

DRAFT WORK IN PROGRESS IN STRICT CONFIDENCE

Family Start

Phase One Services Review

Information pack

March 2026

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IN STRICT CONFIDENCE

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Programme overview

Programme Overview

Purpose of programme

- Family Start is an intensive home-visiting programme to support parents and caregivers through challenges including mental health issues, using drugs or gambling, and caring for a child with a disability by home visits by social workers.

Target cohort

- Families facing difficulties who are expecting a child, and or up until the child's first birthday.
- Referrals are intended before a child turns one, ideally while the mother is hapū.

Background

- Based on Hawaii's Healthy Start model, it is child centred and family focused, aiming to provide early support to give children the best start in life.
- The programme targets the 15% of families most in need to improve outcomes in parenting, health, safety, and early learning.

Key deliverables:

- **Home visit/families engagement:** Families receive weekly home visits for the first three to six months, followed by a minimum of two home visits per month, with the level of support adjusted to family need. This has expanded to include other forms of engagement and advocacy.
- **Families supported:** Service providers/family workers carry an average caseload of 14 families (ranging from 12–16 depending on support needs).
- **Child and Family Plans:** Plans are reviewed every three months to ensure continuous improvement and tailored support.

Core components tracked for each child to monitor progress include:

- **Child progress indicators:** PHO enrolment, Well Child checks, immunisations, oral health checks, and ECE participation/attendance.
- **Key wellbeing checks:** Regular questions around exposure to smoking in the home or car.

What were the outcomes/outputs expected from the Family Start programmes when first designed and contracted?

The original Population Outcomes were as follows:

- Safety – children are not hurt as the result of our actions or inaction;
- Stability – children are in a consistent, supportive, loving environment;
- Security – children have access to essential resources and services;
- Wellness – children are supported to reach their potential and connect with the wider community;
- Development – children are achieving their potential; and
- Thriving independence – children and families are successful in their transition out of direct help from Oranga Tamariki.

Short-term outcomes

1. Children's health and safety issues identified early and addressed
2. Parents understand key child development stage and are confident providing warm, responsive, consistent care
3. Families know what supports and resources are available and how to access them
4. Families feel hopeful about future opportunities

Medium-term outcomes

1. Children are in safe and stable environments
2. Families demonstrate strong parenting practices
3. Families are connected, and parents are engaged in supportive communities
4. Parents are optimistic about the future and families maintain safe, nurturing, violence-free and addiction-free relationships

Long-term outcomes

1. Reduction in child maltreatment
2. Children are physically and mentally healthy
3. Children/families are healthy and resilient

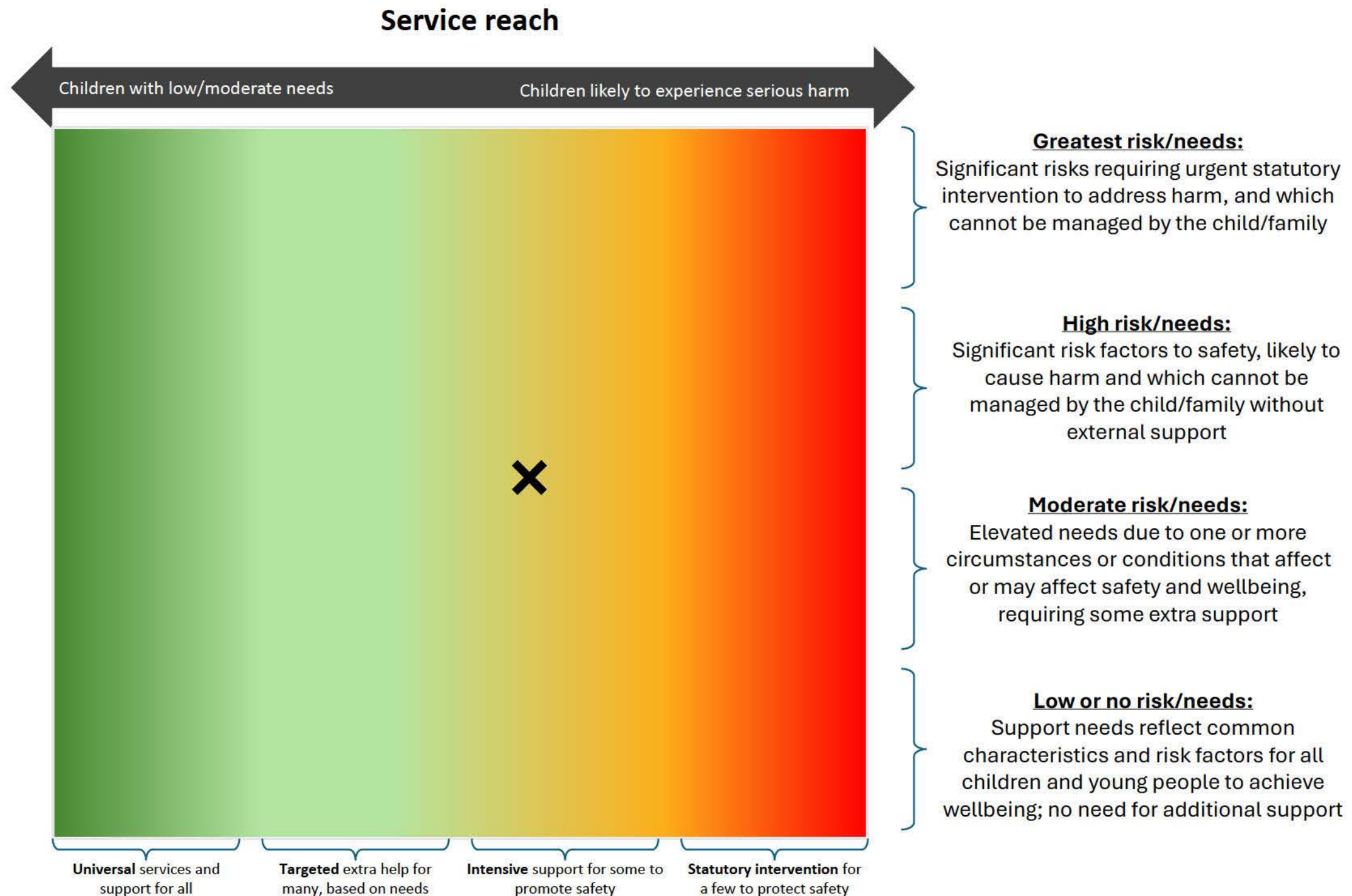
Cost breakdown

- Total cost of contracted service is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.
- Total contracted target is 4,697 families per annum (based on average caseload of 14).
- Total contracted target is 335 FTE family workers per annum.
- Average cost per family is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

Of the 43 providers who deliver Family Start:

- 16 have contracts over **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- 12 have contracts for less than **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- The largest contract is over **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- The smallest contract is less than **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- The average contract is **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum

Family Start Services



Reach and outcomes analysis shows:

- Family Start reaches children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki but are experiencing early risk factors to their safety and wellbeing requiring targeted supports. These are mainly children with moderate safety and wellbeing needs. It also supports some children experiencing high risks to their safety and wellbeing, i.e. those who are on the cusp of care or have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki.
- The programme contributes to outcomes across several portfolios – Health, Education, Family and Sexual Violence, Whānau Ora, and Oranga Tamariki.

Impact analysis shows:

- Evidence shows positive short-term impacts on infant health, parenting capability, mental health and family safety.
- The programme remains valuable, but would benefit from better targeting and alignment with other early-years services.

Value for money is something to be considered when redesigning and/or recommissioning the programme.

Operational considerations include:

- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.
- Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.

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What we know already

Understanding existing material on reach and effectiveness

Previous evaluations indicate that programme reach has been declining

Although referral pathways are well established:

- Referral acceptance rates dropped from **64% in 2017 to 45% in 2019**.
- Government-agency referrals were frequent but had **very low acceptance (5%)**.
- 80% of accepted referrals were **self-referrals**.

This suggests potential **access barriers** or **misalignment between referral sources and programme eligibility**.

External evaluations and case studies using rigorous qualitative research methods provide useful insights into the impact of Family Start

The **Family Start Evidence Scan** and **Deep Dive** combine qualitative and quantitative insights to assess programme quality. The Evidence Scan (2025) draws on five evaluations completed between 2017 and 2021, while the Deep Dive (2025) is an internal, unpublished analysis focused on demonstrating the potential of Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) methods for Social Investment; it does not include qualitative data.

In 2020–21, Oranga Tamariki released three reports on a process and outcome evaluation of Family Start. The **2021 process evaluation** relied heavily on qualitative data from provider case studies, including interviews with Family Start managers, workers, referrers, families, Oranga Tamariki officials, and other stakeholders.

Families who participated in a 2021 evaluation reported improvements in their children's safety and wellbeing. They described the service as responsive to their needs and supportive of their parenting. Participants noted enhanced parenting skills, positive changes in child discipline, improved nutrition and physical activity, and increased engagement with ECE. The Early Learning Payment was seen as helpful in supporting ECE participation.

The evaluation also found the programme design to be effective. However, Kaupapa Māori providers indicated that some programme activities are not well aligned with whanaungatanga or Māori worldviews.

Workers also reported feeling stretched when supporting families with intensive needs, and providers highlighted the need for nationally consistent training.

The **2021 outcomes report** did not include qualitative information, focusing instead on quantitative analysis using IDI data and Propensity Score Matching.

Similarly, the **2016** and **2017** evaluations relied on linked administrative data and quasi-experimental methods rather than qualitative research.

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Approach to Analysis

Understanding the methodology used to assess programmes

General approach to analysis

- **We were constrained by time**, so the amount and depth of analysis we could do was limited.
- **We looked at each programme as a whole**, rather than evaluating individual providers.
- **Programmes were analysed differently**, depending on what information was available for it.
- **We relied on data and evaluations that already existed**, rather than collecting lots of new information.
- **We used data in the IDI**, where we could.
- **Where information was missing**, we asked providers to share what they knew to help fill the gaps.
- **We included the voices and experiences of families** whenever we could.
- **It's hard to prove cause and effect in social services**, because many factors influence people's lives, not just one programme.

Understanding whether a social service causes a particular outcome is challenging

People's lives are complicated

Many different things influence how someone is doing—like their family situation, community, money pressures, and personal circumstances. Because so much is happening at once, it's hard to tell what changes are due to a specific service and what might have happened anyway.

Real life isn't a controlled experiment

Unlike a lab setting, people live in constantly changing environments. Their needs, situations, and how much they engage with services all vary, making it difficult to compare results in a clean, scientific way.

You can't always run ideal studies

Ethical and practical issues mean we often can't use the most rigorous research methods (like randomised controlled trials) in social services.

So any changes we see may have many causes

Because of all these factors, it's hard to confidently say a service caused a particular outcome. What we observe may be influenced by several overlapping things, not just the programme.

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Approach to assessing Family Start

Focus: Impact of Family Start on children across health, education, and safety, plus birth parent outcomes (justice, labour-market participation, health enrolment).

Data: Linked administrative data from the IDI, using service usage as a proxy for need. Outcome definitions aligned with the Child Wellbeing Model.

Cohorts Assessed

Age 0–1 cohort: children entering Family Start aged 0–1, born **2015–2017** (82% of participants). Focus on **infant mortality**, using pre-COVID births to avoid pandemic distortion.

Age 6 cohort: children who reached age 6 during **2022–2024** (born 2016–2018).

Age 12 cohort: children who reached age 12 during **2022–2024** (born 2010–2012).

Cohorts are not comparable over time due to different birth years; analysis instead focuses on outcomes at different ages following early participation.

Eligibility

Only children who entered Family Start at ≤ 2 years old were included (reflecting typical entry age).

Comparison Groups

Control cohorts built using Propensity Score Matching (same method as Deep Dive report).

Matching used administrative data to align children on age at entry, ethnicity, region, and other observable characteristics.

Purpose: create comparable groups and better isolate the impact of Family Start.

Key limitations to consider

Administrative data constraints:

- Outcomes rely on service use, not underlying need → disengaged families may appear to have better outcomes.
- Some eligibility criteria (e.g., premature birth, housing instability, support networks) are not captured in IDI.

Methodological limitations:

- Propensity Score Matching controls for observable differences only → unmeasured factors may bias results.
- Findings indicate associations, not causation.
- Different birth years across age cohorts → cohorts not comparable over time.

Data availability issues:

- IDI and CWM data only reliable up to mid-2024, limiting cohort selection.
- Key datasets incomplete or outdated (e.g., PHO enrolments to Dec 2023, mortality post-2020, hospital/ED data to Jun 2023).
- Infant mortality analysis restricted to 2015–2017 births due to post-COVID data reliability.

Caregiver linkage challenges:

- Poor linkage in IDI meant only ~50% of recorded caregivers matched birth parents; adjusted analysis reached ~85%.
- Birth parents used as proxy for primary caregivers, which may not reflect actual caregiving context.

Overall evidence:

- Across analyses, limited evidence of positive impact, aside from reduced short-term infant mortality (low volumes) and improved early health engagement.
- Difficult to conclude Family Start is achieving intended outcomes or delivering a strong return on investment.

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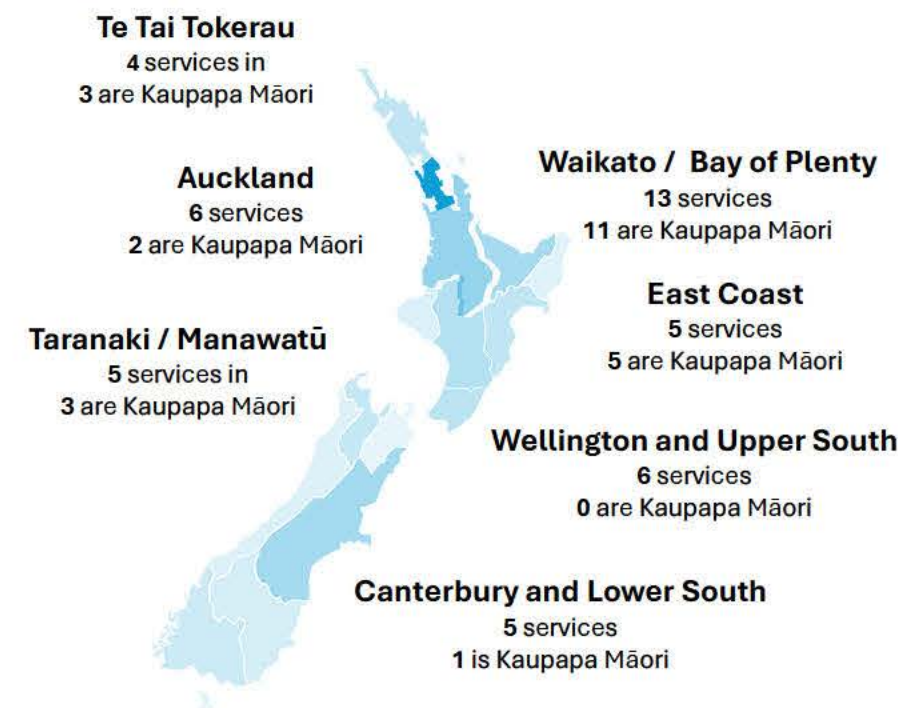
Reach Analysis

Understanding who the services are reaching and whether the intended outcomes extend across more than one portfolio

Key insights from analysis

- 4,554 families were referred to Family Start in 2023/24.
- We looked at whether these services were reaching children with moderate or high risk/needs such as having had an infant interaction with Oranga Tamariki.
- **17%** of children interacting with the service have had an infant interaction with Oranga Tamariki, but not everyone in this cohort interacted with the service.
- Only 10% of children who had an infant interaction with Oranga Tamariki received the service.
- 72% of children interacting with the service never interact with Oranga Tamariki.
- 5,563 families were referred to Family Start in 2024/25.

44 Family Start services are delivered across the country



Data limitations and caveats to consider

- Service delivery restrictions causing misalignment between priority cohort [children who have had an infant interaction with Oranga Tamariki] and programme cohort
- Referral is not dependent on Oranga Tamariki interaction
- Referral is not strictly for children under 1 year
- Support may prevent Oranga Tamariki interaction

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Oranga Tamariki outcomes

- Combined evidence indicates Family Start is consistently demonstrating benefits in child safety and engagement with health services and is strong in improving parenting capability (based on family/provider experience evidence).
- Education outcomes are less clearly improved in measured data, although the programme supports ECE participation through mechanisms such as the Early Learning Payment and families report increased ECE engagement.
- Family Start is a voluntary early-intervention programme focused on health and parenting and primarily supports children at risk of poor life outcomes but not in statutory care.
- Data indicates most Family Start children are not involved with Oranga Tamariki.
- The Programme contributes to multiple portfolio outcomes – Health, Education, Family and Sexual Violence, Whānau Ora, and Oranga Tamariki.

Reach analysis shows:

- Family Start mainly reaches children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki but are experiencing early risk factors to their safety and wellbeing requiring targeted supports. Most of these children have moderate safety and wellbeing needs. Services also reach some children experiencing high risks to their safety and wellbeing, i.e. those who are on the cusp of care or have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki.
- Referrals are broad, with variable acceptance and strong self-referral rates.
- Oranga Tamariki involvement at intake is not specified but appears to fall in the 20–50% range.
- Outcomes relevant to Health, Education, Family and Sexual Violence, Whānau Ora, and Oranga Tamariki can be seen.

