



CHILD AND YOUTH STRATEGY
REVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT OF TARGETED
ENGAGEMENTS

AUGUST 2022

ATA GLANCE

Between June and July 2022, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) engaged with 40 individuals representing 15 non-government stakeholder organisations and individuals, science advisors, child poverty experts and members of the (former) Strategy Reference Group to seek their input into the review of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy).

We shared our thinking on five priority areas of focus and four key enablers and asked if stakeholders considered these to be the right areas to focus on to deliver the most value for children and young people.

Across all engagements, we heard the following cross-cutting themes:

There is widespread support for the vision of the Strategy, but a perception of limited delivery to date.

Those we engaged with were positive about many aspects of the Strategy and there was strong support for the proposed five priority areas. There was also support for the identified need to prioritise effort and to focus on effective implementation so that the Strategy might “reach those on the ground”.

Equity is paramount to wellbeing.

Most stakeholders saw equity as the key factor that should drive investment, accountability and prioritisation of effort. Stakeholders felt we are and should be measured by our disparities rather than our averages. Material wellbeing, mental wellbeing, access to education and outcomes for whānau Māori, Pacific children and children with disability were raised in connection with the need for government to address inequity if it seeks to improve outcomes for all.

Communities and whānau have valuable networks and strengths and want to contribute these to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Stakeholders described communities as ready and able to contribute but often slowed down by the ways in which agencies work, and work together. They saw communities, and children and young people themselves, as the keepers of the knowledge and the solutions, and wanted opportunities to be represented and to lead change.

Government needs to work differently to support the implementation of the Strategy.

Those we engaged with thought the strength of the Strategy lay in its ability to engage everyone with a collective purpose, but that turning this support into meaningful change requires a different way of working. They sought more inclusive and effective governance and representation, more efficient and collaborative government agencies, services and contracting, and they placed fulfilment of the Crown’s obligations to te Tiriti o Waitangi as critical to the success of the Strategy.

These findings largely corroborate the findings of earlier engagements and the 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation and add the voices of stakeholders less represented in prior engagements. We are grateful to the individuals, organisations and the communities they represent for contributing their time and their insights to support the Strategy to best fulfil its vision for children and young people.

BACKGROUND

Context for the review

New Zealand's first Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy was launched in August 2019, setting out a vision of New Zealand as the best place in the world for children and young people.

Under the Children's Act 2014, the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction must complete a review of the Strategy, in consultation with the children's Ministers, within three years of its adoption (August 2022).

Evidence to date suggests there is broad and strong support for the vision and outcomes of the Strategy. However, not everyone sees themselves or their work reflected in the framework and there is still much to do to see real change in practice.

The 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation of the development and implementation of the strategy concluded there is a need to enable greater government agency and community buy-in, drive (rather than align) government efforts, and take a stronger and more explicit focus on equity for tamariki and rangatahi Māori. It also identified a need to streamline the number of Strategy monitoring and reporting arrangements, to improve communication to the public and make key information more accessible.

Therefore, the review is focussed on:

- how best to give effect to the Strategy outcomes – the policies, Programme of Action, including supporting communities to deliver
- how progress against the Strategy is measured – the indicators and measures, and streamlining the monitoring and reporting arrangements
- how implementation of the Strategy is governed
- how the Strategy could better integrate Māori concepts of wellbeing.

Review inputs (bold denotes subject of this Report)

- Reports and material from original engagement on the purpose, desired outcomes and potential scope of the Strategy
- Prior engagements including with Social Sector Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) and review of themes from engagements undertaken with children and young people since the launch of the Strategy
- Findings from the 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation which assessed the development and implementation of the Strategy in its first three years
- Strategy Annual Reports describing the state of wellbeing 2019/20 and 2020/21
- Strategy Monitoring Reports describing progress of Programme of Action initiatives
- **Strategy review engagement with non-government stakeholders**
- **Strategy review engagement with science advisors and other child wellbeing experts**
- Strategy review engagement with children and young people
- Strategy review engagement with community-led project leads
- Feedback on findings and recommendations from child and youth wellbeing stakeholder agencies feedback.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

Kanohi ki te kanohi engagement

The Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group at DPMC (CWPRG) engaged with stakeholders representing the following non-government organisations, groups and experts.

- Office of the Children’s Commissioner
- Children’s Convention Monitoring Group:
 - UNICEF New Zealand
 - Save the Children New Zealand
 - Children’s Rights Alliance
 - Human Rights Commission
- Peak Bodies:
 - Barnardos
 - New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services
 - Ara Taiohi
 - Plunket
- Salvation Army
- Oranga Tamariki Pacific Panel
- Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Group
- Pou Tangata
- Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies:
 - Pasifika Futures
 - Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu

Written engagement

We also invited feedback via email from the following stakeholders/groups:

- Original Strategy Reference Group
- Government science advisors
- Child poverty experts

Additional engagements

The CWPRG also engaged with:

- children and young people, about how we can more creatively engage with children and young people, particularly those less likely to participate, and how we can create more enduring and sustainable ways of supporting child and youth voice to influence change.
- communities and stakeholders on place-based initiatives, facilitated through The Southern Initiative.

