

**IMPROVING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR SOCIAL
POLICY:
STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE NEEDS**

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Overview

1. This paper consolidates and extends work already undertaken by the Ministry of Social Policy (MSP) towards identifying strategic social policy knowledge needs. It is the one of three review strands of work aimed at improving the knowledge base for social policy being led by MSP reporting to the Ministers of Social Services and Employment; Research, Science and Technology; and Statistics. It presents a framework and an agreed statement across social sector agencies of high level social policy knowledge needs which will help guide future investments in social research.
2. An analysis based on the strategic social policy knowledge needs framework resulted in seven knowledge theme areas (See Appendix A for a full description of the framework and the analysis). These are, in alphabetical order:
 - The changing nature of work
 - Developing human capabilities – knowledge and skills
 - Disparities between groups – how to change the picture
 - Enhancing positive social outcomes - developmental risk and protective factors
 - Measuring and understanding social well-being
 - Social connectedness
 - Social and cultural identities.

Introduction

3. This paper presents an inter-departmental statement on strategic social policy knowledge needs. The following social sector ministries and departments have been involved in the development of this paper: Education, Health, Housing, Justice, Labour, Pacific Island Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri, Women's Affairs, and Youth Affairs. There has also been consultation with the Ministry of Research, Science, and Technology, State Services Commission, Statistics New Zealand and the Treasury.
4. In addition, a linked initiative has been undertaken by the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology (MoRST) with the external research community (academics and private researchers). MoRST has convened a social science reference group chaired by Professor Sally Casswell, and facilitated a broad list-server discussion group which has provided input and feedback to the strategic knowledge needs exercise.
5. The strategic knowledge needs statement advances previous work undertaken by MSP on the characteristics of key knowledge needs for social policy and emerging social policy trends reported to the Ministers of Social Services and Employment and Research, Science and Technology in March 2001. It has involved regular meetings with social sector officials to develop an agreed strategic framework or template for consideration of our knowledge needs, work-shopping of ideas and on-going consultation and input as these ideas have been refined. The work has also

drawn from related initiatives such as the Social Report 2001 (MSP), the Children's Agenda Initiative (MSP) and the Social Surveys Programme work being led by Statistics New Zealand.

6. The strategic knowledge needs framework provides a context for considering how new knowledge may be able to inform social policy work in the future. The key elements of the framework are:

- i. Social policy outcome domains**

These have been drawn from the strategic social well-being frameworks developed by the Ministry of Social Policy and the Treasury, and in particular, the Social Report 2001 (Ministry of Social Policy) that reports on the social health of the nation.

- ii. Characteristics of the work of government (policy)**

Social policy can have an impact on social outcomes through a range of instruments and can focus on A) maximising likelihood of a positive social outcome (for example, early childhood programmes) or preventing negative social outcomes (for example, drink driving campaign; B) intervening to curb negative social outcomes at an early stage (for example, Family Group Conferences); and C) repair/remedying recurrent/persistent or severe negative social outcomes (for example, programmes in prisons).

Policies need to be relevant to the groups that they focus upon in terms of characteristics such as gender, age, location, ethnicity etc.

- iii. Five key types of knowledge questions**

The five enduring types of knowledge questions that have been identified are:

- describing and monitoring variation in social outcomes
- understanding the multiple causes of variation in social outcomes
- monitoring key causal factors
- analysing what works to change variation in social outcomes: design, delivery and impact of policy
- anticipating the likely impact of future social, socio-demographic and technological trends on social outcomes.

Strategic social policy knowledge needs

The overarching goal of social policy is to ensure and enhance the social well-being for all New Zealanders.

7. *The aim of social (policy) research is to:*
increase knowledge of what social outcomes are desired by New Zealanders and the relative valuation placed on them; improve the measurement of these social outcomes; increase understanding of the causes of social outcomes; and improve understanding of how, including by how much, different government interventions impact on these outcomes.
8. Seven overlapping and inter-related Knowledge Themes Areas (KTAs) have been identified. These KTAs are high level indications of broad areas of strategic interest for social policy knowledge investment. These themes have emerged from an analysis across the strategic knowledge needs framework (including desired social outcomes, understanding multiple causal factors and what works, and emerging trends). The themes have been developed to encourage a cross-sectoral focus and emphasis (rather than simply reflecting government social sector domains). Each KTA is characterised by a descriptive paragraph of the general issues and trends that it encompasses.
9. In addition, examples are also provided of questions that are of strategic interest for social policy for each KTA. These are indications of potential areas of research rather than prescriptive in nature. The knowledge theme areas can be related to the Foundation of Science research and Technology and draft Health Research Council's strategic portfolio outlines for funding