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Impact Analysis

Understanding the effectiveness of the programme

Analysis of Family Start was completed in the IDI, assessing impacts at ages 1, 6 and 12 years

- **Infant mortality was very rare** for children aged 0–1 years (fewer than 0.2% of children).
- **Children in Family Start had slightly lower infant mortality** in the year after joining the programme.
- **Because the numbers are so small**, we can't confidently say the programme caused this difference.
- For children aged **6 to 12 years**, those in Family Start generally had **poorer safety, health, and education outcomes** than similar children who didn't use the programme.
- **Small improvements** were seen in early health checks.
- These patterns were **consistent across different regions and ethnic groups**.
- The results likely reflect that **Family Start works with families facing the greatest challenges**, even after matching them with similar families for comparison.

Data limitations to consider

- Impact is difficult to quantify at the programme level.
- Micro-impacts are seen more at the regional and local level.
- Research shows success of any intervention heavily influenced by quality of client / professional relationship.

Why the results may look this way

The insights likely reflect limits in the data rather than a lack of real impact from Family Start.

Family Start families often face challenges not visible in the data

We compare Family Start families with similar families using what's recorded—like age or income. But families who engage with Family Start often experience deeper, unrecorded challenges that affect outcomes, making results look worse even when the programme is helping.

Using services can appear as a 'negative outcome'

Many of the outcomes we measure are based on service interactions. Families who don't use services may still have unmet needs—we just can't see them. Family Start connects families to support, which shows up as increased service use, sometimes appearing as poorer outcomes when it may actually reflect better access to help.

The programme may help in ways the data can't capture

Family Start is based on strong evidence. Some benefits—like improved attachment, parenting confidence, or small cumulative changes—aren't visible in administrative data. It's also possible that the level or duration of support isn't enough to shift long-term outcomes influenced by many factors.

- Using additional quantitative analysis from the IDI, we know about the impact of these programmes on other outcomes (e.g. school attendance/attainment, health outcomes).
- The 2016 evaluation found statistically significant reductions in children's overall post-neo-natal mortality within the child's first year of life.
- Participation in Family Start was associated with a 42% reduction in deaths from all causes.
- Children were estimated to be less likely to die due to injury and SUDI in the first year of life.
- Significant reductions for Māori participants and a 62% reduction for Pacific participants.
- Positive effects were found on Public Health Organization enrolment, immunization rates and Before School Check attendance.

Providers regularly report about micro-impacts that are not seen in the quantitative and population level data but appear visible at local and regional levels such as:

- parents moving to a safe and stable home for children
- children starting early childhood education with ongoing attendance supporting development
- reduced family violence
- long-term improvements in mental health and substance abuse
- preventing escalation to high-cost interventions.

- Evidence shows that high intensity, home-based early intervention programmes are able to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.
- By providing an intensive targeted home visiting service to families with the highest needs, Family Start can make an important contribution to early intervention with vulnerable children.
- International literature suggests this service should:
 - reduce child maltreatment, leading to fewer child deaths and avoided entry into statutory care
 - keep children physically and mentally healthy, leading to more participation in early learning and higher education levels
 - keep families healthy and resilient, leading to improved mental health for caregivers and increased workforce participation.

Impact analysis shows:

- Quantitative evidence shows some short-term positive impact, including lower infant mortality, but significant long-term improvements in safety, health, or education outcomes are not visible.
- This is likely due to underlying unobservable risk factors in the cohort, limitations of administrative data, and the programme meeting need rather than shifting long-term indicators.
- Micro impacts are visible at local and regional levels with providers reporting improved parenting skills, improved mental health and reduced family violence.

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Value for Money

Understanding the programmes cost-to-serve

Cost-to-serve for 2025/26

- Total cost of contracted service is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.
- Total contracted target is 4,697 families per annum (based on average caseload of 14).
- Total contracted target is 335 FTE family workers per annum.
- Average cost per family is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

Limitations

- Limited timeframes mean analysis beyond cost-to-serve isn't feasible.
- Provider feedback is acknowledged; value for money remains only a broad indicator.
- A full social return on investment assessment would require significant time and slow the review process.

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Material Shared by Providers

We received 9 detailed written responses from Family Start providers, including narratives, case study examples and summarised client surveys. The key themes on the programme's impact were:

Supporting parents move to a safe and stable home for children

... interventions saw whānau moving from inadequate, temporary housing to safe, stable housing with assistance from Family Start.

South Island regional provider

Children starting early childhood education with ongoing attendance supporting development

... Regular daycare attendance supporting speech, socialization, and routine.

South Auckland provider

Reduced family violence and long-term improvements in mental health and substance abuse resulting in a safe, stable home for tamariki

... Ensured wellbeing of tamariki was central while parent navigated trauma, addiction and mental health challenges.

Large national provider

Better, more confident parenting skills that see gains in child development and health

... Family Start child [now] thriving, meeting developmental milestones, attending preschool, strong attachment with Mum.

South Island provider

... For the Family Start child, this meant [...] a stable and predictable home environment. And consistent routines and reduced stress within the household.

South Auckland provider

Parents moving from isolation to community connection by engaging with services and wider whānau

... Parent progressed from isolated and anxious to socially engaged, employed part-time, driving, attending ELP, and managing household responsibilities.

... Once trust was rebuilt and the effects of the coercive control had begun to minimise, she reintegrated fully back into the relationship with her parents...

Taranaki provider

Preventing escalation to high-cost interventions

... Mum was [...] able to enter residential treatment with her baby, preventing the need for separation or crisis-driven intervention...

South Auckland provider

... Two tamariki returned to parent's care, two subsequent tamariki remained in parents care, tamariki fully provided for by parents, no ongoing OT involvement at exit. ...

South Island provider

Provider feedback on review criteria

“Reach should be measured by the depth, continuity, effectiveness of relationships, preventative impact, culturally grounded engagement, and sustained outcomes. Our services are integrated and respond holistically to whānau needs across health, education, housing, and justice, reflecting a whānau ora approach rather than a single-agency focus.”

South Island provider

“Using “high OT reach” vs “low OT reach” oversimplifies risk and need. Many whānau engaged with Family Start sit immediately below the statutory threshold and are often the very same whānau who later appear in statutory data if preventative supports are unavailable... Reach and intensity must be understood within local context...”

Otago / Dunedin provider

“We agree value for money should be assessed, but a narrow focus on cost-per-participant or volume-based measures will distort value and can incentivise the wrong behaviours. Define value broadly: Value must reflect outcomes, equity, and system contribution (including avoided downstream costs in care, family violence response, health, education and justice).”

National Provider

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Operational Factors

Understanding operational factors that need to be considered

Operational factors that need to be considered include:

- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga
Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.

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Social Workers in Schools, Youth Workers in Secondary Schools, Multi-Agency Support Services in Secondary Schools

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Programme overview

Social Workers in Schools Overview

Purpose

- SWiS puts social workers in primary and intermediate schools including kura kaupapa Māori to increase children's school attendance, improve resilience of children and their families and reduce contact with statutory services.
- The service began in 1999 and was expanded to all (then) decile 1–3 schools in 2012–13.

Target cohort

- The most at-risk children, their families and schools.
- Referrals need the consent of the parent/caregiver and can be made by:
 - The child/family
 - The school
 - Community/government agencies

Contracted outcomes / outputs

- Children attending and engaged in school.
- Safe, socialised children with a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.
- Children and families are well connected to their community/whanau/hapu/iwi and confidently seek out additional support (natural & external) in times of need.
- Fewer children coming into contact with more intensive / statutory pathways

Youth Workers in Secondary Schools Overview

Purpose

- YWiSS is a secondary school-based youth worker service for young people to improve attendance, engagement, achievement and wellbeing. It began as a pilot in 2012.

Target Cohort

- Vulnerable young people in Years 9-10 at risk of disengagement.
- Nominations made by the school for young people with issues around:
 - attendance
 - engagement
 - lateness or skipped classes
 - behavioural issues
 - stand-downs
 - minimal academic progress
- Young people and families then receive youth work mentoring and support.

Contracted outcomes / outputs

- Improved life outcomes for young people and their family, including:
 - improvements in mental wellbeing and resilience
 - academic achievement
 - making positive choices and developing social competence
 - parents, caregivers or trusted adults are involved (as appropriate) and help facilitate change for young people
 - partnering with families, whānau, hapu and iwi to ensure YWiSS is well-focused and delivered.

Multi Agency Support Services in Secondary Schools Overview

Purpose

- MASSiSS is a secondary school-based community social work service providing early assistance and intervention to young people and their families.
- MASSiSS staff, including social workers, are employed by NGO social service providers. They work in partnership with school staff as part of the school community.
- MASSiS began in 2002 as a pilot in ten decile one schools with high Pacific and Māori enrolments in Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Porirua.

Target Cohort

- Young people in Years 9 – 15 and their families where social or family circumstances are causing the young person to struggle with education, health, mental health or social development.

Contracted outcomes / outputs

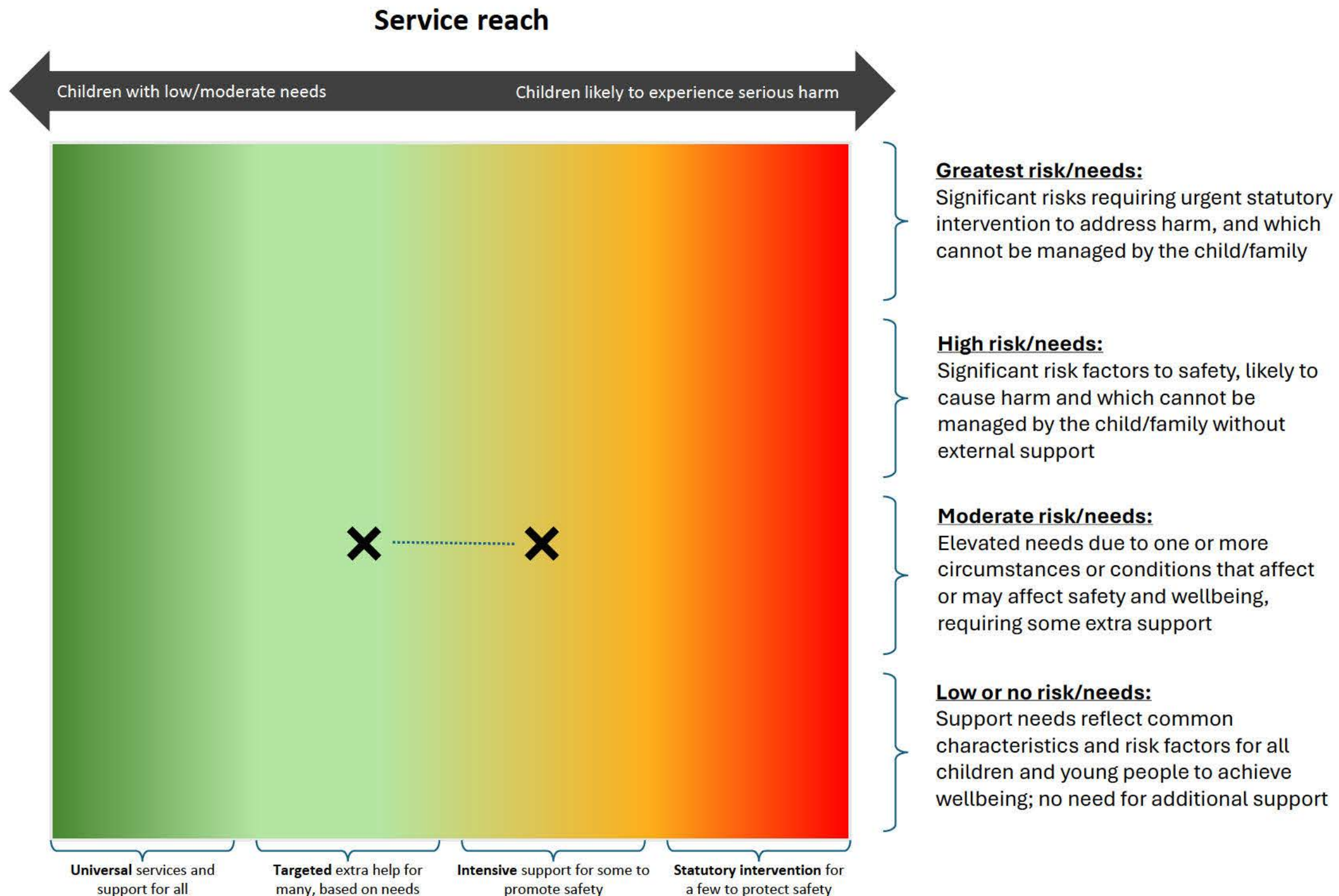
- Young people attending and engaged in school
- If school is no longer a preferred option, young people are well supported to exit school into further education and/or employment
- Safe, and socialised young people with a strong sense of identity and well-being
- Young people and their families are well connected to their community/ whānau /hapu/iwi and confidently seek out additional support
- Fewer young people are coming in to contact with more intensive/statutory pathways
- Healthy young people

- Total cost of all contracted services is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.
- Total contracted targets are:
 - 4,886 children/young people per annum (based on average caseload of 16)
 - 305 FTE social workers per annum
 - 21 programmes per annum.
- SWIS: Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**
- YWISS: Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)** and average cost per programme is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.
- MASSISS: Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)** and average cost per programme is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

Of the 52 providers who deliver Strengthening Families:

- 7 have contracts over **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- 27 have contracts for less than **s9(2)(b)(ii)** million per annum
- The largest contract is over **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- The smallest contract is under **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum
- The average contract is **s9(2)(b)(ii)** million

SWiS, YWiSS and MASSiSS



Reach analysis across SWiS, YWiSS and MASSiSS shows:

- Services are mainly reaching children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki but are experiencing early risk factors to their safety and wellbeing requiring targeted supports (i.e. it has wide reach).
- Services contribute to multiple portfolio outcomes – Health, Whānau Ora, Education, Family Violence & Sexual Violence, Youth Justice and Oranga Tamariki.
- The Social Support Workers in Schools suite of programmes has close alignment with the education system through its delivery in schools.

Impact analysis across SWiS, YWiSS and MASSiSS shows:

- Limited good-quality quantitative data on impact to demonstrate short or long-term impact, although Providers regularly report about micro-impacts (e.g. improved emotional regulation, attendance gains and crisis prevention) that are not seen in the quantitative and population level data.
- While valued by schools and communities, the services appear to lack clear targeting and measurable outcomes.

Value for money is something to be considered when redesigning and/or recommissioning the suite of programmes.

Operational factors for consideration include:

- Referral pathways are predominantly school-based, with services closely integrated into day-to-day school operations and valued by schools, children and youth, and communities. While valued by schools and communities, the services appear to lack clear targeting and measurable outcomes.
- Social Support Workers in Schools contracts have phased expiry dates with some ending in June 2026 and the rest in March and June 2027 but baseline funding is ongoing.
- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.
- Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.

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What we know already

Understanding existing material on reach and effectiveness

- There appears to be very limited data on who actually received SWiS, YWiSS, and MASSiSS services – specifically a lack of individual participation data.
- This means analysis is diluted (many students in SWiS schools may never interact with the social worker).
- Current delivery models appear to lack strong targeting (who the programme is for) and outcome clarity.

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Three external evaluations provide useful insights into the impact of SWiS

A large quantitative data study in 2018 looked at any additional datasets to see whether SWiS changed things like suspensions, child protection reports, or police involvement.

- There was **no clear overall change** in suspension rates, child protection notifications, or police apprehensions.
- Some small improvements were seen, but they weren't statistically strong.
- One finding showed an **increase in police apprehensions**, but this was likely caused by changes in police practice, not SWiS.
- For students with higher needs, results looked more promising — some showed fewer negative outcomes.

A qualitative case study in 2019 interviewed children, families, and school staff in a small set of schools.

1. Children showed **better emotional regulation, behaviour, and relationships**.
2. SWiS workers built strong trust with children and families.
3. The service often reached families the school struggled to engage.
4. Cultural responsiveness and relationships were key strengths.

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A kaupapa Māori study in 2020 interviewed three kura with tamariki, whānau, teachers, and SWiS workers to understand experiences and cultural factors.

- SWiS helps **early**, before problems get big.
- Tamariki became **more confident**, happier, and better connected to their culture and identity.
- Whānau felt **more supported**, including help accessing services and meeting basic needs.
- SWiS workers who **speak te reo and understand tikanga** are much more effective.
- Kura often see SWiS as **under-resourced** and carrying very high caseloads.

SWiS works well at building trusted relationships

Schools, children, and families value the service because social workers are approachable and build strong, supportive relationships — especially when they work in culturally appropriate ways.

The data doesn't show strong results across the whole population

When researchers look at large datasets, the impact of SWiS is hard to measure. Overall changes aren't big or statistically clear.

But some groups — like Māori and Pacific children with higher needs — do seem to benefit more.

Cultural fit matters

SWiS works best when workers understand the community, speak te reo Māori, and work in ways that reflect local tikanga. This is especially important in kura kaupapa Māori.

There are still big system challenges

High caseloads, not enough resources, and evaluation tools that don't reflect Māori perspectives on wellbeing limit how effective the service can be — and how well its benefits show up in the data.

People's experiences show meaningful benefits

Interviews and stories highlight that children become more confident, happier, more connected to culture, and have better relationships at home and school.

Children's need identified

- Children benefit from **trusted adult relationships** and feel safer and more supported when these exist.
- They need **emotional and mental wellbeing**, including help managing feelings like anger, grief, or low self-esteem.
- A **strong sense of cultural identity and belonging** supports confidence and engagement.
- Many children need **family support** — help with communication at home, navigating services, and meeting basic needs.
- Staying **engaged in school** is important for stability and wellbeing.

