intention is to address systemic issues and improve how we meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Together we're creating a system that works better for the children and young people who need it most.

Alongside this work, through the second Te Aorerekura Action Plan that we launched in December, agencies are working together to strengthen multi-agency responses to family violence.

An assessment of the multi-agency responses found significant gaps in risk assessments and workforce capability – partly because there has not been sustained leadership or guidance from central government.

That is leading to harm – 92% of people who die in family violence homicides are known to multiple statutory organisations.

We need government agencies working together better with specialists and leaders in their communities to deliver effective responses.

Government has been investing in workforce capability, to equip people with the knowledge and skills they need to safely respond to family violence.

There are Entry to Expert and Specialist Organisational Standards for the family violence workforce, with new sexual violence frameworks due to launch before the end of the year.

Alongside this, is a new Risk and Safety Practice Framework. These are important frameworks for establishing more consistent practice and ensuring people working in social services – and in government agencies – know what they need to do.

The first ever workforce survey showed that many people are accessing training and they are using that training regularly. But we don't know about the quality of that training.

There is now a training directory available that identifies the different workforce capability training available, that has been mapped to the frameworks so you can be sure about the quality of that training.

I think it's important that workers who completed the 2024 survey reported positive relationships with the government agencies in their communities – and I encourage everyone to keep building relationships and working together to make sure that we're as effective in our work to protect children and strengthen families as we can be.

The 2025 FVSV workforce survey is now open so please complete it so you can be counted and can share your views

One of the core components of effective multi-agency responses is governance and leadership so that people know what they need to do, and there is accountability for the actions that will get people to safety.

You'll hear more about this work from Emma and Benesia, shortly

Over the past few months, Oranga Tamariki has been developing a Commissioning and Investment Plan. In part, this is a response to the Office of the Auditor-General's report.

It has also been developed because a transparent plan setting out a roadmap, providing direction, clarifying goals, allowing for better decision-making and efficient resource allocation is necessary.

It will also serve as a communication tool to align everyone involved toward a common work programme.

The Plan sets out four programmes of work:

- Ensuring that contracts and contract variations are all in place.
- Refreshing the commissioning and investment process and implementing it.
- Refining how Oranga Tamariki delivers its commissioning and investment services.
- Rejuvenating Oranga Tamariki communications and engagement with providers.

That Plan was in draft form until just recently. The draft was discussed at 24 hui, including 21 regional hui held across the country.

Providers were provided with the opportunity to participate in a workshop that encouraged debate and feedback on gaps, risks and benefits, and other ideas. Feedback was generally positive about the Plan and its contents.

I'm pleased that last year is behind us and that all contracts and contract variations are in place.

By the end of this month, decisions will be made by Ministers on what's happening regarding contracts expiring on 31 December 2025.

After that, Oranga Tamariki will then be getting in touch with all relevant providers about those decisions later this month.

The Plan set out a 5-step commissioning and investment process that focuses on:

- A regional needs assessment being undertaken that provides the basis for decisions on services required, priorities and services that may no longer be required as the needs analysis shows.
- Services are designed to meet needs, and outcome and performance measures are put in place.
- Procurement processes being undertaken in a fair manner that enables all equal access to participate.
- Ensuring that contracts are in place before services are delivered.
- Services are regularly monitored and evaluated.

It's a sound process based on domestic and international best practice. Providers asked for more time on the regional needs assessment phase and wanted more certainty with contract negotiations being completed 3 months prior to July 1st, when services need to start being delivered.

The first ask - for more time for a regional needs assessment - makes sense and can be easily implemented.

While it makes sense to have contract negotiations completed 3 months prior to the year of delivery – realistically this goal hasn't been achieved before, but I have asked Oranga Tamariki to make best endeavours, knowing that they will need to pull up their socks if they are to make this happen regularly.

I want them to do this and am encouraged by what I have seen in recent months – but there is room for ongoing improvement.

Oranga Tamariki systems and processes need to be refined, updated and red-tape cut out of clunky decision-making processes.

Oranga Tamariki also need to join-up with other social sector government agencies on issues like service design, contract terms and conditions, and procurement. Collaboration across government agencies – this is a MUST.

It's not about government agencies having more hui to discuss – it's about doing meaningful work together and implementing decisions.

With the collaborative work underway to deliver better investing and commissioning, through Te Aorerekura Action Plan, the Child and Youth Strategy and in response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry, now is the time for government agencies to work better together – alongside community service providers – in their delivery of services to the public and to the children, young people and families that need government support.

The communications and engagement process employed by Oranga Tamariki has been improving over the past few months too. This focus area is about making sure regular, open and transparent communication continues.

You will be aware that work is underway in government to understand the investment into the family violence and sexual violence system.

Agencies are working together to conduct a baseline review of that investment so that we can ensure investment is going into the right things and is having the impact it needs to have so that people are receiving effective services, and we do better at preventing violence.

Through the baseline review and social investment approach, we'll:

- Build our collective understanding of investment and impact.
- Contract differently through social investment and outcomes-based approaches.
- Reorientate and integrate our system of investment to drive a collective approach to future investment in the system.

In May, the government announced new funding of \$275 million over four years to establish the Social Investment Fund (SIF), which will initially be administered by the Social Investment Agency (SIA).

\$20 million is earmarked over four years to strengthen parenting in the first 2,000 days of a child's life. We will invest \$25 million in preventing children and/or vulnerable adults from going into care.

I'm pleased to see this conference has up to 20 workshops to explore new practice models, new approaches, and emerging issues for the care system.

I want to ensure that communities and NGOs are able to do what they do best, and that government agencies are supporting them well.

It's essential that we are as effective and efficient as possible in the delivery of social services.

Good systems, processes and capable workforces are central to this, and both the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan and Te Aorerekura Action Plan are focused on how we enable this.

Thank you for the important work you do in communities to deliver services and support people when they need it.

I want to see practical changes to the way agencies and providers work together in communities so that families, whānau and their children are thriving.

As always, I hope this conference and the workshops provide great opportunities for learning and connection that inspire you and sustain you in your work.