Strategic Social Policy Knowledge Theme Areas (in alphabetical order)

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|------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge theme area | The Changing nature of work Participation in fair, safe and rewarding paid work is fundamental to an individual's psychological and material well-being. Participation in unpaid work can also contribute to personal well-being. In the past 25 years patterns of paid and unpaid work participation have changed markedly. These changes have included the way in which work is spaced over the life cycle, the emergence of multiple career patterns, more complicated interactions between parental and occupational roles, diverse patterns of family and child-care arrangements, and increasing variation in when (age) and how people withdraw from work. New technologies and changing workplace contexts for the future also signal a wider range of workplace arrangements and lifestyle choices in relation to paid and unpaid work. |
| Illustrative examples | General issues include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is the nature of paid and unpaid work changing and what are the consequences for employers, employees, self-employed, unemployed and labour relations both now and in the future?• What changes in family and child-care arrangements have occurred in |

response to increased diversity in paid and unpaid work arrangements?

- How are attitudes towards work, pay, and job satisfaction changing in response to the changing nature of work?
- How does raising employment growth relate to reduced unemployment and involuntary joblessness?
- How does raising productivity and profitability in enterprises relate to bringing about faster growth in real incomes from the labour market?
- How can we ensure that individuals, households and communities are able to adjust positively to changes in the labour market?

Knowledge theme area

Developing human capabilities - knowledge and skills

Developing human capabilities refers to a wide range of activities that can enhance a persons abilities and productivity including the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Acquisition of knowledge and skills refers to the ability to learn through both formal and informal methods (such as reading, self-directed study, institutional-based studies, leisure studies, and general life experiences). It is important that people all acquire basic skill levels in areas such as literacy and numeracy. Knowledge and skills affect people's opportunities to participate in society in a range of ways including everyday activities, cultural participation and employment. The educational achievement needed before entering the workforce has increased over time. In addition, as New Zealand focuses on increasingly becoming a knowledge-based society, there will be increasing emphasis on the ability to use new knowledge in creative and innovative ways to improve the well-being of the nation.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

- How can we measure and monitor relevant knowledge and skill needs in the population?
- What are the factors that hinder or enhance learning and how can we improve levels of educational attainment and literacy?
- How can training and re-training initiatives best be designed to enable people to have the skills and knowledge needed for the workplace (including making most use of on-going technological change)?
- How can we ensure that New Zealand retains and attracts people with the relevant knowledge and skills for economic and social growth?
- Does knowing about and understanding other cultures and perspectives enhance creativity, innovation and positive social outcomes?

Knowledge theme area

Disparities between groups – how to change the picture

Much has been or is being done to describe inequality and disparity between groups within the population regarding factors or outcomes such as income levels, health status, educational achievement, living standards. Key sub-groups in the population for whom disadvantage has been shown include: Māori, Pacific peoples, and women. What is now needed is to gain a better understanding of the linkages across these disparities, and a dynamic understanding of why these disparities exist and how they could be ameliorated through government influenced intervention.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

- What are the persistent and/or inter-generational characteristics of disparities over time and why do they persist?
- What are the underlying multiple causes of different types of disparities and how do they operate?
- What are the factors underlying the impact of urban aggregation and rural decline on disparities, and how do they operate?
- Is it more effective to target interventions on the basis of communities and regions or on individuals and groups?

Knowledge theme area

Enhancing positive social outcomes - developmental risk and protective factors

A person, family or whanau’s life history will have an impact on the choices they make and their social outcomes for the future. It is important to gain a better understanding of: the cumulative effects of factors and when trajectories become embedded, information on markers that point to negative outcomes, and when may be the best points to intervene. Major life transitions such as starting school; leaving home; first employment; commitment to or ending of long term relationships, first child, last child leaving home, and retirement are stressful events that may result in maladaptive responses. Emerging trends show that the progression through these life stages is likely to occur at an older age for many of the population.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

- For “at risk: children, when is it most useful and cost-effective to intervene and how?
- To what extent and how do developmental risk and protection factors differ for Māori, Pacific peoples or children in different familial structures?
- What are the disparities amongst children, the factors underlying these disparities and their impact on current and later life?
- What are the factors that contribute to persistent negative behaviours and what are the markers that indicate intervention is necessary for youth?