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Approach to Analysis

Understanding the methodology used to assess programmes

General approach to analysis

- **We were constrained by time**, so the amount and depth of analysis we could do was limited.
- **We looked at each programme as a whole**, rather than evaluating individual providers.
- **Programmes were analysed differently**, depending on what information was available for it.
- **We relied on data and evaluations that already existed**, rather than collecting lots of new information.
- **We used data in the IDI**, where we could.
- **Where information was missing**, we asked providers to share what they knew to help fill the gaps.
- **We included the voices and experiences of whānau** whenever we could.
- **It's hard to prove cause and effect in social services**, because many factors influence people's lives, not just one programme.

Understanding whether a social service causes a particular outcome is challenging

People's lives are complicated

Many different things influence how someone is doing—like their family situation, community, money pressures, and personal circumstances. Because so much is happening at once, it's hard to tell what changes are due to a specific service and what might have happened anyway.

Real life isn't a controlled experiment

Unlike a lab setting, people live in constantly changing environments. Their needs, situations, and how much they engage with services all vary, making it difficult to compare results in a clean, scientific way.

You can't always run ideal studies

Ethical and practical issues mean we often can't use the most rigorous research methods (like randomised controlled trials) in social services.

So any changes we see may have many causes

Because of all these factors, it's hard to confidently say a service caused a particular outcome. What we observe may be influenced by several overlapping things, not just the programme.

Approach to assessing SWiS, YSWiS and MASSiS

What we looked at

- The evaluation looked at whether students in **SWiS schools** had different outcomes from students in **schools without SWiS**.
- The analysis compared three things:
 - **Unjustified absences** (how often children missed school without a valid reason)
 - **Care and Protection notifications** to Oranga Tamariki
 - **Police apprehensions** for alleged offending

Who was included and how we grouped students

- The study included **children in Years 1–8 from 2019–2023**.
- Students were grouped by things like:
 - Their **year level**
 - Their school's **socio-economic status** (EQI decile)
 - Their **ethnicity, gender, and school area type**
 - Whether they had a **history of early C&P notifications**
 - Whether they had **early benefit history**

Approach to assessing SWiS, YSWiS and MASSiS

What outcomes we measured

- For each child, the data captured:
 - Which school they attended most in each year
 - Their absences
 - Whether they had a C&P notification or police apprehension that year

The evaluation did **not** identify which specific students received SWiS support—only whether the *school* had SWiS.

MASSiSS and YWiSS schools were excluded because small sample sizes meant insufficient statistical power to account for worker-in-school differences.

This means the results show school-level impacts, not individual impacts.

Some outcomes, like Youth Justice involvement or school suspensions, were considered but not included because they were very rare for this age group.

Putting trained social workers inside schools is expected to help spot problems early and support children before things get worse.

When issues are picked up and responded to early, children are more likely to feel safe, healthy, and able to learn.

What SWiS workers do (the activities and outputs)

They provide a mix of practical and emotional support, including:

- Working one-on-one with children or in small groups
- Supporting families and working with them directly
- Identifying children's needs in a consistent way
- Referring children or families to other services when needed
- Coordinating with other agencies so families don't fall through gaps
- Helping during crises

What happens in the short term (early results)

Because children have a trusted adult at school who knows them and supports them, they experience things like:

- Feeling more supported and understood
- Attending school more often
- Getting help earlier
- Better emotional regulation and communication
- Improved physical and mental wellbeing
- Feeling more confident

What happens in the long term (big-picture outcomes)

Over time, SWiS aims to lead to:

- Better engagement at school (fewer stand-downs, suspensions, and truancy)
- Reduced contact with child protection and youth justice
- Overall improvements in wellbeing
- Stronger cultural identity and belonging

Key limitations to consider

- Cross-sectional analysis cannot show change over time or fully control for confounders.
- Segmentation by year level, Equity Index (EQI), and one other variable reduces precision.
- Data identifies students in SWiS schools but not those who actually received SWiS support. MASSiSS and YWiSS schools were excluded because small sample sizes meant insufficient statistical power to account for worker-in-school differences.
- Higher needs may appear in SWiS schools because previously unmet needs become more visible after implementation.
- COVID-19 disruptions likely affected both SWiS delivery and student outcomes (2019–2023).
- Programme participation data (2021) may be outdated, creating inconsistencies in identifying SWiS schools across years.
- Using EQI from 2023 alone may not reflect earlier socio-economic conditions.
- Assigning students to a single “main” school may misrepresent experiences for mobile students.
- Police Family Violence notifications were excluded due to inconsistent reporting that does not reflect actual family-violence levels.

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Reach Analysis

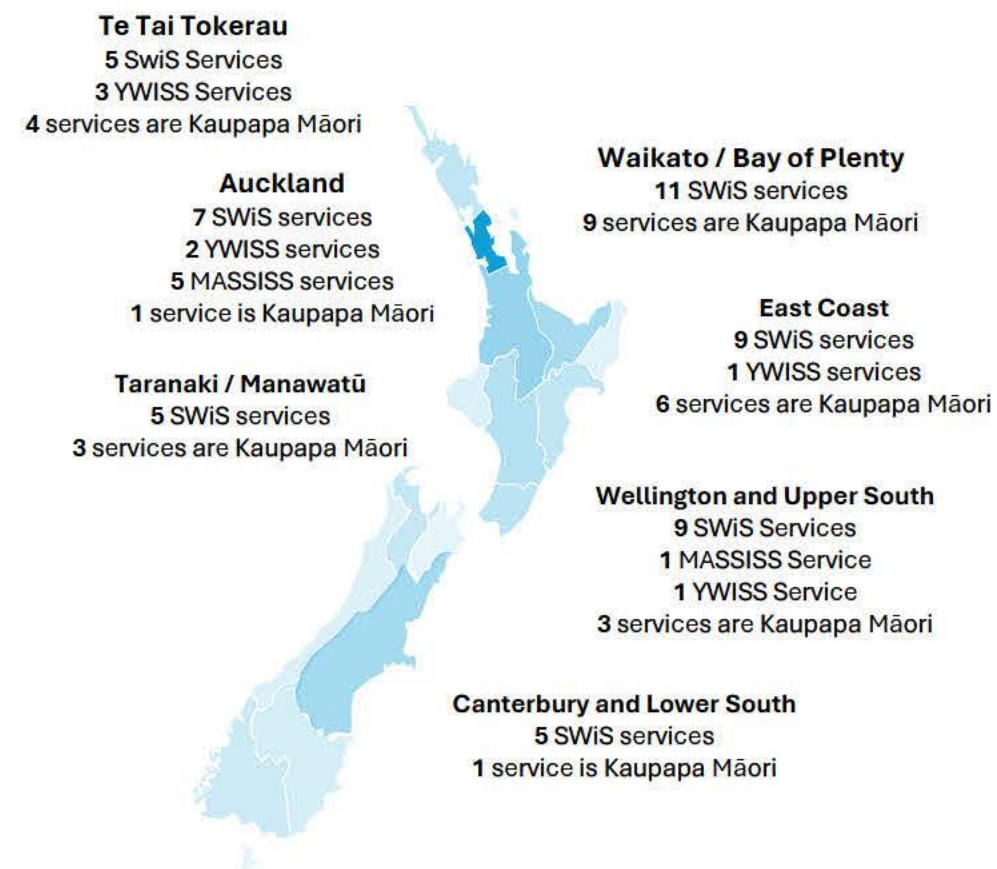
Understanding who the services are reaching and whether the intended outcomes extend across more than one portfolio

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Key insights from analysis

- 7,184 children and young people are referred annually.
- School-based referral pathways and early-help focus mean many children supported have no existing Oranga Tamariki involvement.
- Priority cohort is unknown so difficult to assess reach.
- Proportion of children and young people interacting with the service who are in the priority cohort is unknown.
- Proportion of priority cohort serviced by programme is unknown.

There are 51 SWiS, 7 YWISS, and 6 MASSISS services delivered across multiple locations



Service delivery restrictions to consider

- Decile 3 schools only

The SWiS service is aiming to achieve the following results for the children and their families with whom they work:

- child attending school
- child making friends and maintaining positive relationships at school
- resilient children
- child able to manage difficult situations and know who to go to for help
- timely SWiS intervention to address child safety concerns
- schools able to identify abuse and neglect and respond appropriately
- parent/caregiver participation in school activities
- children making successful transitions from primary to intermediate and intermediate to secondary schools
- appropriate referrals are made to services to provide specialised support to children and families
- collaboration between social services in the school and community, resulting in coordination of services to children and families
- parents and caregivers have positive parenting strategies and skills.

Reach and outcomes analysis shows:

- The programme has wide reach across the children's system – services are mainly reaching children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki. Most of these children and young people have moderate risks/needs where one or more circumstances may be affecting their safety and wellbeing requiring extra targeted support and a few experiencing significant risks factors to safety which cannot be managed by the child/family without external support.
- The programme has strong school-based referral pathways and close integration into school environments.
- The Programme contributes to multiple portfolio outcomes – Health, Whānau Ora, Education, Family Violence & Sexual Violence, Youth Justice and Oranga Tamariki.

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Impact Analysis

Understanding the impact of the programme's services

- No significant cohort-wide improvements were found for students attending SWiS schools. Their outcomes were generally similar to—or slightly poorer than—those of students in non-SWiS schools, with the largest differences for students experiencing greater socio-economic disadvantage.
- Students in SWiS schools:
 - Averaged more unjustified absence days.
 - Had a higher proportion with 60+ unjustified absence days per year.
 - Had Care and Protection notification rates that were similar or slightly higher than non-SWiS students.
 - Had similar police apprehension rates, though low volumes make these insights less reliable.
- Demographic factors (e.g., ethnicity, school characteristics) influenced overall outcome levels but did not meaningfully change relative differences between SWiS and non-SWiS students.
- Across most sub-cohorts, SWiS students consistently showed similar or slightly higher rates for the measured outcomes compared with students in non-SWiS schools

Data limitations to consider

- MASSiSS and YWiSS schools were excluded because small sample sizes meant insufficient statistical power to account for worker-in-school differences.
- Impact is difficult to quantify at the programme level.
- Micro-impacts are seen more at the regional and local level.
- Research shows success of any intervention heavily influenced by quality of client / professional relationship.

- Providers told us that impacts include:
 - **Improved emotional regulation:** children developed coping skills, reduced anger, and improved social confidence.
 - **Attendance gains:** examples include students moving from 37% attendance to over 85% with SWiS, YWiSS, MASSiSS support.
 - **Crisis prevention:** SWiS, YWiSS, MASSiSS acting as a “holding service” where external services had long waitlists.
 - **Bridging rural gaps:** crucial support for rural families with limited services.
 - **Trauma informed support:** enabling emotional healing for families after significant trauma or bereavement.

- International evidence highlights that embedding social workers in schools is valued, improves partnerships and responsiveness. However, most rigorous trials find little or no effect on rates of referrals to child protection or children entering care.
- Across multiple countries and studies, school based social work shows potential to improve:
 - student mental health and wellbeing (e.g. reduced depression, improved self-esteem)
 - social and behavioural outcomes (e.g. reduced aggression, improved social skills)
 - school engagement and attendance
 - school climate and teacher–student relationships
- These improvements help with earlier detection and support, but don't shift population-level statutory outcomes such as referrals or care entry.
- The research highlights several possible explanations for why embedding social workers in schools doesn't shift the big outcomes:
 - school social workers serve many families whose needs still escalate, despite early help
 - measurements rely on statutory data, which may not reflect improvements in wellbeing, relationships, or resilience
 - child protection involvement is influenced by structural factors (poverty, housing, domestic violence), not just school-based support
 - evidence shows that improved school relationships don't automatically translate to fewer statutory interventions.

Impact analysis shows:

- Social Support Workers in Schools has limited quantitative data to demonstrate short or long-term impact.
- External evaluations show no clear population level impact on suspensions, care and protection notifications, or police involvement.
- No significant cohort-wide improvements were found for students attending SWIS schools.
- Providers regularly report about micro-impacts that are not seen in the quantitative and population level data such as improved emotional regulation, attendance gains and crisis prevention.
- Qualitative evidence indicates the service is valued and people's experiences show meaningful positive benefits.

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Value for Money

Understanding the programmes cost-to-serve

Cost-to-serve for 2025/26

SWIS

- Total cost of contracted services is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.*
- Total contracted targets are:
 - 4,174 children/young people per annum (based on average caseload of 16)
 - 261 FTE social workers per annum
- Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

YWISS

- Total cost of contracted services is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.*
- Total contracted targets are:
 - 320 children/young people per annum (based on average caseload of 16)
 - 20 FTE social workers per annum
 - 4 group programmes
- Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**
- Average cost per programme is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

MASSISS

- Total cost of contracted services is approximately **s9(2)(b)(ii)** per annum.
- Total contracted targets are:
 - 392 children/young people per annum (based on average caseload of 16)
 - 24 FTE social workers per annum
 - 17 group programmes
- Average cost per child/young person is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**
- Average cost per programme is **s9(2)(b)(ii)**.

Limitations

- Limited timeframes mean analysis beyond cost-to-serve isn't feasible.
- Provider feedback is acknowledged; value for money remains only a broad indicator.
- A full social return on investment assessment would require significant time and slow the review.

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Material Shared by Providers

Additional material that we used in our analysis

We received written responses from 13 SWiS, YWiSS, MASSiSS provider organisations and supporting schools. Key themes on the programme's impact were:

Improved emotional regulation and emotional literacy for children initially demonstrating severe behaviour and peer relationship difficulties

... school has had no issues with [...] behaviour in 2025, and home reports she seems far less angry with the world. [...] identified good alternatives to self-harm.

Canterbury provider

... I learnt that when people bully you it is just their opinion, I also learnt to how to control myself and things to do to help when times get tough.

East Coast provider

Improved school attendance and classroom participation

... Chronic school absences (attendance was sitting at around 37%) ... Would hide in Mum's car, run away from school to Grandma's ... Both children are now attending school with over 85% attendance.

Provider across Northland/Midlands/Te Tai Tokerau

Preventing escalation to crises because SWiS is immediate, in a safe environment, often bridging other service gaps

...Long wait lists for external services meant SWiS is acting as a 'holding' service providing interim support to prevent escalation.

Hawkes Bay provider

... SWiS bridges social service gaps for West Coast families due to distance, travel costs and limited local capacity.

Letter of support from West Coast school principal

Improved emotional wellbeing through emotional and therapeutic support often addressing family harm and other trauma

... Mum expressed a strong desire to turn her pain into purpose, fostering stability and wellbeing for her tamariki.

Auckland provider

Providers point to evidence of social return on investment

While impact evidence is limited a provider Social Return on Investment report indicates that for every dollar invested, SWiS creates ^{s9(2)(b)(ii)} in social value.

Case study examples of improved outcomes

SWIS enabled a tamariki to move from chronic school non-attendance (37%) to attending over 85% of the time. SWiS worked with the parent to understand the impact of family harm, and connecting with housing and financial support.

Mum made substantial changes to boundaries at home by no longer allowing family violence to occur [...] the seven-year-old has made substantial progress in this learning and has started participating...

SWiS enabled a family grieving the loss of a child to cancer to move to strengthened family relationships and supported healing.

Emotional and therapeutic supports were established for the three children via individual casework and SWiS programmes to develop emotional regulation, coping skills and self-awareness ... Mum received practical emotional and advocacy support.

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Operational Factors

Understanding operational factors that need to be considered

Operational factors for consideration include:

- Referral pathways are predominantly school-based, with services closely integrated into day-to-day school operations and valued by schools, children and youth, and communities. While valued by schools and communities, the services appear to lack clear targeting and measurable outcomes.
- Social Support Workers in Schools contracts have phased expiry dates with some ending in June 2026 and the rest in March and June 2027 but baseline funding is ongoing.
- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.
- Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.

“We would propose that SWiS can be more explicitly positioned within OT’s statutory obligations to prevent harm, promote wellbeing, and ensure proportionate statutory intervention. Formal recognition of SWiS as a key harm-minimisation partner would support better discharge of duties related to safety, timely escalation, and reducing unnecessary system entry. Stronger alignment of SWiS and OT data would also support improved monitoring of notifications, entries, and re-entries to care.”

