



Cyclone & Flooding Response & Recovery: Key issues from our members throughout Te Ika-a-Māui

22 February 2023

Background & Purpose

As the full scale of devastation of Cyclone Gabrielle and the January-February Floods are being understood, Social Service Providers Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa is listening carefully to the experience of our member organisations throughout affected rōhe of Te Ika-a-Māui. Many are directly impacted themselves, as well as continuing to work alongside children, rangatahi and whānau in their communities and hāpori to provide them with social services support and meet their urgent needs.

This document briefly outlines the key issues that we are hearing at this point in time, and that we are advocating for the government to focus on at this point in the response and recovery (i.e., short-term, immediate needs). While our communities and hāpori are incredibly resilient and responding collectively to needs, the magnitude of the level of support needed is large-scale and urgent.

SSPA will continue to advocate to government over the coming weeks and months for the needs and outcomes of children, rangatahi, families, whānau and the community-based social service providers who walk alongside and support them. We expect specific needs to evolve over coming weeks and months.

Key issues we are hearing are in need of attention for families & whānau

Housing

- Scale of need for temporary accommodation is huge. Some people have lost everything.
- Greater focus on security and safety of people in current emergency accommodation is necessary, as well as particular needs whānau with pēpē, of children and whānau with disabilities, neurodiversity, addiction and/or mental health challenges.
- Longer-term temporary accommodation needs to meet the needs of children, rangatahi, families and whānau, and particular needs of disabled people, previously homeless people, and people with addiction and/or mental health challenges.
- In Tāmaki Makaurau, some families and whānau are living in flood affected homes unfit to live in, but not coming forward for support due to range of reasons (security of tenure; lack of trust; not knowing where to go for help; fear of losing home/possessions). Social service providers are seeking to connect with these families and whānau, but it is taking time to overcome barriers.
- Some mātua taiohi (young parents) with pēpē have lost the ability to live in their homes and are living with families and whānau, leading to these homes becoming overcrowded, causing in some instances a build-up of stress and tension.

Access to basics

- Access to kai, water, fuel and communications remain much needed in hardest hit regions.
- This is putting particular stress on those with young children and mokopuna, and of course, those who have lost homes and livelihoods. Many families and whānau affected were already experiencing challenges.
- Some families and whānau require greater financial support to cover costs of kai, as a result of new cyclone-incurred costs and hardship, and loss of employment.

Mental health & wellbeing

- The individual and collective trauma in affected communities and hāpori must not be underestimated. As shock wears off, grief is setting in and will be long-lasting for many.
- A proactive, practical focus on this is needed now, to minimise longer-term impacts.
- Proactive, wraparound mental health support for those with pre-existing mental health challenges is also needed.

Children & Rangatahi

- Children and rangatahi are experiencing significant disruption to their lives, including to their education, community and cultural activities.
- Children and rangatahi are, in many instances, likely to experience some level of anxiety and/or mental distress due to being impacted by the cyclone and/or floods. Emotional and trauma support is needed.

Family harm, violence in communities

- Families and whānau are under immense pressure due to isolation, uncertainty, significant disruption to daily life, loss of homes, livelihoods, pets, taonga, destruction of whenua and wāhi tapu. In some instances, these stressors are leading to spikes in family harm.
- In some regions, crime and threats of violence are making it difficult for community-based social service providers to safely reach children and their families and whānau in need.

Key issues in need of attention for community-based social service providers

- Community-based social service providers and their kaimahi have been playing key roles in the emergency response to both the floods and cyclone (e.g., in hubs, shelters, CDCs; through outreach).
- Many community-based social services kaimahi and their whānau are directly affected themselves.
- Kaimahi are in many instances exhausted and fatigued, due to the cumulative impact of endurance working through the pandemic years, together now with the floods and cyclone (this is especially the case for some kaimahi in Tāmaki Makaurau). The wellbeing needs of community-based social services kaimahi require urgent attention and support, to enable the workforce to remain well, and to prevent further burnout and loss of capacity in the social services and children’s workforces. In rural areas where it was already difficult to attract and retain staff, worker shortages and workforce pressure is now exacerbated by the cyclone.
- The Government’s support package for community-based social service providers and organisations is a positive first step. Community-based social service providers also need:
 - Government funders to enable them to divert some of their existing funding to address immediate needs and be responsive to the needs of families and whānau right now. A consistent approach across social sector funders is necessary, as well as effective coordination between government agencies. Active implementation of the Social Sector Commissioning Principles is needed.
 - Like during COVID-19, all social sector government funders to lift the compliance burden from contracted partners, to free up providers’ time and resource to be responsive to the needs of families and whānau. Again, a consistent approach across social sector agencies is necessary.
 - Community-based social service providers will continue to play an essential role as the restoration and recovery continues over the coming weeks and months. The trusted relationships that they hold with children, rangatahi, families and whānau are crucial to weaving a strong response and recovery, and the professional expertise and skills that our community-based social service providers are equipped with are essential to help communities and hapori to recover and restore. We call on Government to sustainably fund social service providers to enable their role in this essential mahi of the cyclone and floods response and recovery. Additional funding is needed quickly, available for use by community social service providers on a high-trust basis to meet community and hapori needs.

SSPA is calling on Government to:

<p>Prioritise getting kai, water, fuel and communications links to isolated affected regions and communities.</p>  <p>Prioritise making available temporary accommodation to house families and whānau in ways that meet their needs – including those of disabled people – and keep children and rangatahi safe and well.</p>	<p>Fund and scale-up existing and effective mental health and psychosocial support services for children and rangatahi affected by these events, to make them easily and quickly accessible. Promote widely so children and rangatahi know help is there.</p>  <p>Ensure that holistic hauora and wellbeing (including mental health) is an explicit strand of the recovery plans in each affected region, and that this has oversight at the national level from the Minister for Cyclone Recovery.</p>	<p>Ensure that children’s rights and needs (within the context of their families and whānau) forms an explicit strand of the recovery plans in each affected region, and that this has oversight at the national level from the Minister for Cyclone Recovery. Children’s experiences and views need to inform the recovery in line with their Article 12 participation right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.</p>  <p>Actively support safe access for community-based social service providers to reach children and their families and whānau in need.</p>
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- Enable contracted community-based social service providers to divert some of their existing funding to address immediate needs and be responsive to the needs of families and whānau right now. Now is also the time for early intervention to prevent issues developing further – including family harm, and longer-term mental health impacts.
 - Lift the compliance burden from their contracted provider partners on a temporary basis, to enable them to reprioritise their time and resource for the response and recovery.
 - Sustainably fund social service providers to enable their role in the essential mahi of the cyclone and floods response and recovery. For example, start by increasing the amount of funding organisations access through the Community Support Fund (currently the cap is \$7000). Fund on a high-trust basis, enable flexibility to meet needs.
 - Ensure a coordinated approach across government social sector agencies locally and regionally, and in doing so reduce barriers for community-based social service providers.
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