Knowledge theme area

Measuring and understanding social well-being

The central focus of social policy is to enhance social well-being for all New Zealanders. Social well-being is dependent upon and encompasses a range of domains including: physical and mental health, safety and security, social connectedness, economic or material standards of living, knowledge and skills, work, human rights, culture and identity and the physical environment. An understanding of the inter-relationships between social (non-market) and economic (market) factors is important for gaining a practical understanding of how government can achieve well-being for all New Zealanders.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

- How are social well-being and economic growth inter-related and how do social and economic factors contribute to overall social well-being?
- What are people's attitudes, expectations and perspectives on their quality of life and how have or do these change over time (for the individual, sub-groups and across age cohorts)?
- What are different ways that social well-being can be measured and monitored?
- What are the causal factors and the relative contributions of these factors in relation to overall social well-being?

Knowledge theme area

Social connectedness

Social connectedness refers to the constructive relationships that people have within families/whanau, iwi, schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, communities and other social groupings or institutions. Social networks, institutions, policies, norms and relationships enable people to act and work together, and build partnerships. Different types of networks at the local, regional and organisational level can be important in contributing to positive social and economic outcomes. Positive networks and relationships can operate as protective factors when risks arise that could lead to negative social outcomes. The constructive relationships that children and young adults have within their families (parents and siblings), in school (peers and teachers) or with others are also key factors in relation to positive outcomes in later life.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

- How can we best measure and what are the mechanisms underlying constructive relationships within families/whanau, iwi, schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities?
- Horizontal and vertical collaboration – what are practices that can assist intervention partnerships at different agency levels (central government, local government and community) or across social sectors to operate most effectively?
- How do parenting practices and social connectedness (neighbourhood, school, peers, and community) contribute to positive childhood (and later adult) outcomes and how can these factors be used to intervene towards ensuring improved outcomes?

Knowledge theme area

Social and cultural identities

Identity is about commonality and variation in social norms, values and common beliefs within and between groups. It is likely that diversity within New Zealand will continue to increase over time. It is important that we continue to develop our understanding of traditions and cultures and their impact within a multi-ethnic and diverse society operating within a bicultural constitutional and structural (treaty) framework.

Illustrative examples

General issues include:

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- How can we maximise opportunities for economic and social growth through diversity?
- How can we minimise the risks of inter-group tension and hostility?
- What are the ranges/clusters of norms, values and beliefs within and between groupings and how have and are these changing over time?
- How is it best to promote diversity and innovation whilst maintaining social cohesion and national unity?
- How can and do we operationalise Crown responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi?

10. Strategic knowledge for social policy development needs to have a cross-sectoral approach to take into account the complex relationships across social domains. We need to gain more information about the persistence of negative social outcomes for individuals, groups and over intergenerational cycles. Further understanding is needed of the complex dynamics of social processes and how people, situations and outcomes develop and change over time. It is also important to relate knowledge about social processes, factors and outcomes to practical knowledge about ‘what works’. Although, perhaps most difficult, knowledge about what works, for whom and when is essential for making cost-effective investment decisions about the design of new, and the assessment of current, government influenced interventions and effective ways of working across sectors and communities in their delivery.

The knowledge investment process

11. Identifying the strategic knowledge needs in the medium to long term is only one of the aspects to be taken into account for making investment decisions about social policy related research. Priorities have not been assigned to the theme areas or the issues within the theme areas because of the need to take into account a range of criteria in making funding decisions.
12. Knowledge investment decisions can best be made with information about the total pool of projects that are requesting funding, information about the pool of funds available and consideration of proposals by a team that comprises research and policy expertise. The recent initiatives by the Health Research Council and Foundation of Research Science and Technology to directly involve policy and

research experts in their funding process signals a recognition of the need for a joint and negotiated approach to the allocation of funding to research projects. Other criteria includes:

- how the project fits alongside existing knowledge (builds on or extends it into new territories versus duplication)
 - the feasibility and scientific merit of the research project
 - the size of the funding pool to be allocated
 - certainty of results versus risky (innovative) approaches
 - opportunity cost – projects which are capitalising on a serendipitous situation (eg linking in with another project, or event)
 - regret principle (what ways could we compensate if this information is needed for the future and we chose not to do this project?)
 - spread across theme areas or portfolios
 - expected middle-level (within theme) contribution to social policy knowledge needs in the future.
13. The result of the current strategic knowledge needs exercise is part of an on-going process where new knowledge assists us to understand what our priorities should be for further knowledge investment. The framework that has been developed in this exercise will be useful as a foundation base for reconsidering our strategic knowledge needs in the future. Further work is to be undertaken to comprehensively map the knowledge gaps within these theme areas as a means of refining our knowledge priorities.