Provider covering Auckland North, West and Central

Aide Memoire to support attendance at Cabinet Business Committee (CBC) - 7 April 2026

To Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children			
Date	1 April 2026	Deadline	7 April 2026
Report number	OT-B-2026-0124	Priority	Medium
Key contact	Benesia Smith MNZM Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment	Contact number	s9(2)(g)(ii)
Security	In-confidence		

Tuesday 7 April 2026, 1:00pm

Online

Purpose	This aide memoire provides suggested talking points (see Appendix One) to support your attendance at the Cabinet Business Committee on Tuesday 7 April 2026. The meeting will be held online. You and the Minister for Social Investment are presenting the paper <i>Cabinet report back: Oranga Tamariki and Social Investment Agency review of Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services</i>.
Expected Attendees	Membership of the Business Committee is: • Rt Hon Christopher Luxon (Chair) • Hon David Seymour (Deputy Chair) • Rt Hon Winston Peters • Hon Nicola Willis • Hon Chris Bishop • Hon Shane Jones • Hon Brooke van Velden • Hon Erica Stanford • Hon Simeon Brown • Hon Judith Collins KC • Hon Paul Goldsmith • Hon Louise Upston Officials Benesia Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment Oranga Tamariki and Aphra Green, Deputy Chief Executive System Performance and Investment Advice, Social Investment Agency are available to attend online, if required.
Background	The joint review report back was invited by Cabinet 1 In October 2025, Cabinet invited the Minister for Social Investment and the Minister for Children to report back on a joint review of early support and prevention services [CAB-25-MIN-0108.02 refers]. 2 The Cabinet paper being considered by Cabinet Business Committee presents results from Phase One of the joint Oranga Tamariki - Social Investment Agency review of early support and prevention services covering five national programmes and one large national provider. 3 The Cabinet paper includes:

	• Appendix One: Assessment Criteria (for the joint review). • Appendix Two: Summary of review results. 4 The joint review sits under wider work spearheaded by the Social Investment Agency and Treasury to identify funding and services that could be suitable to move to the Social Investment Fund. Cabinet agreed the high-level criteria for the joint review 5 Phase One of the joint review assessed the reach, impact, and value for money of five significant programmes: Family Start, Strengthening Families, Workers in Schools, Gateway and post-Gateway support; and one large national provider s9(2)(a). 6 The review criteria (see Cabinet paper, Appendix One) were set by Cabinet and subsequently refined by Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency with further refinement informed by provider feedback. The criteria recognise that each programme needed to demonstrate: • Reach – who is being served and whether outcomes span multiple portfolios. • Impact – evidence that programmes are working, drawn from children and families, providers, the Integrated Data Infrastructure, previous evaluations, case studies and international literature scans. • Value for money – the total cost to serve. 7 The review also identified the need to assess key operational factors including how the programme supports the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki, how priority referral pathways and service continuity are maintained, financial implications of any transfer and alignment with existing cross-agency work. This work has not yet been completed and will need to be a core component of any transition and implementation plan. Minister Willis will introduce the paper 8 We understand that Minister Willis will introduce the Cabinet paper at Cabinet Business Committee. She will make some introductory remarks and then invite you to speak. We understand her remarks will cover: • the review is the first in a rolling programme of Social Investment Agency spending reviews. • the Government is strengthening social investment practice. • the review shows a need for redesign and retargeting. • three programmes are proposed for transfer.
Key issues	9 The Cabinet Business Committee is likely to have a full agenda and the paper may have limited time for discussion. The attached talking points (Appendix One of this aide memoire) complement Minister Willis's remarks by providing additional context, detail, and operational insights about the review. Overall joint review results 10 Overall, the joint review found mixed results while confirming room for improvement. 11 Programmes like Family Start, Strengthening Families and Workers in Schools are mainly reaching children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki but are experiencing early risk factors to their safety and wellbeing. Gateway and post-Gateway mainly serve children already in Oranga Tamariki care or youth justice custody, or on the cusp of care or youth justice. s9(2)(a). The reach

	of these programmes is a positive and is helping support children before their safety and wellbeing risks escalate to the level requiring state care. 12 The review found limited quantitative evidence of impact, due to issues like incomplete data sets, limited data infrastructure and design issues between what is collected and what can be seen in the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). 13 However, available evidence from previous evaluations and qualitative evidence suggests there are short-term impact gains like improved parenting, emotional regulation, school engagement and crisis prevention. 14 Providers and the literature refer to such gains as 'micro-impacts' i.e. small, individual changes that make a real difference to the children and families experiencing them but cannot be traced to large datasets like the IDI. Oranga Tamariki can provide examples of micro-impacts if required. 15 The joint review concludes early support and prevention programmes are needed and should continue, to prevent children and young people coming into care and youth justice. Detailed review results 16 More detailed analysis of results for each of the five programmes and the large national provider is presented in table format in Appendix Two of the Cabinet paper. Oranga Tamariki can speak to this more granular level if required. Recommendations for transfer 17 The Cabinet paper seeks agreement to: • redesign and transfer Family Start to the Social Investment Fund as it reaches a wide range of children demonstrating an early risk factor and it contributes to multiple outcomes across multiple portfolios. • redesign and transfer Strengthening Families to Te Puni Kōkiri as it is closely aligned with the Whānau Ora Commissioning model. • redesign and transfer the Workers in Schools suite of programmes to the Ministry of Education, subject to further advice on transition and implementation planning, as it reaches a wide range of children demonstrating an early risk factor, contributes to multiple outcomes across multiple portfolios and is closely integrated into school environments. • Oranga Tamariki retaining the large national provider (s9(2)(a)), Gateway and post-Gateway services.
Ministerial/ Departmental consultation	18 The Cabinet paper was updated to reflect comment from: • Treasury – that the Social Investment Agency should be involved in all transition and implementation plans due to their central agency role. (s9(2)(i)) (s9(2)(a)). • (s9(2)(f)(iv)) _____ _____ _____ _____ • Ministry of Health – that any joint redesign of Gateway would be within baseline funding rather than new funding. • Te Puni Kōkiri – that recommendations on Strengthening Families should make clear officials will jointly undertake an assessment of fit with Whānau Ora.

Funding implications	19 Any transfers of programmes agreed by Cabinet are expected to be fiscally neutral between Votes. 20 s9(2)(f)(iv)
Next steps	21 Cabinet is asked to direct agencies to jointly report back to responsible portfolio Ministers on the following: Gateway and post-Gateway 22 Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Health and Health NZ to report back by 26 February 2027 on improvements to address issues with coverage, consent processes, contractual arrangements, outcome measurement and quality. Strengthening Families 23 Oranga Tamariki and Te Puni Kōkiri to report back by 26 February 2027 on service redesign and a transition and implementation plan for transfer to Whānau Ora commissioning agencies. Family Start 24 Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency to report back by 26 February 2027 on service redesign and a transition plan and implementation plan for transfer to the Social Investment Fund, including how the programme will be better targeted and considered alongside other services delivered in the first 2000 days. Workers in Schools 25 Oranga Tamariki, the Ministries of Education and Health, and Health NZ to report back by 28 August 2027 on a transition and implementation plan for transfer to the Ministry of Education, including how these programmes will be redesigned and better targeted. s9(2)(b)(ii) ■ [REDACTED] 27 The further work to be completed for the programmes will address operational factors, including legal and financial matters, referral pathways and service continuity for children and families. Phase Two of the joint review 28 Cabinet is asked to direct Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency to report back to joint Ministers by 31 July 2026 on the proposed approach for Phase Two of the joint review comprising \$113 million of 760 contracted early support and prevention services across roughly 200 providers.
Attachments	Appendix One: Suggested talking points

Appendix One: Suggested Talking Points

Cabinet paper introduction

- Minister Willis and I commissioned the joint review to better understand who early support and prevention programmes are reaching, what the impact is for children, young people and their families, and whether they are suitable for transfer to the Social Investment fund or another agency.
- Where they are successful, early support and prevention services meet the needs of at-risk children and prevent escalation to high-cost statutory interventions.
- The joint review shows there is limited, mixed evidence that impact is headed in the right direction. However, there are clear opportunities to improve the way outcomes and value for money are measured.

Recommendations focus on the right commissioning agencies

- I support the recommended approach to ensure early support and prevention programmes are commissioned by the most appropriate agency.
- Three of the programmes would be best delivered by another agency but they will need to be redesigned. A transition and implementation plan will need to be developed.
- Three of the programmes continue to fit best with Oranga Tamariki due to the cohorts they reach:
 - Gateway and post-Gateway as they mostly reach children and young people in statutory care or youth justice custody.
 - s9(2)(a) [REDACTED]

Next steps and report backs

- As well as report backs to responsible portfolio Ministers in 2027 for programmes proposed for redesign and transfer, Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency will also report back to Hon Willis and myself by 31 July 2026 on an approach to Phase Two of the joint review.
- Phase Two will cover all remaining Oranga Tamariki early support and prevention programmes – 760 services across 200 providers totalling \$113 million – with a similar focus on reach, impact and value for money.

Transition timeframes allow time to understand operational factors

- Throughout, I have been clear that we are placing children at the heart of our thinking.
- I want to be sure that changes are enduring, and that no children can fall through gaps when we transition to new commissioning agencies.
- This means taking time to understand and provide for operational factors like how programmes support the statutory duties of Oranga Tamariki's Chief Executive, and

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how referral pathways work to ensure children and their families get the right support at the right time.

- Achieving social investment goals for early support and prevention is part of a much wider transformation of the Children's System. The staged transition for Phase One programmes through to July 2027 ensures service continuity while we progressively align commissioning, accountability, and system architecture around earlier, more coordinated support for children and whānau.

Revised update on Phase One of the Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services review for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026

To Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children			
Date	30 January 2026	Deadline	2 February 2026
Briefing number	OT-B-2026-0102	Priority	Medium
Key contact	Benesia Smith MNZM Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning & Investment	Contact number	s9(2)(g)(ii)
Security	In-confidence		

Executive Summary

This paper provides you with a revised update on the Phase One review for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February.

Social Investment Agency officials have indicated they are comfortable with the minor changes we have made and recommended that you forward a copy to Minister Willis, subject to your approval.

Recommendations

We recommend that you:

1	Note that the proposed update on Phase One of the Oranga Tamariki Services Review for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026 has been revised based on your feedback.	
2	Agree to provide an update with Minister Willis on Phase One of the Services Review at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026.	YES/ NO

Sign-off
Oranga Tamariki

Sign-off
Minister for Children



Benesia Smith, MNZM
Deputy Chief Executive,
Commissioning and Investment
Date signed: 30 January 2026



Hon Karen Chhour
Minister for Children
Date signed: 03 February 2026

Minister comments

Satisfaction

Please select your level of satisfaction with this briefing

☐ Outstanding ☐ Good ☐ Acceptable ☐ Poor ☐ Unacceptable

Revised update on Phase One of the Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services review for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026

Purpose

- 1 This paper provides you with a revised update on Phase One of the joint Services Review for the next Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February (**Appendix One**).

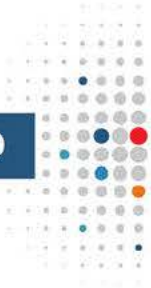
Proposed update for Child and Youth Ministers meeting

- 2 On 22 January 2026 we provided an update to you on Phase One of the joint SIA/OT review of Oranga Tamariki early support and prevention services. This included our initial thinking on proposed criteria for identifying whether funding and services could shift to the Social Investment Fund.
- 3 We recommended that you and Minister Willis provide an update on Phase One of the Services Review at the next Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026 and provided you with a draft update for your comments.
- 4 Overall, you were comfortable with the work undertaken to date and agreed 'in-principle' with the proposed criteria for identifying whether funding and services could shift to the Social Investment Fund.
- 5 You agreed to provide an update on Phase One of the Services Review at the next Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026.
- 6 You provided the following feedback on the material proposed to be shared with Child and Youth Ministers:
 - Make the potential outcomes of this work clearer and earlier in the memo so that is it signalled to other Ministers at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026.
 - Add a noting recommendation setting out potential outcomes of this work.
 - Nuance the proposed matrix as it currently looks too binary.
 - Review the memo with timing in mind and ensure the language reflects where officials will be at in the process.

- 7 We have made the following changes to the update for Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026:
- Add noting recommendations c and d to make the potential outcomes of the work clearer.
 - Updated paragraph 15 and added paragraphs 16–17 to make the potential outcomes of the work clearer.
 - Removed the proposed matrix at paragraph 18 as it requires work to nuance it, which is underway, to make it less binary.
 - Changed recommendation e to reflect that officials will have engaged with affected providers on the proposed criteria by the Child and Youth Minister’s meeting.
- 8 A revised update is provided for your approval at **Appendix One**.

Next Steps

- 9 Joint Ministers provide an update on Phase One of the Services Review at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February 2026. A revised update is provided for you at **Appendix One**.
- 10 We will continue engagement with central agencies and relevant social sector agencies to involve them in the review.
- 11 We will report back to joint Ministers with the outcome of the engagement with providers and agencies and provide advice on any proposed changes to finalise the criteria.
- 12 We will provide you substantive advice in mid-late February for decisions ahead of the report-back to Cabinet in March 2026.



Review of Oranga Tamariki Prevention and Early Support funding and services

To: Child and Youth Ministers
From: Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children
Hon Nicola Willis, Minister for Social Investment
Meeting date: 9 February 2026
Security level: In Confidence

Purpose

1. This memo provides Child and Youth Ministers with an update on the joint Oranga Tamariki and Social Investment Agency (SIA) review of Oranga Tamariki Prevention and Early Support funding and services to identify what could be transferred to Vote Social Investment from 1 July 2027.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Child and Youth Ministers:
 - a. **Note** progress on Phase One of the review of Early Support and Prevention funding to identify funding and services that could be transferred to the Social Investment Fund from July 2027.
 - b. **Note** the proposed criteria for identifying whether funding and services could shift to the Social Investment Fund comprise of three components:
 - i. **Reach and ideal commissioning approach:**
 - (1) **high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach** – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs requiring only some or no additional support.
 - (2) **single outcome focus vs multiple agency outcomes** – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach.

- ii. **Impact and value for money:** impact of programmes on key Oranga Tamariki outcomes (i.e., entries/re-entries to care/renotifications), impact of programmes across multiple domains, international evidence, qualitative evidence from providers. We propose assessing value for money on total cost of the programme, cost per participant/cost to serve and whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review).
 - iii. **Operational considerations:** we will advise on the extent to which programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki and any specific operational considerations to be worked through as part of any transition.
- c. **Note** that potential outcomes of the Phase One review include retaining a programme within Oranga Tamariki, transferring it to SIA, transferring it to another agency, redesigning and recommissioning it, decommissioning all or part of a programme or a mix of these options.
 - d. **Note** that any programme with low reach and low impact may need to be redesigned or a more targeted approach taken, and as a result a longer decommissioning process would be appropriate to allow time for new service design, procurement and commissioning.
 - e. **Note** that Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency will have completed engagement with affected providers on the proposed criteria by 9 February.
 - f. **Note** that relevant social sector agencies are involved in the review process.
 - g. **Note** that the Minister for Children and Minister for Social Investment have been invited to report back to Cabinet by 30 March 2026.

Background

- 3. In April 2025, Cabinet invited the Minister for Children to report back in September 2025 on progress towards a new strategic approach to commissioning services for children, including whether some services and funding could transfer from Oranga Tamariki to the Social Investment Fund [CAB-24-MIN-0148.54 refers].
- 4. In October, Cabinet noted the first tranche of services within the Early Support and Prevention category to be considered for transfer included five large programmes and one national provider. These are:
 - Services in Schools programme – Social Workers in Schools (SWiS), Multiagency Services in Secondary Schools (MASSiSS), Youth Workers in Secondary Schools (YWiSS) – [REDACTED] per annum across 51 providers
 - Family Start – [REDACTED] per annum across 44 providers
 - Gateway – [REDACTED] per annum across Health NZ
 - Targeted Supports post Gateway – three services totalling [REDACTED] per annum across 11 providers
 - Strengthening Families services – [REDACTED] per annum across 35 providers
 - One large national provider of a programme – [REDACTED] per annum.

5. Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency (SIA) are reviewing the reach, impact and value for money for the above services and ensuring the services are well commissioned and well understood. Cabinet has invited a joint report-back on this work by 30 March 2026 [CAB-25-MIN-0357 refers].
6. The review of Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention services is focused on understanding whether they are well commissioned and well understood.
7. This review is progressing in two phases:
 - a. Phase One focuses on five large programmes and one national provider, totalling around \$126 million in 2025/26
 - b. Phase Two covers the remaining early support and prevention services, with funding totalling around \$113 million in 2025/26.

Proposed Criteria for Analysis

8. Oranga Tamariki and SIA have developed a set of proposed criteria to help assess each programme for suitability to transfer: These will be finalised in mid-late February after consultation with Phase One providers.

Reach and ideal commissioning approach

9. We are looking at reach to determine both who the services are reaching and whether the intended outcomes extend across more than one portfolio:
 - high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs and require only some or no additional support.
 - single outcome vs multiple agency outcomes – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach.

Impact and value for money

10. Impact is assessed across multiple dimensions, including:
 - a. **Oranga Tamariki outcomes:** the extent to which the programme reduces entries/re-entries to care and notifications/re-notifications
 - b. **contracted outcomes:** what were the outcomes/outputs expected from the programmes when first designed and contracted
 - c. **other portfolio outcomes:** from additional quantitative analysis using the IDI, what do we know about the impact of these programmes on other outcomes (eg, school attendance/attainment, health outcomes, etc)
 - d. **international comparators:** what impacts can we see from similarly designed initiatives overseas; and
 - e. **qualitative evaluation, provider case studies and information submitted during the review:** what do participants and providers say about the impact of these programmes.

11. Considerations in relation to value for money are:

- a. total cost of the programme
- b. cost per participant/cost to serve; and
- c. whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review).

Operational considerations

12. As well as assessing reach and impact there are a range of operational factors to consider. Some of these—particularly how programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki—are important to factor into decisions on which programmes are suitable for transfer.
13. Other factors, such as referral pathways, links to other services, and service maturity, will shape how any transfer is implemented to avoid gaps in care. We will make best endeavours to provide transfer advice by the end of March, but these operational issues will require further work to ensure system-integration and statutory requirements are fully understood.

How the proposed criteria might work together to shape options

14. The proposed reach criteria are not binary – reach is one signal within a broader assessment that also considers impact and operational feasibility.
15. Bringing the proposed criteria together means advice to Ministers on transfer of programmes will be case by case. Recommendations could include retaining a programme within Oranga Tamariki, transferring it to SIA, transferring it to another agency, redesigning and recommissioning it, decommissioning all or part of a programme or a mix of these options.
16. For example, with a programme with low reach and low impact—the review may conclude that redesign or a more targeted approach is required, and that a longer decommissioning process is appropriate to allow time for new service design, procurement, notice to unsuccessful providers in accordance with social sector commissioning principles and commissioning.
17. The final advice will reflect the balance of evidence, risks, and the time needed to manage any transitions safely.