As the focus of these engagements differed, these engagements are out of scope for this report and are described in associated Review material.

WHAT DID WE SHARE?

We outlined the key findings of the 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation and our recent monitoring data, and how this had led us to focus the review on the best means of achieving the Strategy's outcomes.

We shared our thinking on five priority areas of focus and four key enablers and asked if stakeholders considered these to be the right areas to focus on to deliver the most value for children and young people.

METHODOLOGY FOR DATA CAPTURE

Participants

The CWPRG met with 40 people representing 15 non-government organisations, groups, government science advisors and the former Strategy Reference Group.

Data capture

Hui were conducted as open conversations with context provided by the CWPRG and the proposed 5 priority areas and 4 enablers described.

For each hui, a member of the CWPRG made a written record, these were sense checked with other CWPRG attendees and sent to external attendees for their review and endorsement.

Analytical approach

We used thematic analysis to identify topics, ideas, concepts and sentiments from each engagement and identified concordance and discordance by stakeholder type. Codes were themed and sense-checked with the CWPRG review team.

Because of the semi-structured nature of the hui, much of the feedback sits around the key questions posed (are these the right priorities and enablers), but other themes emerged, and these were also analysed.

Some prioritisation is placed on themes that occurred most frequently, but as this was not an extensive engagement, this should not be over-emphasised.

Gaps and caveats

While all stakeholders received the same introductory material, the follow up questions and direction of the discussion differed depending on stakeholder perspectives and priorities. There are also likely to be differences in the nature of written versus face-to-face feedback. To mitigate this, stakeholders who participated in hui were given the opportunity to review CWPRG meeting notes and amend if there were omissions or misrepresentations.

Different stakeholders are likely to have interpreted and responded to questions differently as they represent different groups and have different interactions with the Strategy and with government. Different groups are likely to have experienced different degrees of comfort to express frank views or introduce topics outside of the questions posed.

This engagement primarily focused on non-government stakeholders. Other inputs to the review consider the experiences and views of government stakeholders, of communities and of children and young people themselves. Where applicable, themes emerging from this engagement have been contextualised to the findings of other inputs to the review.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Across all engagements, the following themes emerged:

**There is widespread support for the vision of the Strategy,
but a perception of limited delivery to date.**

Equity is paramount to wellbeing.

**Communities and whānau have valuable networks and strengths
and want to contribute these to improve outcomes
for children and young people.**

**Government needs to work differently
to support the implementation of the Strategy.**

EXPERIENCE OF STRATEGY TO DATE

- Stakeholders support the principles, development process and vision of Strategy.
- Stakeholders were less positive about Government progress in improving wellbeing.
- Stakeholders report minimal reach of the implementation of the Strategy outside of central government.

This engagement corroborates earlier findings:

- The 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation identified that the Strategy framework is considered by most stakeholders to be an easy-to-use framework for improving child wellbeing. It found that outside of central government stakeholders supported the aspirational nature of the Strategy, its vision, and its principles, but reported limited awareness of the Strategy in their networks.
- The 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation also captured central government stakeholder perspectives that the Strategy is not yet driving policy and investment in areas other than child poverty reduction.
- SSPA Workshops in 2022 identified that social sector providers appreciated the aspirational focus, but hadn't seen the Strategy being brought to life, or seen tangible change for families yet.

This engagement adds:

- An understanding that similar sentiments are held by community and non-government stakeholders.

AREAS OF POLICY PRIORITY

All stakeholders supported prioritisation of focus of policy efforts. Most stakeholders supported the proposed priority areas, but some felt they were still too broad to drive meaningful progress.

The following priority areas were specifically endorsed:

- Mental wellbeing including maternal mental health
- Poverty
- Racism & discrimination.

The following areas were also raised as important to stakeholders:

- Violence, abuse & neglect
- Retention in education.

Stakeholders identified the following overarching principles with regard to selecting and driving priorities:

- Addressing disparities/inequities
- Understanding and addressing enduring impacts of COVID-19
- Taking a “life course” approach that better recognises the significance of ‘ages and stages’ and different transition points for children and young people
- Being clear on what success looks like for whānau
- Focus on enhancing protective factors, not just ameliorating risk factors.

This engagement corroborates earlier findings:

- The original Programme of Action priorities remain relevant and important to stakeholders engaged through multiple avenues.
- 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation stakeholders felt the approach to setting out and monitoring the Programme of Action was too broad to be effective in driving change.
- SSPA Workshops in 2022 identified access to mental health supports, child poverty and re-engagement in education post-COVID-19 as priorities for future work.

This engagement adds:

- The near unanimous backing for supporting holistic mental wellbeing as a central and critical theme.
- That participation in education is seen as a priority with complex drivers and broad positive impacts on wellbeing.

WAYS OF WORKING

Much of the feedback centred around ways of working, in particular governance and community leadership. Governance, leadership, the role of communities and the place of Te Tiriti were generally discussed together but have been separated here for clarity:

Government working better to improve outcomes:

Stakeholders reported a lack of clarity of relationships between government strategies and a need for better alignment.