For inquiries contact:
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APPENDIX A

A framework for identifying strategic knowledge needs for social policy

A. Social outcomes

To gain an understanding of the social health of the nation, it is important that government describes and monitors indicators relating to desired social outcomes. An important aspect of this work is the need to focus on the inter-relationship between outcomes and outcome coincidence. The nine key social outcome domains that have been identified in the Social Report 2001 (MSP) are:

- **Physical and mental health**
All people have the opportunity to enjoy long and health lives. Avoidable deaths, disease and injury are prevented. People have the ability to function, participate and live independently in society
- **Safety and security**
People enjoy personal safety and security. Society is free from victimisation, abuse, violence and avoidable injury.
- **Social connectedness (family, friends, and community ties)**
People enjoy constructive relationships with others in their families, whanau, communities, iwi and workplace. They are able to participate in society and have a sense of belonging.
- **Material standards of living**
Everyone has access to adequate income and enjoys a standards of living that means they can participate fully in society and have choice about how to live their lives
- **Knowledge and skills**
All have the knowledge and skills that provide the opportunity to participate fully in society. Lifelong learning and education are valued and supported. New Zealanders have the necessary skills to participate in a knowledge society and become global citizens.
- **Paid work**
Access to meaningful, rewarding and safe employment is available to all
- **Human rights**
Civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, are enjoyed by all. The principles of the Treaty of Waitangi are recognised and incorporated into government decision-making.
- **Culture and identity**
Cultural diversity is fostered. People have the right to express different cultural values and practices and to pass cultural traditions on to future generations. Our

national identity reflects values and aspirations of Māori, European/Pakeha, Pacific peoples and other groups and communities.

- **Physical environment**

A clean and healthy environment is maintained, sustaining nature and meeting the needs of people now and in the future.

The Social Report 2001 uses indicators centred on these social outcomes to provide a high level view of the overall social health of the nation. This initial report is the prototype for an on-going monitoring process. Consultation and review work regarding social outcomes and the indicators used is currently being undertaken to better identify the information needs and the indicators that would be best for monitoring the social health of the nation over time.

Although a review of the social reporting work is yet to be completed, there are some early issues that have been identified through completing the prototype report. The first is the need for regular data that can be used for on-going social reporting. Many of the indicators used in the Social Report 2001 were based on one-off initiatives such as the time-use, child-care, victimisation and living standards surveys which were designed and collected on an ad hoc basis. These surveys did not necessarily gather the most relevant information for social reporting needs. The data required for monitoring outcomes effectively includes broad social information (such as household structure, quality of life, social connections, and time use information) and more specialist social data about sensitive social issues (such as discrimination and victimisation experiences).

In addition, to a need for regular data collection, is the need for indicators that can inform us about persistence of factors (such as length of unemployment), disparity between and variance within sub-groups in the population over time, and can examine issues of outcome coincidence. The need for an integrated programme of social surveys is being addressed by an initiative by Statistics New Zealand who are developing a social surveys programme proposal to be completed by the end of October this year.

Our understanding of some of the social outcome domains is partially developed. Further work is required to better define and measure these areas. This includes indicators in the areas of social connectedness, and social institutions; culture and identity; and subjective indicators about happiness and life quality. In addition, the possibility of aggregate indicators that bring together a range of aspects relating to social well-being may be of interest. The need for consistency of definitions of ethnicity across datasets was also an issue highlighted in the social reporting work.

B. Drivers that influence social outcomes

Cross-portfolio information about causal factors

Research is required to better understand causal factors, inter-relationships, and the relative contributions that these factors make to social outcomes. Although, the full range of factors that have an impact on desired social outcomes is needed to research

causal linkages, of particular importance are those factors that are potentially most useful for government influence or intervention and policy development.

Understanding the factors that influence social outcomes is complex involving relationships across different social outcome areas such as the impact of poor educational achievement on material living standards; and poor material living standards on health, and additional factors that need to be considered such as genetic, and environmental variations. Factors that cause variation in social outcomes include differences in genetic endowment and environmental differences such as:

- Parents/family/whanau
- Peers
- Neighbourhood/community
- Schools
- Societal norms and prejudices
- Natural environment
- Income/resources
- Availability of support services
- Intergenerational cycles
- Attitudes, beliefs and aspirations.

Longitudinal information

To gain a good understanding of the interplay across factors and their influence on social outcomes, dynamic information about change over time for an individual/family/whanau is required. This type of information will allow: a clearer separation of cause and effect, better understanding of the cumulative effects of factors and when trajectories become embedded, information on markers that point to negative outcomes and when may be the best points to intervene. Information would also be required across a variety of domains for one person/family/whanau over time.

One area of work that is currently being investigated is the potential benefits of a New Zealand longitudinal survey of children and young adults. Overseas and domestic research indicates this is where trajectories become embedded, and that prevention is better than cure. MSP is currently undertaking an assessment of the merits of a longitudinal study for improving the knowledge base in relation to gaining a better understanding of circumstances for children and youth and subsequent outcomes.