The review is forming part of all-of government response to the Dame Karen Poutasi review

18. The integrated all-of-government response to the Poutasi Review is well underway, with an immediate focus on safeguarding children and building capacity to avoid overwhelming the child protection system.
19. The Poutasi Review also raised questions about how the system responds to children and their families who are at risk of poor outcomes but not yet involved with statutory services.

20. Within the wider all-of-government response to the Poutasi review, it will be important to ensure that responsibilities and funding flows are aligned with achieving the best outcomes. Having a portfolio view of outcomes, cohorts and impacts means that we can understand the long-term payoff from intervening earlier using a social investment approach when children and their families may need support but have not reached a level of need requiring statutory intervention.

Discussion

21. We know that across the children's system we need to more effectively manage and target available funding to get better results. The expected increases in demand on the child protection system make it essential that recommissioning processes (for Oranga Tamariki, SIA and social sector agencies) consider how early support and prevention services operate as part of a cohesive children's system and support statutory interventions.
22. Centralising commissioning for early support and prevention services through the Social Investment Fund is expected to work better than the current situation, where services are contracted by programme type by individual government agencies.

Next steps

23. The Minister for Children and Minister for Social Investment will report back to Cabinet by 30 March 2026.

WEEKLY REPORT UPDATES

31 October 2025

*Progress update on **phase** one of the review of early support and prevention services and programmes*

We met with Social Investment Agency officials and Ernst and Young this week to discuss the proposed methodology for reviewing the five large legacy programmes and one national provider. Communication was sent this week to these providers for initial hui to discuss their involvement and the proposed methodology.

The timeframes for this work are tight. Our initial thinking is that the draft data work will need to be completed by 19 December and finalised by mid-January to allow sufficient time for the development of advice, ministerial engagement, Cabinet Paper development and relevant government consultation processes. We also need to allow sufficient time for engagement with over 140 affected partners and providers throughout the process.

We will continue to update you as this work progresses.

14 November 2025

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

This week officials met with Services in Schools and targeted post-Gateway service providers (such as primary level mental health services) to discuss phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services and opportunities for them to be involved in the process. Officials also met with representatives from Health New Zealand to discuss the review of Gateway services.

Overall, providers seem reasonably comfortable with the proposed approach to use existing material wherever possible rather than undertake new evaluations given the timeframes. They have indicated they are keen to support the work as much as possible by providing additional material and insights to ensure their services are well represented to Ministers.

Further meetings are being set up to keep affected providers regularly informed of progress and to seek their feedback at key milestones in the review process. We are planning to provide you with a briefing on the proposed methodology for each programme and overall timeframes in the coming weeks.

21 November 2025

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

We continue to work closely with Social Investment Agency officials on the joint review of services. Work is progressing at pace given the tight timeframes for providing advice to yourself and the Minister for Social Investment by the end of January 2026.



IN-CONFIDENCE

We have started regular update emails to affected providers to keep them informed of progress and give them ongoing opportunities to share their insights as part of the review process.

Last week we shared a table of data sources and other evidence we have compiled on s3(2)(a) family Start and Strengthening Families programme. Providers have been invited to provide any comments they have on the documents and share any additional data, reports, or evaluations they would like us to consider by Monday, 24 November 2025. This week we shared evidence compiled on Workers in Schools, Post-Gateway and Gateway. Providers have been invited to provide any comments and share any additional reports, or evaluations by Friday, 28 November 2025.

Further meetings have been set up for affected providers in early December to share with them the initial data analysis we have on the reach, impact and effectiveness of the programmes for feedback.

As indicated last week, we will provide you with a joint briefing on the proposed methodology for each programme and overall timeframes in the next couple of weeks.

28 November 2025

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

We continue to work closely with Social Investment Agency officials on the joint review of services. We are working to provide yourself and Hon Willis with a joint briefing in the week beginning 8 December 2025. The briefing will include content on the following key areas:

- key timeframes and proposed content for the March 2026 Cabinet paper
- progress on the data analysis underway to assess the reach and impact of the six programmes in the Phase 1 review
- proposed assessment criteria for the Phase 1 review
- initial thinking on additional operational criteria to consider when making recommendations on which programmes and services should remain with Oranga Tamariki, and which programmes and services are best delivered via the Social Investment Fund or another agency.

Data analysis of the six programmes is progressing at pace. We are using several contractors to support the completion of this work given the tight timeframes for providing advice to yourself and the Minister for Social Investment by the end of January 2026.

We had previously indicated that we were aiming for the data analysis to be completed by 19 December 2025. This date has been bought forward to allow providers at least 10 working days to consider the draft reach and impact findings and provide written feedback prior to Christmas.

Further meetings have been set up for affected providers from 5 December 2025 to update them on progress, talk through the material and methodology being used to assess the reach and impact of their services. We will also outline the proposed next steps and timing for draft reach and impact findings to be shared with them for feedback.

We continue to send weekly update emails to affected providers to keep them informed of progress and give them ongoing opportunities to share their insights as part of the review process. Several providers have acknowledged their appreciation to the open approach Oranga Tamariki, and the Social Investment Agency have taken to date on this work.

This week we received feedback on documents we had shared with affected providers and additional material that wanted us to consider as part of the assessment process. Next week we are planning to include an update on the Phase 1 review of services in the Provider Pānui, so all Oranga Tamariki partners and providers are informed about how this important work is progressing.

12 December 2025

Working with the Social Investment Agency

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

We are working on a draft joint briefing with the Social Investment Agency that will provide you and the Minister for Social Investment with clarity about the process we have been following and provide some preliminary insights into what we are seeing in relation to the reach and impact of the services under review. We had intended to report to you both by Christmas but due to further work required, we will now report to you by Friday, 23 January 2026.

23 January 2026

Joint briefing with the Social Investment Agency on Phase 1 of the Services Review

We have provided you and the Minister for Social Investment with a joint briefing updating you on progress with the Phase 1 of the Services Review and seeking agreement to the criteria for the review. The briefing also seeks agreement to provide Child and Youth Ministers with an update at their next meeting on 9 February 2026.

5 February 2026

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

IN-CONFIDENCE

Last week we met with Family Start, Strengthening Families, Social Workers in Schools and Post Gateway providers to discuss the proposed criteria for decision-making as authorised by you and Minister Willis, Minister for Social Investment. Meetings went generally well and there was early discussion about whether the criteria should also include – equity of access and service coverage (e.g. rurality).

The Social Investment Agency have suggested to Minister Willis to include an update on this work on the agenda for Social Investment Ministers on 17 February 2026. We agree that an update to Social Investment Ministers would be beneficial and may flush out issues for consideration for the Cabinet paper. We understand you may be traveling overseas at that time and won't be able to attend. We would like to discuss this matter with you.

20 February 2026

Working with the Social Investment Agency

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

Feedback on the proposed Phase One Service Review criteria was sought from providers on 30 January 2026, resulting in around 30 detailed submissions. Early themes highlight concerns about data consistency and clarity, and the importance of recognising local context, rural barriers, trust-building, and the intensity of engagement, and the limitations of a blanket approach to applying the criteria.

Providers emphasised the importance of equitable access for rural whānau and tamariki in any transition and the importance of preserving trusted relationships. A small number of providers also raised concerns about the level of partnership in the review process.

We are considering adjustments to the criteria in response for joint Ministers approval. In the meantime, we are planning to meet with providers on 26 and 27 February 2026 to discuss their feedback.

27 February 2026

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

We have completed our analysis of provider feedback on the proposed Service Review Criteria for the five large programmes and one national provider. The feedback aligns closely with the early themes reported last week and has allowed us to refine and clarify how the criteria will be applied. Meetings with providers to update them on the criteria and our preliminary analysis occurred online on Thursday 26 and Friday 27 February 2026.

These meetings discussed feedback with providers and outlined the changes we propose to make to the criteria, including:

- assessing reach and impact in a more nuanced way that better reflects risk and need
- strengthening the role of whānau voice and lived experience in assessing impact
- incorporating matters such as continuity of service, rurality, equitable access and reliance on specialist workforce into operational considerations.

At the recent Social Investment Ministers meeting, the Minister of Education indicated that her officials were working on designing a new programme to support tamariki and rangatahi in care when they transition schools.

You sought further information on this mahi, as Oranga Tamariki officials were unaware of the new programme. We have been in touch with the Ministry of Education, and they have advised that the scope of this work and potential supports to tamariki in care, including potential budget implications, is still under consideration by the Ministry of Education.

Oranga Tamariki is engaged with Ministry of Education and will assist in developing any potential proposal further, including consideration of whether this aligns with the Gateway service. We note this work is at a very early stage and we will provide you with further information as it becomes available.



6 March 2026

Working with the Social Investment Agency

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

This week, work continued finalising the penultimate version of the review's results reports for the five programmes and one national provider. These penultimate reports have been distributed in draft to relevant government agencies for information.

The Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki officials met this week with senior officials from the Ministries of Social Development, Education, Māori Development and Health on Wednesday, 4 March 2026 to discuss the contents of the draft Cabinet paper. Discussions were also held with Treasury and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Minister for Social Investment and yourself will have received a penultimate version of the Cabinet paper on Friday 6 March 2026 for consideration over the weekend. Your comments are sought so that we can finalise for ministerial consultation commencing on Wednesday 11 March 2026.

20 March 2026

Working with the Social Investment Agency

Update on phase one of the joint Social Investment Agency and Oranga Tamariki review of services

Ministerial consultation on the Cabinet paper ended on 18 March 2026. The Cabinet paper has been deferred for lodging with the Cabinet Office by one week. It is proposed that Cabinet paper be lodged on 26 March 2026 for consideration by the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee on 1 April 2026 and Cabinet on 7 April 2026. We will keep your office updated as this progresses.



Social Investment Ministers meeting – 17 February 2026

To Hon Nicole McKee, Acting Minister for Children			
Date	16 February 2026	Deadline	17 February 2026
Report number	OT-B-2025-0074	Priority	High
Key contact	Benesia Smith, MNZM Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment	Contact number	s9(2)(g)(ii) 1
Security	In-confidence		

Tuesday 17 February 2026, 5:00 – 6:00pm

Venue: 2.021 Ministerial Meeting Room, Beehive

Purpose	This aide memoire provides information and commentary on the four items (including three papers) being discussed at this meeting. Talking point are included in Appendix One. Out of Scope - Item 1: [Redacted] - Item 2: [Redacted] - Item 3: Oranga Tamariki – Funding Review – update on the review of Early Support and Prevention funding and services (co-led by SIA and Oranga Tamariki officials) Out of Scope The aim of the hui is to keep ministerial colleagues informed of key initiatives underway that intersect between the social sector and social investment – with a focus on implementing a social investment lens across all social sector (and children’s system) work.
Expected Attendees	The expected attendees of the Social Investment Ministers hui are: - Hon Nicola Willis (Chair) - Hon Chris Bishop (TBC) - Hon Simeon Brown - Hon Erica Stanford - Hon Paul Goldsmith - Hon Louise Upston (TBC) - Hon Mark Mitchell - Hon Tama Potaka - Hon Matt Doocey Apologies: - Hon David Seymour (sending advisor) - Hon Dr Shane Reti (officials attending) - Hon Karen Chhour (officials attending) Benesia Smith, DCE, Commissioning and Investment will attend the hui.

[illegible]

	SIA and Oranga Tamariki are working well together on the review. Providers are being journeyed, but some are likely to raise issues if decisions are made to move a programme and funding to SIA, repurpose it and/or recommission that funding. The review is focusing on \$126m of six programmes that Oranga Tamariki is investing early support and prevention monies into – a tiny portion of the investment that government puts into early support and investment. The question we should be asking across the children’s system is ‘have we really thought about how our collective early support and prevention investments are aligned to get the best outcomes for children across the children’s system?’ Oranga Tamariki cannot continue to be agency ‘holding the can’ when other government departments either don’t fund or reduce funding in early support and prevention. Oranga Tamariki recommends that you: • indicate the review is not about reducing funding – it’s about looking at what government is funding, understanding who it is reaching, whether it is having any impact, which agency is best placed to commission it, and whether it needs to be repurposed to achieve improved outcomes with limited social sector investment • ask your colleagues whether it’s timely now to think how our collective investments are aligned to get the best outcomes for children across the children’s system. Talking points can be found in Appendix One.
Agenda item 4: Learning and Impact	Out of Scope [Redacted content]
Next Steps	The next ministerial group hui is expected to be in April 2026.
Attachments	Appendix One: Talking points – Social Investment Ministerial meeting on Tuesday 17 February 2026.

Appendix One: Proposed Talking Points – Social Investment Ministers’ group hui

Out of Scope

-

- [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

Item 3 – Review of Oranga Tamariki early support and prevention services – phase 1 (SIA and Oranga Tamariki officials co-leads)

- 6 This is the first significant funding review undertaken by the SIA and Oranga Tamariki using a social investment lens.
- 7 The review is not about reducing funding.
- 8 It is taking a good look at what we are funding in early support and prevention, understanding who it is reaching, whether it is having any impact, which agency is best placed to commission it, and whether it needs to be repurposed, either wholly or partially, to achieve improved outcomes with our limited social sector investment.
- 9 Clear criteria—reach, impact and value for money, and operational considerations—will enable decisions that are principled, consistent, and well-reasoned.
- 10 There are always going to be hard choices to make across our service portfolio.
- 11 The question we should be asking across the children's system is 'have we really thought about how our collective early support and prevention investments are aligned to get the best outcomes for children across the children's system?'
- 12 The review has made a good start but has looked at only five programmes and one large national provider that form a tiny part of the system. Analysis shows the programmes have a moderate impact at a programme level. There is room for improvement.
- 13 There is a need to look at how investment is integrated across the whole children's system, not only at the individual agency, programme or service level.

- 14 The system is interdependent and relies on all agencies to be collective—with children at the heart of decision-making—being really joined-up and taking a social investment approach.
- 15 Oranga Tamariki and SIA have reached out to work with the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Development. The central agencies have been advised of this work, along with the CE's Social Sector group.
- 16 Providers have been taken along the journey of the review. As there may be some changes, some providers may raise issues that will need to be carefully considered and managed.
- 17 We are running fast to reach a 30 March 2026 Cabinet deadline, and not all of the analysis and work will have been completed. We will be seeking agreement to a “direction of travel”, as the decisions will require further work such as operational considerations to be understood and appropriate transitional arrangements put in place.
- 18 Decisions will need to be nuanced and balanced taking on board the risks, evidence and data that has been gathered and bearing in mind any impacts on children and whānau.

Out of Scope



Phase One Review update: Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services

To Hon Nicola Willis, Minister for Social Investment, Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children			
Date	22 January 2026	Deadline	26 January 2026
Briefing number	B-2025-0067 SIA2526-079	Priority	Medium
Key contact	Aphra Green Deputy Chief Executive, System Performance and Investment Advice	Contact number	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
	Benesia Smith MNZM Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning & Investment	Contact number	s9(2)(g)(ii)

Executive Summary

This paper provides you with an update on Phase One of the joint SIA/OT review of Oranga Tamariki early support and prevention services. The review has been focused on six large programmes. These are:

- Services in Schools programme
- Family Start
- Gateway
- Targeted Supports post Gateway
- Strengthening Families services
- One large programme led by a national provider.

The review is underway and has been assessing reach and impact and value for money, and ensuring programmes are well commissioned and well understood. Officials have developed proposed decision-making criteria to guide advice on potential transfer and consider that engaging with providers on these will help mitigate any concerns that they have not been fully included in the review process.

Feedback from providers will be collated and analysed, and any advice on any changes as a result of feedback or the finalisation of our review analysis will be provided to you for decision in mid-late February. We also recommend that you share an update on the Phase One review at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February.

Recommendations		
We recommend that you:	Minister for Social Investment	Minister for Children
1. Note progress on Phase One of the review of Early Support and Prevention funding to identify funding and services that could be transferred to the Social Investment Fund from July 2027.		
2. Note that Cabinet has invited a joint report back on this work by 30 March 2026.		
3. Note that Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency will seek your joint agreement to specific proposals in February 2026, for endorsement by Cabinet in March 2026.		
4. Agree in principle that the proposed criteria for identifying whether funding and services could shift to the Social Investment Fund comprise of three components: a. Reach and ideal commissioning approach: i. high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs requiring only some or no additional support. ii. single outcome focus vs multiple agency outcomes – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach. b. Impact and value for money: impact of programmes on key Oranga Tamariki outcomes (i.e., entries/re-entries to care/renotifications), impact of programmes across multiple domains, international evidence, qualitative evidence from providers. We propose assessing value for money on total cost of the programme, cost per participant/cost to serve and whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review). c. Operational considerations: we will advise on the extent to which programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki and any specific operational considerations to be worked through as part of any transition.	YES/NO YES/NO YES/NO	☒ YES ☐ NO ☒ YES ☐ NO ☒ YES ☐ NO
5. Approve , subject to your agreement to recommendation 4, that Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency share the above proposed criteria with Phase One providers as part of the review and provide them with seven working days to provide feedback.	YES/NO	☒ YES ☐ NO
6. Direct Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency to report back to joint Ministers with Phase One provider feedback on the proposed criteria and advise on any changes required as a result of feedback and further testing of the proposed criteria.	YES/NO	☒ YES ☐ NO

7. Note that Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency will apply the proposed criteria set out in recommendation 4 to Phase One services, subject to any feedback from affected providers, and provide joint advice in mid-late February 2026 on specific proposals for transfer for Cabinet endorsement in March 2026.		
8. Agree to provide an update on Phase One of the Services Review at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February.	YES/NO	<u>YES</u> /NO
9. Provide comments on the draft update for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting at Appendix 1.	YES/NO	<u>YES</u> /NO

Sign-off

Social Investment Agency, Oranga Tamariki

Sign-off

Minister for Social Investment, Minister for Children



Aphra Green
**Deputy Chief Executive,
 System Performance and Investment Advice
 Social Investment Agency**
 Date signed: 23 January 2026

Hon Nicola Willis
Minister for Social Investment
 Date signed:



Benesia Smith, MNZM
**Deputy Chief Executive,
 Commissioning and Investment**
 Date signed: 23 January 2026



Hon Karen Chhour
Minister for Children
 Date signed: 26/1/2026.