Stakeholders asked for:

- government to join up better across agencies
- government to work differently with communities
- government to support NGOs to play a greater role in implementing the Strategy
- greater focus on the role of local government
- greater visibility of children and young people, and their rights, in all government policymaking and work programmes.

Government honouring Te Tiriti obligations:

Stakeholders wanted to hold government to account for its role in being a good treaty partner, and wanted to see a partnership enacted at all levels of the Strategy. They raised:

- the role of tangata whenua in governance, direction setting, investment decisions
- Te Ao Māori needs to sit at same level as the Pakeha world view, not incorporated
- whānau as the unit for policy and investment, a child doesn't sit in isolation
- enacting Kaupapa Māori – by Māori, for Māori – not the role of government to do this, but must give equal power, giving a seat at the table.

Government enabling communities:

Stakeholders saw communities as fundamental to delivering the Strategy, and a core locus of knowledge and power that could be harnessed to improve outcomes, if they were sufficiently resourced.

Common themes across all stakeholder groups included:

- the desire for community leadership, governance, self-determination
- the urgent need for simpler and more stable community resourcing
- leveraging existing relationships and successes
- supporting community leadership
- the need to understanding wellbeing needs and aspirations in the context of the child, their community and their connection to place.

This engagement corroborates earlier findings:

- Stakeholders want government to work more effectively. Engagement facilitated by The Southern Initiative and the Auckland Co-design Lab reported that local organisations

currently leading whānau centred community led approaches felt the way government works is a significant constraint to their activity.

- Te Tiriti is foundational to the Strategy. Most Māori 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation participants considered that genuine transfer of power and resources had not yet occurred. There was a strong call for the government to capitalise on the expertise and networks of iwi and other Māori organisations by transferring decision making powers, tools and resources to iwi to lead tamariki and rangatahi-focused initiatives.
- Communities consider themselves the unit of change and want to be supported and resourced to drive change. Stakeholders at SSPA Workshops in 2022 emphasised the inherent strengths, resourcefulness and willingness of communities, whānau and hapū, and identified that effective collaboration with government allows providers and communities to show what they can do. Social sector providers described the COVID-19 pandemic response as demonstrating what is possible through collaborative networks, local leadership, and increased agency flexibility and trust, and sought this as the norm.

This engagement adds:

- The coordinated voices of communities and providers involved in transformational change at the community level.
- Feedback on the specific issues faced by community wellbeing initiatives in their engagement with government.

MEASUREMENT, MONITORING & REPORTING

Stakeholders who discussed their views on this enabler supported the proposal to improve the ways in which the Strategy measures and reports outcomes and monitors action.

They identified measurement, monitoring and reporting as key levers for accountability, and for supporting two-way information flow between communities and government.

They supported the holistic intent of the current indicator framework but sought to take less of a deficit approach to measuring and reporting wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. They sought investment and focus on the development and use of robust strengths-based measures, and greater priority to hearing and representing a wider range of voices.

Science advisors additionally raised the need for systematic evaluation and review, and to ensure initiatives and investments are informed and improved by robust evaluation and evidence. They sought to better leverage existing evidence and to also develop the evidence base as to the determinants of wellbeing.

Other topics raised, related to measurement, monitoring and reporting included:

- making better, more frequent and more detailed data available to non-government organisations and communities
- incorporating Te Ao Māori concepts of wellbeing into measurement and reporting
- working to understand the impact of the Strategy on the highest need families
- seeking a focus on Pacific children and young people in data and reporting, not grouping with Māori
- measuring what matters to children and young people
- capturing and reflecting the voices and experiences of children and young people.

This engagement corroborates earlier findings:

- The 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation found that participants considered that some of the indicators and measures are considered to be well constructed, useful, and based on robust scientific evidence. Other measures, particularly those relating to early childhood development, educational achievement, and the experience of children younger than 12 years old, were reported to be either missing or not measuring what matters. Many of the indicators were also identified as being deficit focused, and stakeholders considered there is a need to include more strengths-based measures that focus on protective factors.
- Māori 2022 Strategy Process Evaluation participants also considered the lack of measures that examine institutions' effectiveness for Māori, and their capacity and capability to respond to needs of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau was a critical accountability gap.

This engagement adds:

- A greater understanding of the data needs of non-government organisations and communities, and the role the Strategy measurement frameworks can play in supporting locally driven wellbeing initiatives.
- The voices of Pacific, disability communities, rainbow communities and the perspectives of children and young people themselves.

ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY

Some stakeholders sought to represent the views and perspectives of children and young people. They related the need for better mechanisms for child and youth leadership and greater need for the voices of children in the work of government.

They emphasised the need for sustainable engagement and to ensure young people benefit from engagement, not just government. They noted the strengths and contributions of young people in many areas and discussed the idea of youth representation in governance.

They also emphasised the need to consider the heterogeneity of children and young people's perspectives, voices and barriers to participation, and raised the intersectionality of identities meaning there cannot be a 'one size fits all' in terms of engagement and representation.

Direct engagement with children and young people was undertaken as part of the Strategy Review, with findings published alongside this report.