C. Monitoring key drivers

In addition to monitoring desired social outcomes, it is also important to describe and monitor potential key drivers (such as those described above) for the population as a whole and subgroups of the population. We note that the relative importance of key drivers may vary between sub-groups. This type of information can help to signal progress, or lack of progress, towards desired outcomes and also highlight potential areas of concern for the future. Indicators relating to key influences are included in the Social Report 2001.

D. What works: Design, implementation and impact of policy tools

To be directly useful for social policy work, knowledge that will inform policy design, implementation and an understanding of its impact is a priority. This information will inform policy that aims to achieve the social outcomes identified and ensure that interventions are appropriate and relevant to the groups involved.

In part the information that informs what works, draws from research within the previous three areas of describing and monitoring social outcomes, understanding multiple causal factors and monitoring key drivers. This research highlights how to assist those most in need, what factors could be the focus of government influence or intervention, intervention appropriateness in relation to different groups (eg gender, ethnicity or location) and under what circumstances.

The design of the policy includes consideration of implementation issues, the intervention level (for example individual, family/whanau or community), and entry points (eg Plunket Line, Family Start, general practitioners). As would be expected of central relevance is gaining an understanding of changing individual and group behaviour and the mechanisms by which interventions work (for example, use of incentives).

Research and evaluation that provide information about what interventions work and their level of impact is useful across the social sector as it assists us in assessing the relative merits of intervention strategies. The evaluation of interventions needs to focus on both new initiatives and pilots and also on the assumptions of interventions which may have been in place for some time but which have never been examined. Information about interventions can be used to assess the relative cost effectiveness of different intervention approaches such as the use of prevention in comparison with interventions that curb negative social behaviour and outcomes.

E. Emerging trends and socio-demographic change

Consideration of what may be the emerging social policy issues for the future is important for examining strategic knowledge needs for social policy. The following list signals major changes likely to influence the social policy landscape over the next twenty years. We have ranked them from the most certain first to the most speculative last.

- **Demographic change**

An ageing population. The rise in the proportion of the older population will place pressures on labour force participation rates across the spectrum, as workers become relatively more scarce. An increasing proportion of multi-ethnic people in the working-age population and a decline in single ethnic group people. This trend will particularly impact strongly on established minority populations like Māori and Pacific peoples. An increase in the cultural diversity in the population and the number of small ethnic groups due to immigration policy. Declining fertility for the overall population, and increasing life expectancy.

- **Urban aggregation and regional decline**

Population shifts with a general continued expansion of main cities and decline in rural regions. At the same time the ageing population will cause population growth in regions where climate and amenities are good and that are adjacent to the major urban centres where the relatives of the retired are likely to live.

- **Life transitions**

Greater education before entering workforce, the extension of pre-school education as pressures continue for parental involvement in the labour market, relationships and children at older ages, retirement later in life and less discrete than in the past.

- **International relations and globalisation**

Growing exchanges of people, goods, capital and ideas with the rest of the world. Increases in the international mobility of skilled labour, and fluctuations in levels of inflow and outflow of those with high skills.

- **Technological change: knowledge industry, biotechnology, medical**

Ongoing technological change driving economic growth which is consistent with New Zealand's fairly modest performance of the last half of the last century. Technological change is likely to be particularly pronounced in the computing, biotechnical and medical areas.

- **Inequality**

Continued inequality in personal and household income and wealth perpetuated by a variety of inter-generational mechanisms. Ethnic group disparities in market outcomes will continue to slowly decline in the absence of major recessions due to changing social attitudes, educational catch-up, and inter-ethnic intermarriage.

- **Environmental change and sustainable development**

Global warming will change climate patterns and agriculture. Emissions targets will change the pattern and form of industry. The desire for sustainable development could have major impacts on patterns of resource use.

- **Role of women**

The disparity between men and women in higher education will diminish and women will increasingly move into high paid and high status occupations previously disproportionately occupied by men. The gender pay gap will continue to slowly close. There will be an increasing demand for quality child-care and workplace flexibility as a consequence of social changes and the growing relative scarcity of labour.

- **The workplace environment**

Changing skill sets required and a need for on-going training and up-skilling in employment. A greater demand for flexibility in the workplace to co-ordinate the demands of home and work. A greater consideration of issues of job quality and job satisfaction.

- **Continuing restitution for Māori and Māori development**

The continuance and likely completion of Treaty settlements will provide iwi with an economic base allowing them the potential to develop and more effectively meet the needs of their members. Māori as a language of every-day use will continue to be uncommon.