Minister comments**Satisfaction**

Please select your level of satisfaction with this briefing

☐ Outstanding ☐ Good ☐ Acceptable ☐ Poor ☐ Unacceptable

Phase One Review update: Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services

Purpose

1 This paper:

- updates you on the ongoing review of Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention funding and services;
- seeks your agreement in principle to high-level proposed criteria for assessing whether programmes are suitable for transfer to the Social Investment Fund; and
- seeks your agreement to provide an update on this work at the next Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February (draft update provided for your comments at Appendix 1).

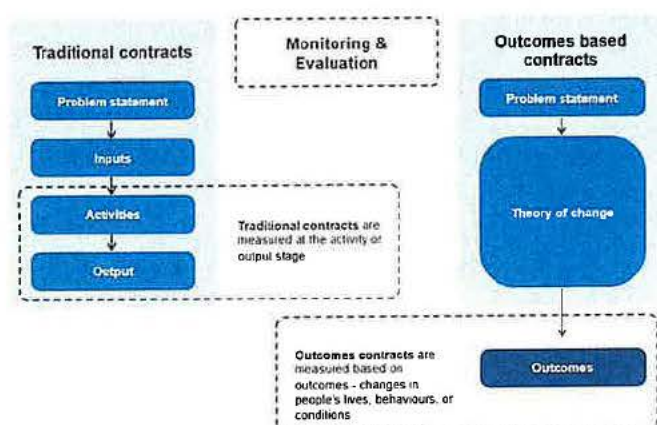
Background

Cabinet has noted the Oranga Tamariki and Social Investment Agency work programme and invited a report-back by March 2026

- 2 In April 2025, Cabinet invited the Minister for Children to report back in September 2025 on progress towards a new strategic approach to commissioning services for children, including whether some services and funding could transfer from Oranga Tamariki to the Social Investment Fund [CAB-24-MIN-0148.54 refers].
- 3 In October, Cabinet noted the first tranche of services within the Early Support and Prevention category to be considered for transfer included five large programmes and one national provider. These are:
- Services in Schools programme – Social Workers in Schools (SWiS), Multiagency Services in Secondary Schools (MASSiSS), Youth Workers in Secondary Schools (YWiSS) – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 51 providers
 - Family Start – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 44 providers
 - Gateway – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across Health NZ
 - Targeted Supports post Gateway – three services totalling [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 11 providers
 - Strengthening Families services – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 35 providers
 - One large national provider of a programme – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum.
- 4 Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency (SIA) are reviewing the reach, impact and value for money for the above services and ensuring the services are well commissioned and well understood. Cabinet has invited a joint report-back on this work by 30 March 2026 [CAB-25-MIN-0357 refers].

The introduction of the Social Investment Fund

- 5 Universal, targeted and intensive supports or intervention and statutory interventions are graduated and layered rather than linear. A child or their family may need different types of support or intervention at different times, stepping up the help they receive as needs and risk increase, and stepping down as safety and wellbeing are achieved and sustained.
- 6 The Social Investment Fund (the Fund) is a shared social sector architecture intended to support a shift to a social investment approach. The Fund is designed to test and embed changes in how support is delivered to people with complex needs, how government commissions and manages social services, and how public resources are targeted to improve long-term outcomes, particularly for children, young people and families experiencing persistent disadvantage.
- 7 The below diagram illustrates the new approach to measuring outcomes:



- 8 The Social Investment Fund Ministerial Group provides collective oversight and direction for the Fund.

Review progress since the report-back to Cabinet in October 2025

- 9 Oranga Tamariki and SIA have developed a draft decision-making framework and proposed criteria for assessing Phase One services, described below. We are engaging with providers of Phase One programmes through online hui and weekly email updates.
- 10 Reach and impact analysis is well advanced for each programme and for the large national provider. Analysis has focused on the cohorts who are involved with or have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki. Final analysis will be available in late January. Analysis of the wider cohort of children and young people with early risk factors began late last year with initial insights also expected by late January.
- 11 With information from analysis to date we have a picture of who the programmes are reaching. There are some indications of impact, but we are mindful that outcomes are influenced by many factors beyond the programme itself and it is difficult to isolate cause and effect in complex, real-life situations.

- 12 Data quality varies across programmes and there is regional difference in how they are delivered by different providers. We intend to strengthen our understanding of impact by drawing on international research and on case studies and other information Phase One providers have submitted.

Proposed Criteria for Analysis

- 13 We have developed a set of proposed criteria to help assess each programme for suitability to transfer.

Reach and ideal commissioning approach

- 14 We are looking at reach to determine both who the services are reaching and whether the intended outcomes extend across more than one portfolio:
- **high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach** – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs and require only some or no additional support.
 - **single help vs multiple agency outcomes** – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach.

Impact and value for money

- 15 Impact is assessed across multiple dimensions, including:
- **Oranga Tamariki outcomes:** the extent to which the programme reduces entries/re-entries to care and notifications/re-notifications
 - **contracted outcomes:** what were the outcomes/outputs expected from the programmes when first designed and contracted
 - **other portfolio outcomes:** from additional quantitative analysis using the IDI, what do we know about the impact of these programmes on other outcomes (eg, school attendance/attainment, health outcomes, etc)
 - **international comparators:** what impacts can we see from similarly designed initiatives overseas
 - **qualitative evaluation, provider case studies and information submitted during the review:** what do participants and providers say about the impact of these programmes.
- 16 Considerations in relation to value for money are:
- total cost of the programme
 - cost per participant/cost to serve
 - whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review).

Operational considerations

- 17 As well as assessing reach and impact, we are considering a range of operational factors. Some of these—particularly how programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki—are important to factor into decisions on which programmes are suitable for transfer.
- 18 Other factors, such as referral pathways, links to other services, and service maturity, will shape how any transfer is implemented to avoid gaps in care. We will make best endeavours to provide transfer advice by the end of March, but these operational issues will require further work to ensure system-integration and statutory requirements are fully understood.

Sharing proposed criteria with providers

- 19 Subject to your approval, we would like to share the proposed criteria as outlined above with Phase One providers and invite their feedback. There is an opportunity to share this material at the next set of hui with Phase One providers, scheduled for the end of January. We propose giving seven working days for feedback, after which we would report to joint Ministers with the outcome and provide advice on any proposed changes to finalise the criteria.

How the proposed criteria might work together to shape options for Ministers

- 20 The proposed reach and ideal commissioning approach criteria can be expressed in a matrix as shown at Table 1 below. The proposed reach criteria are not binary – reach is one signal within a broader assessment that also considers impact and operational feasibility.
- 21 Bringing the proposed criteria together means advice to Ministers on transfer of programmes will be case by case. Recommendations could include retaining a programme within Oranga Tamariki, transferring it to SIA, transferring it to another agency, redesigning and recommissioning it, decommissioning all or part of a programme or a mix of these options. In some cases—such as programmes with low reach and low impact—the review may conclude that redesign or a more targeted approach is required, and that a longer decommissioning process is appropriate to allow time for new service design, procurement and commissioning. The final advice will reflect the balance of evidence, risks, and the time needed to manage any transitions safely.

- 22 The table below illustrates how the proposed criteria might be combined to guide decision-making.

		Oranga Tamariki Reach (High) (Statutory only/in care where safety at risk or significant risk factors requiring intensive supports)	Oranga Tamariki Reach (Low) (low or no risk/needs or elevated moderate risk/needs requiring some targeted extra help, based on their needs)
Ideal commissioning approach	Has an impact on mostly Oranga Tamariki portfolio (1-2) Outcomes	Eg, Oranga Tamariki to retain responsibility for commissioning (and could decide to redesign or recommission services on basis of impact findings)	Eg, Oranga Tamariki to retain responsibility for commissioning or consider for transfer to Fund or to another agency (with associated funding)
	Has an impact on multiple portfolio (3+) Outcomes	Eg, Consider for transfer to Fund (with associated funding)	Eg, Consider for transfer to Fund, consider recommissioning or redesign

This work intersects with the all-of government response to the Dame Karen Poutasi review and Budget 2026

- 23 In September 2025, Cabinet agreed to accept all recommendations from the Dame Karen Poutasi report on the *Joint Review into the Children's Sector: Identification and response to suspected abuse* and noted that an integrated all-of-government approach is being taken to implement the remaining recommendations, focused on safeguarding children [CAB-25-MIN-0330]. The Poutasi Review also raised questions about how the system responds to vulnerable children who do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but remain at risk.
- 24 We know that across the Children's System we need to more effectively manage and target available funding to get better results. Having a portfolio view of outcomes, cohorts and impacts means that we can understand the long-term payoff from intervening earlier using a social investment approach when children and their families may need support but have not reached a level of need requiring statutory intervention.

Increasing demand and cost pressures

- 25 Oranga Tamariki is experiencing an increase in demand for services. In 2024 there was a 44 percent increase in reports of concern to Oranga Tamariki. Some of this is attributable to practice changes, but the majority represents heightened demand, including a 17 percent increase in individual children with Reports of Concern and vulnerable children experiencing increasingly complex needs. Oranga Tamariki is investing approximately \$529 million in the 2025/26 financial year in contracted services:
- approximately \$290 million for Statutory Intervention and Support Services
 - approximately \$239 million for Early Support and Prevention Services.

- 26 The six large programmes included in the Phase One review total around \$126 million.
[REDACTED] s9(2)(i) [REDACTED] s9(2)(i) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 27 Currently, contracts for all of the Phase One programmes end in March 2027.
- 28 The expected increases in demand on the child protection system make it essential that recommissioning processes (for both Oranga Tamariki and SIA) consider how early support and prevention programmes and services operate as part of a cohesive children's system. Within the wider all-of-government response to the Poutasi review, it will be important to ensure that responsibilities and funding flows are aligned with achieving the best outcomes.

Next Steps

- 29 If you agree, engagement with providers will occur from 29–30 January and end on 9 February, giving providers seven working days to provide feedback on the proposed criteria. We will also continue engagement with relevant social sector agencies to involve them in the review.
- 30 We recommend that you provide an update on Phase One of the Services Review at the Child and Youth Ministers meeting on 9 February. A draft update is provided for your comments at Appendix 1).
- 31 We will provide you substantive advice in mid-late February for decisions ahead of the report-back to Cabinet in March 2026.

Appendix One – draft update for Child and Youth Ministers



Review of Oranga Tamariki Prevention and Early Support funding and services

To: Child and Youth Ministers
From: Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children
 Hon Nicola Willis, Minister for Social Investment
Meeting date: 9 February 2026
Security level: In Confidence

Purpose

1. This memo provides Child and Youth Ministers with an update on the joint Oranga Tamariki and Social Investment Agency (SIA) review of Oranga Tamariki Prevention and Early Support funding and services to identify what could be transferred to Vote Social Investment from 1 July 2027.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Child and Youth Ministers:
 - a. **Note** progress on Phase One of the review of Early Support and Prevention funding to identify funding and services that could be transferred to the Social Investment Fund from July 2027.
 - b. **Note** the proposed criteria for identifying whether funding and services could shift to the Social Investment Fund comprise of three components:
 - i. **Reach and ideal commissioning approach:**
 - (1) **high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach** – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs requiring only some or no additional support.
 - (2) **single outcome focus vs multiple agency outcomes** – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach.

- ii. **Impact and value for money:** impact of programmes on key Oranga Tamariki outcomes (i.e., entries/re-entries to care/renotifications), impact of programmes across multiple domains, international evidence, qualitative evidence from providers. We propose assessing value for money on total cost of the programme, cost per participant/cost to serve and whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review).
 - iii. **Operational considerations:** we will advise on the extent to which programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki and any specific operational considerations to be worked through as part of any transition.
- c. **Note** that Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency will be engaging with affected providers on the proposed criteria.
 - d. **Note** that social sector agencies are involved in the review process.
 - e. **Note** that the Minister for Children and Minister for Social Investment have been invited to report back to Cabinet by 30 March 2026.

Background

- 3. In April 2025, Cabinet invited the Minister for Children to report back in September 2025 on progress towards a new strategic approach to commissioning services for children, including whether some services and funding could transfer from Oranga Tamariki to the Social Investment Fund [CAB-24-MIN-0148.54 refers].
- 4. In October, Cabinet noted the first tranche of services within the Early Support and Prevention category to be considered for transfer included five large programmes and one national provider. These are:
 - Services in Schools programme – Social Workers in Schools (SWiS), Multiagency Services in Secondary Schools (MASSiSS), Youth Workers in Secondary Schools (YWISS) – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 51 providers
 - Family Start – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 44 providers
 - Gateway – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across Health NZ
 - Targeted Supports post Gateway – three services totalling [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 11 providers
 - Strengthening Families services – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum across 35 providers
 - One large national provider of a programme – [REDACTED] s9(2)(b)(ii) per annum.
- 5. Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency (SIA) are reviewing the reach, impact and value for money for the above services and ensuring the services are well commissioned and well understood. Cabinet has invited a joint report-back on this work by 30 March 2026 [CAB-25-MIN-0357 refers].

IN-CONFIDENCE

6. The review of Oranga Tamariki Early Support and Prevention services is focused on understanding whether they are well commissioned and well understood.
7. This review is progressing in two phases:
 - a. Phase One focuses on five large programmes and one national provider, totalling around \$126 million in 2025/26
 - b. Phase Two covers the remaining early support and prevention services, with funding totalling around \$113 million in 2025/26.

Proposed Criteria for Analysis

8. Oranga Tamariki and SIA have developed a set of proposed criteria to help assess each programme for suitability to transfer: These will be finalised in mid-late February after consultation with Phase One providers.

Reach and ideal commissioning approach

9. We are looking at reach to determine both who the services are reaching and whether the intended outcomes extend across more than one portfolio:
 - high vs low Oranga Tamariki reach – whether the programme is reaching children that are experiencing or likely to experience serious harm that requires statutory intervention to address and which cannot be managed by the child or their family, or those children that have low to moderate risks/needs and require only some or no additional support.
 - single outcome vs multiple agency outcomes – whether the programmes are aimed at addressing mostly Oranga Tamariki outcomes, or outcomes of value to a range of portfolios (three or more), which will help identify an ideal commissioning approach.

Impact and value for money

10. Impact is assessed across multiple dimensions, including:
 - a. **Oranga Tamariki outcomes:** the extent to which the programme reduces entries/re-entries to care and notifications/re-notifications
 - b. **contracted outcomes:** what were the outcomes/outputs expected from the programmes when first designed and contracted
 - c. **other portfolio outcomes:** from additional quantitative analysis using the IDI, what do we know about the impact of these programmes on other outcomes (eg, school attendance/attainment, health outcomes, etc)
 - d. **international comparators:** what impacts can we see from similarly designed initiatives overseas; and
 - e. **qualitative evaluation, provider case studies and information submitted during the review:** what do participants and providers say about the impact of these programmes.

IN-CONFIDENCE

11. Considerations in relation to value for money are:

- a. total cost of the programme
- b. cost per participant/cost to serve; and
- c. whether the money would be better spent or better targeted to address specific needs or achieve particular outcomes (taking account of impact review).

Operational considerations

12. As well as assessing reach and impact there are a range of operational factors to consider. Some of these—particularly how programmes support the statutory duties of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki—are important to factor into decisions on which programmes are suitable for transfer.
13. Other factors, such as referral pathways, links to other services, and service maturity, will shape how any transfer is implemented to avoid gaps in care. We will make best endeavours to provide transfer advice by the end of March, but these operational issues will require further work to ensure system-integration and statutory requirements are fully understood.

How the proposed criteria might work together to shape options

14. The proposed reach and ideal commissioning approach criteria can be expressed in a matrix as shown below. The proposed reach criteria are not binary – reach is one signal within a broader assessment that also considers impact and operational feasibility.
15. Bringing the proposed criteria together means advice to Ministers on transfer of programmes will be case by case, with a range of possible options including retention, transfer, redesign, decommissioning or a mix of these. The final advice will reflect the balance of evidence, risks, and the time needed to manage any transitions safely.
16. The table below illustrates how the proposed criteria might be combined to guide decision-making.

		Oranga Tamariki Reach (High) (Statutory only/in care where safety at risk or significant risk factors requiring intensive supports)	Oranga Tamariki Reach (Low) (low or no risk/needs or elevated moderate risk/needs requiring some targeted extra help, based on their needs)
Ideal commissioning approach	Has an impact on mostly Oranga Tamariki portfolio (1-2) Outcomes	Eg, Oranga Tamariki to retain responsibility for commissioning (and could decide to redesign or recommission services on basis of impact findings)	Eg, Oranga Tamariki to retain responsibility for commissioning or consider for transfer to Fund or to another agency (with associated funding)
	Has an impact on multiple portfolio (3+) Outcomes	Eg, Consider for transfer to Fund (with associated funding)	Eg, Consider for transfer to Fund, consider recommissioning or redesign

The review is forming part of all-of government response to the Dame Karen Poutasi review

17. The integrated all-of-government response to the Poutasi Review is well underway, with an immediate focus on safeguarding children and building capacity to avoid overwhelming the child protection system.
18. The Poutasi Review also raised questions about how the system responds to children and their families who are at risk of poor outcomes but not yet involved with statutory services.
19. Within the wider all-of-government response to the Poutasi review, it will be important to ensure that responsibilities and funding flows are aligned with achieving the best outcomes. Having a portfolio view of outcomes, cohorts and impacts means that we can understand the long-term payoff from intervening earlier using a social investment approach when children and their families may need support but have not reached a level of need requiring statutory intervention.

Discussion

20. We know that across the children's system we need to more effectively manage and target available funding to get better results. The expected increases in demand on the child protection system make it essential that recommissioning processes (for Oranga Tamariki, SIA and social sector agencies) consider how early support and prevention services operate as part of a cohesive children's system and support statutory interventions.
21. Centralising commissioning for early support and prevention services through the Social Investment Fund is expected to work better than the current situation, where services are contracted by programme type by individual government agencies.

Next steps

22. The Minister for Children and Minister for Social Investment will report back to Cabinet by 30 March 2026.

Aide Memoire – Social Investment Fund Ministers meeting – 9 December 2025

To Hon Karen Chhour, Minister for Children			
Date	9 December 2025	Deadline	9 December 2025
Report number	OT-B-2025-0036	Priority	High
Key contact	Benesia Smith Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment	Contact number	s9(2)(g)(ii)
Security	In-confidence		

Thursday, 9 December 2025, 3:45 – 4:30pm
Room 2.024/2.025, Beehive

Purpose	This aide memoire briefs you for your attendance at the Social Investment Fund Ministerial Group meeting. The Social Investment Fund Ministerial Group provides collective oversight and direction for the Social Investment Fund, including setting investment priorities and objectives, oversight of the contract consolidation process and other community-led pathways, and monitoring performance of the Fund. The meeting will build on decisions from the September 2025 meeting, focusing on advancing social investment through data-driven, outcomes-focused initiatives. Agenda: • Out of Scope • Item 2: Pathway 2 – Contract Consolidation • Out of Scope
Expected Attendees	• Rt Hon Christopher Luxon • Hon Nicola Willis (Chair) • Hon Chris Bishop (Minister of Housing) • Hon Simeon Brown (Minister of Health) • Hon Paul Goldsmith (Minister of Justice) • Hon Louise Upston (Minister of Social Development and Employment) • Hon Karen Chhour (Chair, Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence Ministers Group) • Hon Tama Potaka (Minister for Māori Development, Conservation, and Whānau Ora) • Hon Erica Stanford (Minister of Education). Oranga Tamariki official: • Benesia Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Commissioning and Investment
Background	This is the third meeting of the Social Investment Fund Ministerial Group and is focused on updating Ministers on the three pathways into the Fund: • Out of Scope • Pathway 2 – Contract Consolidation • Out of Scope Out of Scope

[illegible]

Out of Scope

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
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Out of Scope

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Out of Scope

[illegible]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

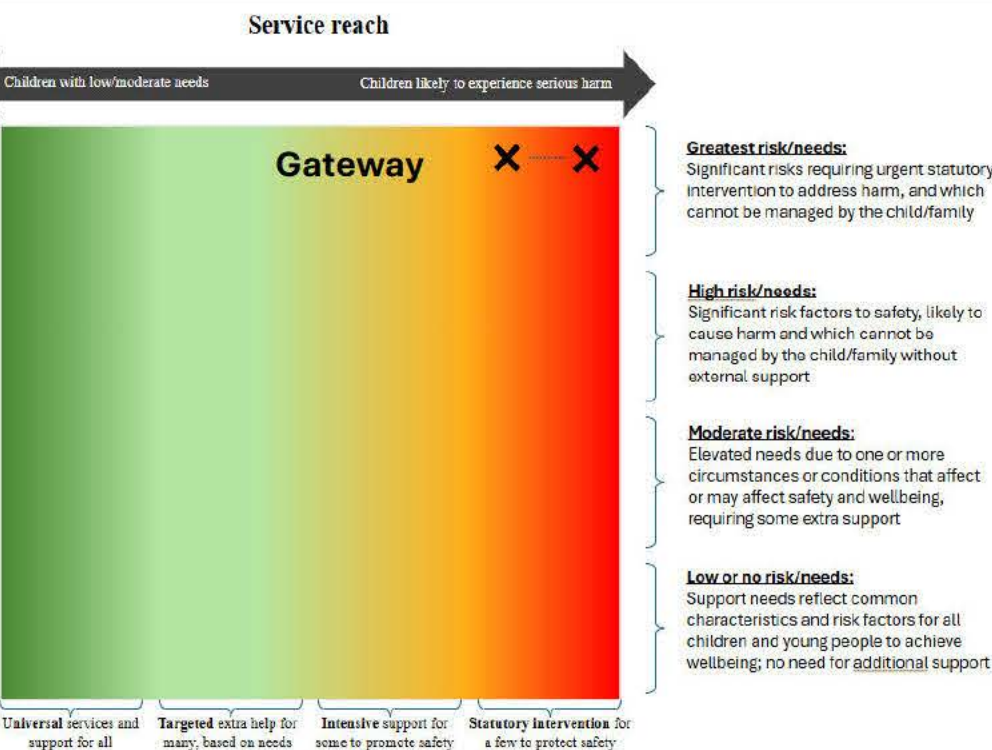
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1. Context

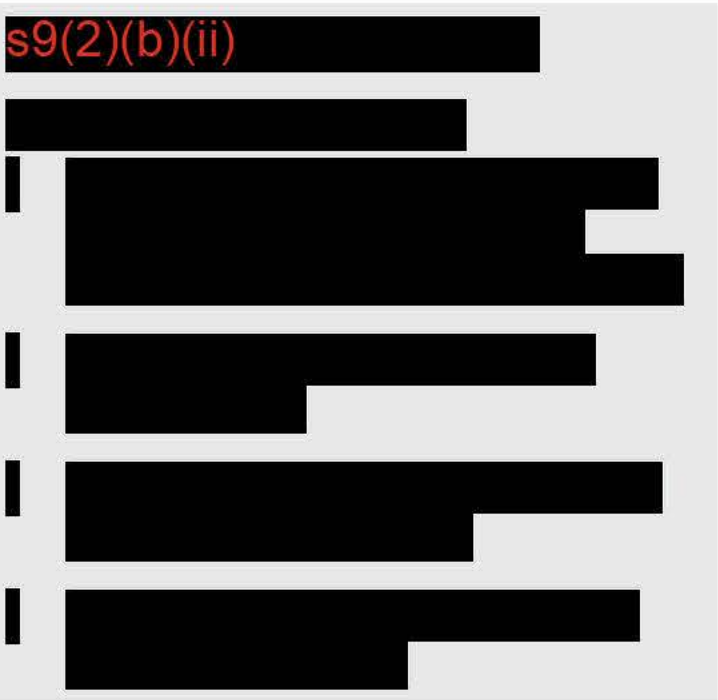
- Gateway is a joint programme between Oranga Tamariki and the Ministries of Health and Education and Health NZ. It provides specialist assessments to identify health, education, disability, social, and wellbeing needs of children involved with Oranga Tamariki, and ensure referral on to necessary follow-up services.
- Delivery of Gateway services relies on strong operational integration between Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Education and Health NZ.
- Oranga Tamariki contributes funding to Health NZ, which undertakes the paediatric assessments for children involved with Oranga Tamariki. Health NZ also contributes funding through its baseline.

How the programme fits into the wider children’s system

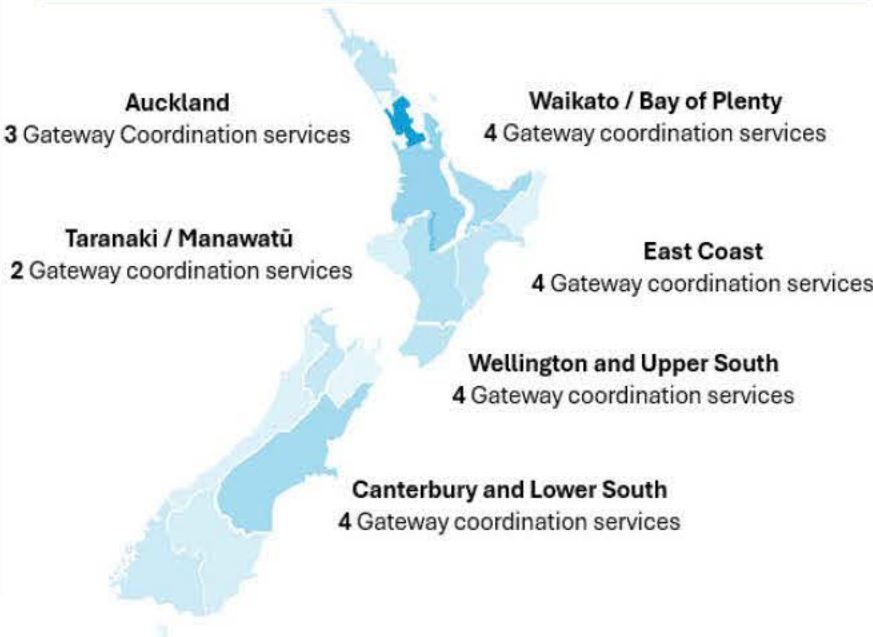


2. Reach and outcomes analysis

- **1,545 children and young people** received a Gateway assessment in 2024/25.
- The Gateway programme has **high reach** – services reach children and young people in the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki, or the cusp of care or youth justice. These children and young people are experiencing the highest risks to their safety and wellbeing, which cannot be managed by the child or their family without external support.
- Analysis of 2023/24 data showed that of the 2,035 referrals that year, 97% of those who received a Gateway assessment are within the Oranga Tamariki priority cohort of care experienced children.
- But delivery is incomplete – only 44% of the priority cohort receive a Gateway assessment, largely due to process and consent barriers.
- Service delivery restrictions to consider:
 - A Gateway assessment requires six months to complete.
 - Parental consent must be given.
 - Many families are already with services.
- Services **contribute to multiple portfolio outcomes** – Health, Whānau Ora and Oranga Tamariki.



21 Gateway Health Assessment Coordination services are delivered across the country



4. Impact analysis

Quantitative data

- Analysis of IDI data shows that children who receive a Gateway assessment tend to access more health and support services post-Family Group Conference, and experience slightly fewer stand-downs:
 - more disability support services referrals (2% difference 24 months post FGC)
 - more paediatric medical appointments (15% difference at 12 months post FGC)
 - higher pharmaceutical dispensing for ADHD (3% difference 24 months post FGC)
 - more secondary mental health and addiction services used (6% difference at 24 months).
- Many other indicators show minimal differences compared to those without Gateway such as GP enrolment, immunisation rates and attendance at child development services appointments.
- Impact cannot be effectively measured due to data gaps and service-specific referral constraints.

International comparisons

- International evidence shows multidisciplinary assessments effectively identify children's needs and strengthen cross-agency collaboration.
- When supported with proper follow-up services, they lead to improved educational, health, developmental, and safety outcomes for children entering or in care.
- Successful implementation requires consistent practice, robust evaluation, and adequate resourcing to ensure assessment insights translate into real improvements.

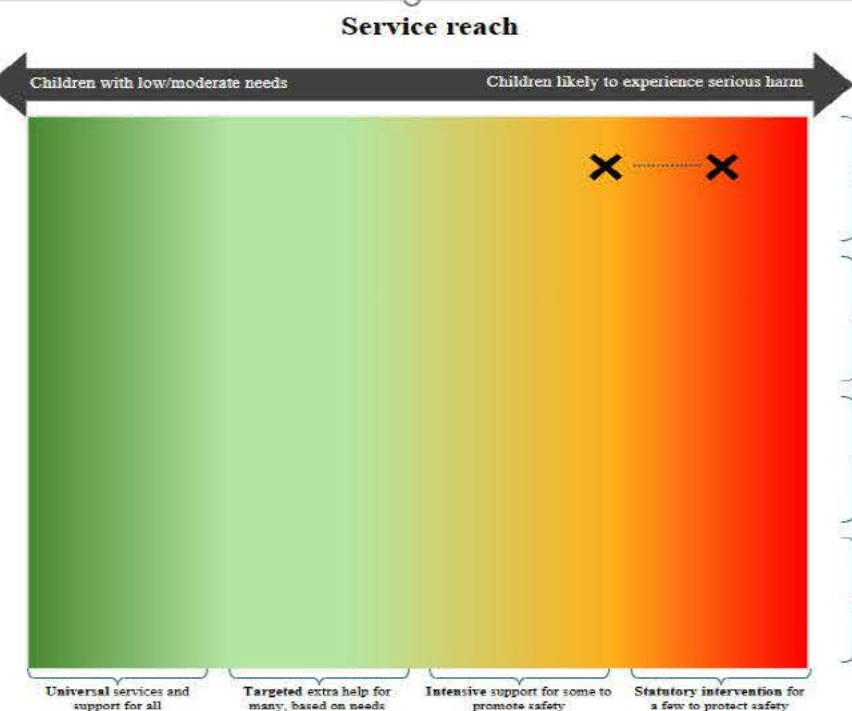
5. Operational factors to consider

- These services contribute to the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive's statutory responsibilities under the National Care Standards clause 7 (immediate needs and long-term needs), clause 13 (health needs assessment process) and clause 35 (support to maintain and improve health).
- Coverage is incomplete, and children not receiving Gateway may have significant unmet needs.
- The current model is not consistently delivered, leading to inequitable access and outcomes.
- The process requires redesign to improve cultural responsiveness, system integration, and follow through.
- Ministers have endorsed the redesigned Gateway Assessment service and agencies are working to test and implement this new model (which will need to include a strengthened focus on outcome measurement), as a key focus area under the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan.
- Effective delivery relies heavily on strong operational integration of Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Education and Health NZ.
- Both Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ contribute funding to the Gateway programme.

1. Context

- The Post-Gateway programme supports children and young people in care or custody or at high risk of entering care.
- In 2011 the Gateway Service was established to identify the needs of children and young people in care or at risk of going into care. It provides a one-off assessment to understand what support they might need.
- When Gateway assessments identify health, disability, mental health, emotional, or behavioural needs, the child or young person may be referred to a Post Gateway Support Service.
- These services aim to keep care arrangements stable and prevent issues from becoming more serious and include:
 - Primary Level Mental Health Services
 - Disability Blueprint Investment Strategy Services
 - Drug and Alcohol Services in Residences.

How the programme fits into the wider children’s system



2. Reach and outcomes analysis

- Post Gateway support services have **high reach** – services are reaching cohorts of children and young people in care or on the cusp of coming into care.
- These are children and young people with the greatest risks and needs. They are experiencing significant risks requiring urgent statutory intervention to address harm, which cannot be managed by the child or their family without external support.
- Delivery is incomplete – only a portion of priority cohort receive services because of eligibility criteria, Gateway requirements, or geographical limitations.
- Services **contribute to multiple portfolio outcomes** – Health, Whānau Ora and Oranga Tamariki.

11 providers deliver Post Gateway support services across the country

Two services are provided in Auckland

- 1 Blueprint Disability service
- 1 Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programme

Seven services are provided in Wellington and Upper South

- 6 Primary Level Mental Health Services
- 1 Blueprint Investment Strategy

Four services are provided in Canterbury Lower South

- 2 Primary Mental Health Services
- 1 Blueprint Investment Strategy
- 1 Alcohol and Drug

Primary level mental health services

- 293 referrals** accepted per year
- 100% are priority cohort (care experienced children)
- 23% total priority cohort reached**
- 83% eligible children reached** (i.e. completed Gateway assessment)

Value for money analysis

Cost-to-serve for 2025/26

- Out of Scope**
-
-

Disability blueprint investment strategy services

- Supports 102 tamariki / rangatahi** annually
- 100% are priority cohort (care experienced children)
- 8% total priority cohort reached**
- 9–14% eligible cohort reached**, due to strict eligibility

Value for money analysis

Cost-to-serve for 2025/26

- Out of Scope**
-
-

Drug & alcohol abuse services in residences

- Supports 309 rangatahi** annually
- 100% are priority cohort (care experienced children)
- 57% total priority cohort reached**

Value for money analysis

Cost-to-serve for 2025/26

- Out of Scope**
-
-

4. Impact analysis

Quantitative data

- Programme impact is not being fully measured due to poor outcome and performance measurement.
- Data is fragmented, delivered variably across regions, and not designed for outcome measurement.
- Quantitative data on impact is limited with no existing formal evaluations of Post Gateway services.
- Current administrative datasets do not capture cultural, relational, or family-level impacts — leading to under detection of positive change.

Qualitative information

- Success is defined collaboratively by children, family, caregivers, providers, and Oranga Tamariki.
- Indicators that Post Gateway services are achieving benefits include improved emotional regulation, placement stability, caregiver confidence, and engagement in school/community.
- Providers report Post Gateway support is reaching complex high needs cohorts and demand is increasing while capacity is constrained.
- Providers report positive outcomes when services are family-centred, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed.

5. Operational factors to consider

- These services contribute to the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive’s statutory responsibilities under the National Care Standards clause 7 (immediate needs and long-term needs), clause 13 (health needs assessment process) and clause 35 (support to maintain and improve health).
- Coverage is incomplete, and children not receiving Gateway may have significant unmet needs.
- The current model is not consistently delivered, leading to inequitable access and outcomes.
- The process requires redesign to improve cultural responsiveness, system integration, and follow through.
- Services are unable to keep pace with general increase in demand and increased complexity of need, highlighting gaps in intensive support, specialist expertise, and integrated wrap around services with the current model.
- Ministers have endorsed the redesigned Gateway Assessment service and agencies are working to test and implement this new model (which will need to include a strengthened focus on outcome measurement), as a key focus area under the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan.
- Effective delivery relies heavily on strong operational integration of Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Education and Health NZ.

6. Material that providers shared

Case Study 1: Better understanding of trauma enables a family to heal

Oranga Tamariki referred a parent for mental health support to transition children back to their care.

Significant progress was made with the parent remaining drug-free, strengthening relationships with their children and providing a safe and stable home environment.

The parent gained better understanding of historical trauma affecting herself and her children. The whānau reconnected with Māori tikanga and are living more closely aligned with cultural values, including the children attending a bilingual unit.

... She has better understanding of the historical trauma experienced by herself personally and the children [...] supporting the children to heal by being emotionally responsive to their needs, while also providing clear consistent boundaries in the home.

Case Study 2: Long term, interconnected child mental health support

Oranga Tamariki referred a young child due to care and protection concerns relating to their safety and wellbeing, including a significant family harm incident.

Subsequent placement of the child with the maternal grandmother meant extensive and long-term support was needed.

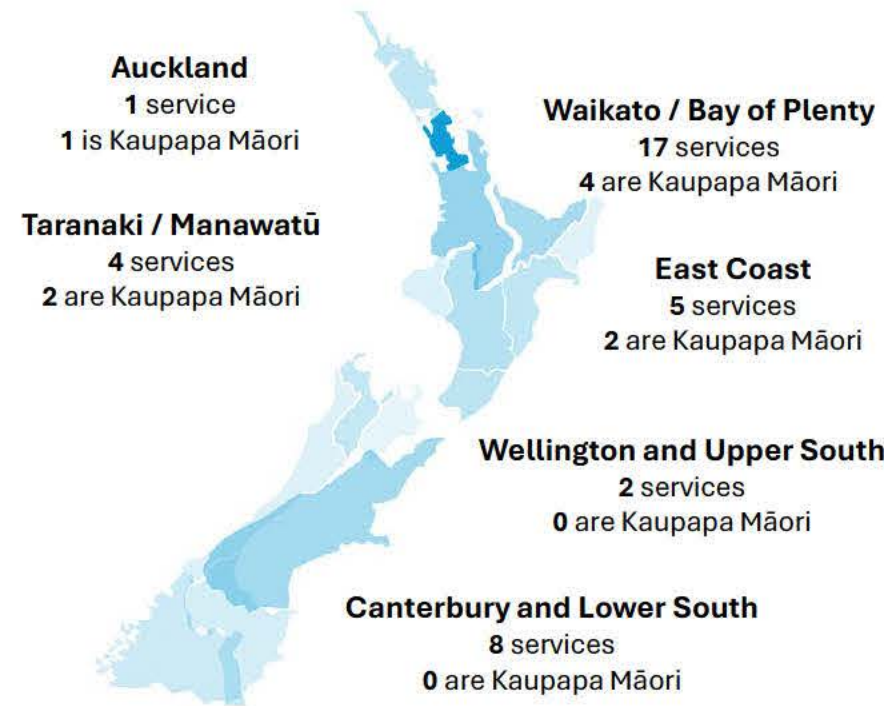
The programme resulted in positive changes in the child’s overall wellbeing, school attendance, and health through participation in social and sporting activities. The caregiver felt well-supported, had a strong understanding of trauma-informed care, and remained committed to caring for them long-term.

... this support continued for nearly three years the grandmother reported a stronger understanding of trauma, its impact on her grandson’s behaviour, and effective strategies for managing his behaviour ...

1. Context

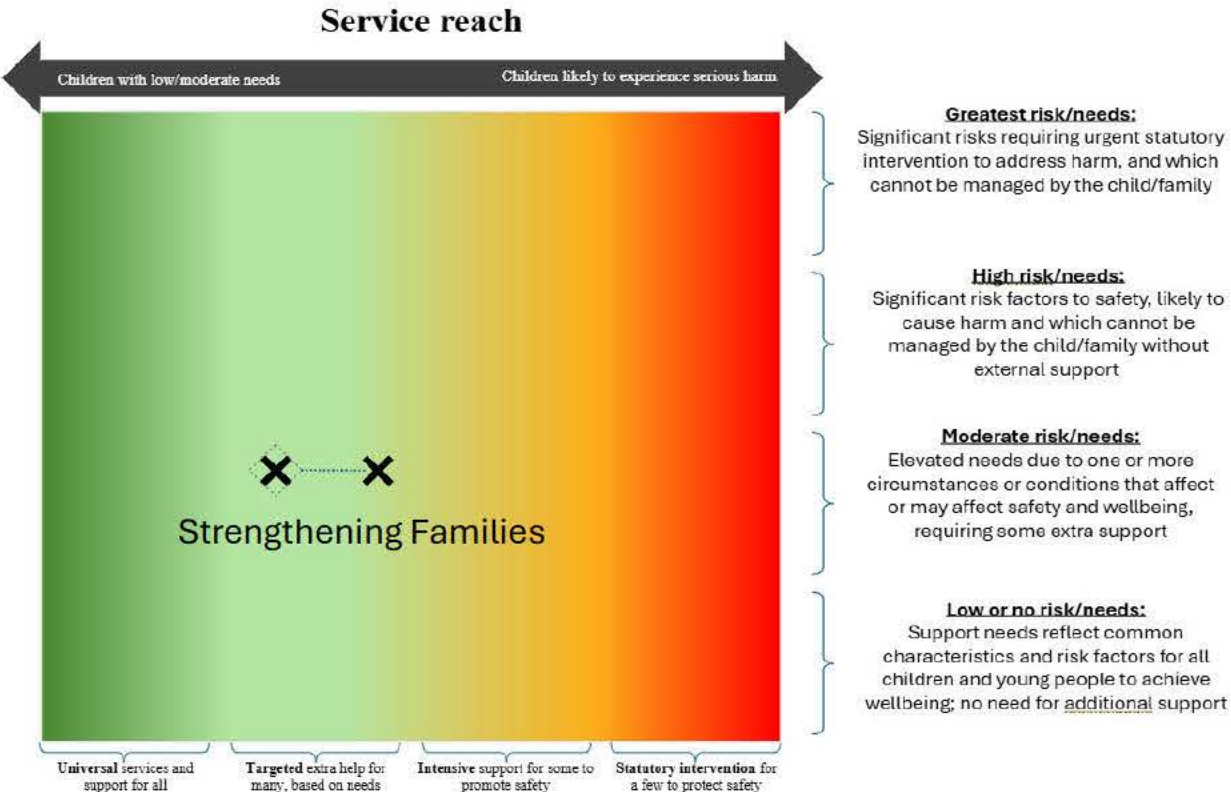
- Strengthening Families provides coordinated support for families with children who need help to access services from government agencies, rather than deliver a standalone service.
- The primary purpose is to help families with multiple issues by providing one ‘place to go’ instead of having to approach several government agencies, thereby providing families with access to coordinated and integrated services and support.

34 providers deliver Strengthening Families services across the country



2. Reach and outcomes analysis

- 1,545 families** were referred to Strengthening Families in 2024/25.
- Programme has **wide reach across the children’s system** – services are mainly reaching children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki. Most of these children have moderate risks/needs where one or more circumstances may be affecting their safety and wellbeing requiring extra targeted support.
- The target priority cohort is likely to be high and complex needs, based on referral criteria, surveys and administrative data for children interacting with the service.
- Currently there is no ability to quantify the number of Oranga Tamariki-involved participants accessing the service.
- Greater targeting is needed to ensure those who need the support receive it, particularly with evidence that some children who are receiving some of the services do not meet the referral criteria.
- Services **contribute to multiple portfolio outcomes** –Health, Whānau Ora, Education, Employment (social connection, improved income and wealth), Family Violence & Sexual Violence and Oranga Tamariki.



How the programme fits into the wider children’s system

3. Impact analysis

Quantitative data

- Strengthening Families has limited quantitative data to demonstrate short or long-term impact.
- There is currently no reporting on long term outcomes or metrics of improvement.
- Variability in delivery makes comparisons and national conclusions difficult.
- Practice and cohort definitions vary and there is overlap with other navigation supports.

Qualitative information

- Families report very high satisfaction and many show short-term improvements when they exit the programme.
- Providers regularly report about micro-impacts that are not seen in the quantitative and population level data such as:
 - a reduction in crisis escalation by bringing agencies together early
 - improved school engagement, especially for neurodivergent children
 - connecting families to health, mental health, addiction, and community supports they would otherwise struggle to access.

International comparisons

- International evidence supports the rationale for Strengthening Families as a coordination mechanism, but evidence of impact is weak.

s9(2)(b)(ii)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

5. Operational factors

- The programme is inconsistently implemented with significant regional variability and gaps in national capability.
- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.
- Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.

6. Key impact themes from material that providers shared

Strengthening Families provides coordinated long-term interventions for families facing multiple and complex challenges that no single agency can resolve

By bringing everyone together, in the same room at the same time, [...] showed her the amount of support she had. She only needed to tell her story once.

Improvements are seen at school and at home for children (notably neurodivergent children) where specialist services come together and engage with families creating shared plans

A family ... were referred ... with issues around the eldest child’s behaviour at home and school, and a possible ADHD diagnosis ... the family gained more tools to manage their son’s behaviour.

Reduced barriers to health as families are connected to GP services, mental health services and addiction support

This women’s journey with SF has been a long, challenging and confronting experience. She still lives with addiction but manages it very well. She works hard every day to meet her, and her family’s needs.

Coordination meetings help to reduce crisis escalation

... We have a close relationship with the police, Oranga Tamariki, iwi providers such as [...] to prevent statutory involvement or escalation.

In different regions, coordinators do very different things

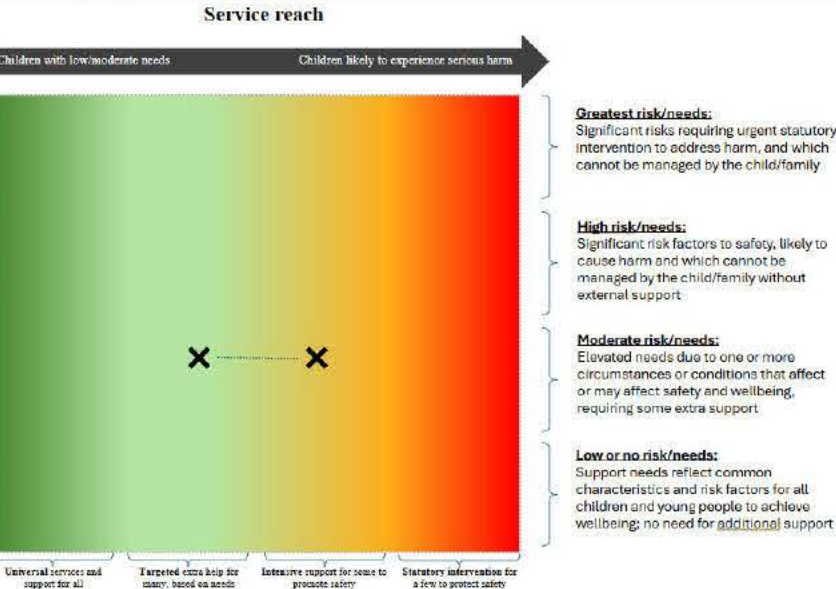
... Our rural locations have no public transport, high rates of people without a driving license and deeply entrenched financial barriers. Families who are otherwise completely disconnected from services are gaining coordinated access to support...

1. Context

- Social Workers in Schools (SWIS), Youth Workers in Schools (YWISS), and Multi-Agency Support Services in Schools (MASSIS) place workers in primary, intermediate and secondary schools to deliver early support to children and youth to enhance wellbeing, strengthen family connections, and address emerging needs before they escalate.
- Target cohort for each service:
 - SWIS: The most at-risk children and their families.
 - YWISS: Vulnerable young people in Years 9-10 at risk of disengagement.
 - MASSIS: Young people in Years 9 – 15 and their families where social or family circumstances are causing the young person to struggle with education, health, mental health or social development.

How the programme fits into the wider children’s system

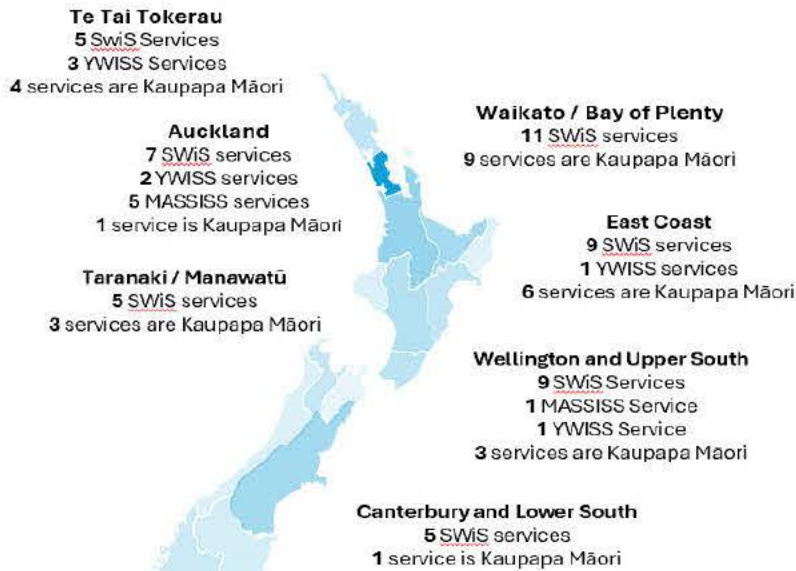
Workers in Schools



2. Reach and outcomes analysis

- 7,184 children and young people were referred to SWIS, YWISS and MASSIS in 2024/25.
- The programme has **wide reach across the children’s system** – services mainly reach children who have not come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki but are experiencing early risk factors to their safety and wellbeing requiring targeted supports.
- The programme mainly supports children and families with moderate safety and wellbeing needs. It also supports some children experiencing high risks to their safety and wellbeing, i.e., those who are on the cusp of care or who have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki.
- While valued by schools and communities, the programme appears to lack clear targeting and measurable outcomes. There is limited visibility at a programme level of who receives the support at the individual level.
- Services **contribute to multiple portfolio outcomes** – Health, Whānau Ora, Education, Family Violence & Sexual Violence, Youth Justice and Oranga Tamariki. Ideal commissioning agency needs to be determined.

There are 51 SWiS, 7 YWISS, and 6 MASSISS services delivered across multiple locations



3. Value for money analysis

SWIS	YWISS	MASSWISS
Cost-to-serve for 2025/26	Cost-to-serve for 2025/26	Cost-to-serve for 2025/26
- s9(2)(i)	- s9(2)(i)	- s9(2)(i)

4. Impact analysis

Quantitative data

- Social Support Workers in Schools has limited quantitative data to demonstrate short or long-term impact. Improved outcome and performance measurement needed to ensure better targeting of cohorts
- External evaluations show no clear population level impact on suspensions, care and protection notifications, or police involvement.
- No significant cohort-wide improvements were found for students attending SWIS schools.
- Their outcomes were generally similar to, or slightly poorer than, those of students in non-SWIS schools, with the largest differences for students experiencing greater socioeconomic disadvantage.

Qualitative information

- Providers regularly report about micro-impacts that are not seen in the quantitative and population level data such as improved emotional regulation, attendance gains and crisis prevention.
- Qualitative evidence indicates the service is valued and people's experiences show meaningful positive benefits.

International comparisons

- International evidence highlights that embedding social workers in schools is valued, improves partnerships and responsiveness, but shows little or no effect on rates of referrals to child protection or children entering cares.

5. Operational factors to consider

- The programme has strong school-based referral pathways, with services closely integrated into day-to-day school operations.
- Need to assess how the programme supports the statutory obligations of the Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive.
- Need to ensure children known to Oranga Tamariki, or at risk of coming to its attention, receive priority in referral pathways.
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities will need to be prioritised, links and integration with other services are important.
- Social Support Workers in Schools contracts have phased expiry dates with some ending in June 2026 and the rest in March and June 2027 but baseline funding is ongoing.

6. Key impact themes from material that providers shared

Improved emotional regulation and emotional literacy for children initially demonstrating severe behaviour and peer relationship difficulties

... I learnt that when people bully you it is just their opinion, I also learnt to how to control myself and things to do to help when times get tough.

Improved school attendance and classroom participation

... Chronic school absences (attendance was sitting at around 37%) ... Would hide in Mum's car, run away from school to Grandma's ... Both children are now attending school with over 85% attendance.

Preventing escalation to crises because SWiS is immediate, in a safe environment, often bridging other service gaps

... Long wait lists for external services meant SWiS is acting as a 'holding' service providing interim support to prevent escalation.

Improved emotional wellbeing through emotional and therapeutic support often addressing family harm and other trauma

... Mum expressed a strong desire to turn her pain into purpose, fostering stability and wellbeing for her tamariki.

SWIS enabled a tamariki to move from chronic school non-attendance (37%) to attending over 85% of the time. SWiS worked with the parent to understand the impact of family harm, and connecting with housing and financial support.

Mum made substantial changes to boundaries at home by no longer allowing family violence to occur [...] the seven-year-old has made substantial progress in this learning and has started participating...

SWiS enabled a family grieving the loss of a child to cancer to move to strengthened family relationships and supported healing.

Emotional and therapeutic supports were established for the three children via individual casework and SWiS programmes to develop emotional regulation, coping skills and self-awareness ... Mum received practical emotional and advocacy support.