



# Report

**Date:** 7 August 2024      **Security Level:** IN-CONFIDENCE  
**To:** Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Child Poverty Reduction  
**File Reference:** REP/24/7/642

---

## Confirming the scope of the child harm priority in the refreshed Child and Youth Strategy

### Purpose of the report

- 1 This briefing seeks your direction on the scope of the child harm priority in the refreshed Child and Youth Strategy (the Strategy). This will enable us to progress work to identify potential areas of focus and appropriate measures of child harm and provide a clear basis for our engagement with other agencies with a role in this priority.

### Executive summary

- 2 Officials are undertaking work to refresh the Strategy, with 'reducing child harm' identified as a priority. There is a robust evidence base and strong stakeholder support for this priority.
- 3 The types of harm experienced by children and young people are wide ranging. At the most serious end of the spectrum, they include physical, sexual and mental abuse, neglect, and violence. Broader types of harm include exposure to harmful material (particularly online), bullying, non-intentional injuries, and racism and discrimination.
- 4 The way in which child harm is scoped in the Strategy has implications for the range of 'harms' that are considered within the Strategy, the types of interventions that are prioritised, and the measures used to assess progress.
- 5 It also has implications for the interface between the Strategy and other direction-setting documents and work programmes, particularly the second Te Aorerekura

- 6 Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction officials propose a narrow focus for the child harm priority in the refreshed Strategy, centred on the prevention of abuse and neglect experienced by children in the context of the family and whānau. While relatively narrow, the benefits of focusing on a small subset of types and domains of child harm domains are that it:
  - has a stronger focus on children and young people with greater needs (those at risk of experiencing the most serious forms of harm)
  - provides greater 'line of sight' to the Government's targets, particularly the youth offending target.
  - is consistent with your intention that the Strategy identifies clear priorities, and specific areas for action and investment.
  - supports a tighter measurement focus – a broad approach would most likely require the identification of a wider range of measures to capture the different types of child harm.
- 7 This scope would exclude policies and activities focused on strengthening the Oranga Tamariki care and protection system (i.e. statutory responses to harm once it has occurred). Rather, it would focus on preventing and addressing early risk factors and strengthening protective factors for children at risk of coming into the care system.
- 8 A focus on preventing child abuse and neglect is consistent with the steer from Ministers at the Child and Youth Ministerial Group meeting on 1 August.
- 9 We note that a narrow definition of child harm runs counter to the feedback received through stakeholder consultation, which supported a broad scope to be adopted in the Strategy. Agency feedback is more mixed and recognises the potential benefits of taking a narrow approach. Feedback also highlighted the inter-connected, complex and cumulative impact types of child harm, and their common underlying drivers.
- 10 There may be opportunities for the Strategy to acknowledge the broader dimensions of child harm and highlight relevant work being progressed across government to address them. Additionally, a broad-based prevention focus in the Strategy, across the three priorities, has the potential to address key drivers of other forms of child harm.



## Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** that the scope of child harm priority in the Strategy affects the range of policies and interventions that fall within the scope of the Strategy, potential areas for further work, and the indicators and measures included in the measurement framework  
**Noted**
- 2 **note** that targeted stakeholder consultation indicated support for child harm to be broadly scoped, and a focus on actions to prevent child harm by addressing underlying drivers  
**Noted**
- 3 **note** that agency engagement highlighted a range of perspectives, reflecting the benefits and disadvantages of both a narrow and broad scope for the child harm priority in the Strategy  
**Noted**
- 4 **note** that an important consideration is the respective roles and focus of the Strategy, second Te Aorerekura Action Plan and Oranga Tamariki Action Plan, with the need to ensure clarity and complementarity across them  
**Noted**
- 5 **note** that officials consider that a narrow scope for the child harm priority is more aligned with your intentions for the Strategy, including supporting a coordinated approach to investment in the priorities, and a streamlined measurement framework  
**Noted**
- 6 **agree** to a narrow scope for the child harm priority in the Strategy  
**Agree / Disagree**
- 7 **agree** that the scope of the child harm priority in the Strategy should be defined as 'preventing child abuse and neglect within the context of family / whānau'.  
**Agree / Disagree**

- 8 **note** that, based on your response to recommendations (6) and (7) above, we will progress work to draft the refreshed Strategy, and work with relevant agencies to identify potential areas of focus for further action, investment and reprioritisation with respect to child harm.

**Noted**



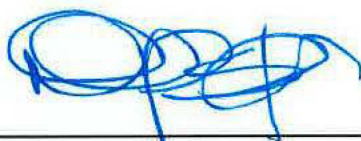
08/08/24

---

Hannah Kerr  
Director  
Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group

---

Date



---

Hon Louise Upston  
Minister for Child Poverty Reduction

---

20240810  
Date



## Background

- 11 In December 2023, you indicated your intention to refresh the current Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy ('the Strategy') [DPMC-2023/24-569 refers]. You have also indicated your intention to retain the current outcomes in the Strategy, one of which is "children are loved, safe and nurtured" [DPMC-2023/24-731 refers], and identified three priorities for the refreshed Strategy: supporting families and children in the first 2000 days, reducing material hardship in childhood, and preventing child harm.
- 12 You have indicated that you want the Strategy to communicate the Government's priorities and actions to improve child and youth outcomes in line with its priorities. You also intend the refreshed Strategy to provide a framework that supports a coordinated, evidence-based approach to investment, aligned with Government priorities and targets, and with a focus on prevention and early intervention (DPMC-2023/24-569 refers).

### **It is important to be clear about the scope of the child harm priority in the Strategy**

- 13 The scope of the child harm priority will influence the work programmes, policies and interventions that come under the Strategy, potential areas of focus for further work and / or investment, and the indicators and measures used to monitor and report on the Strategy. We are seeking your direction on this now, so we can undertake further work with other agencies to identify potential areas of focus within this priority and confirm appropriate indicators and measures.
- 14 As identified in an A3 considered by Child and Youth Ministers at their meeting on 8 May (attached as **Appendix 1**), child harm can be cover a spectrum of experiences including direct physical harm (abuse, neglect, sexual violence), exposure to harm (family violence, online abuse), self-harm, peer-to-peer harm (e.g. bullying), and the discrimination, racism and stigma experienced by groups including Māori, Pacific, disabled, and rainbow children and young people. Harm can occur in different settings, including families, institutions and online.
- 15 All these forms of harm can negatively impact the physical, mental and emotional health and development of children and young people, with implications across the life-course. Many of them are underpinned by common and connected underlying drivers and risk factors, including low income, housing instability, community disadvantage, and parental alcohol abuse, substance abuse, mental illness, or incarceration. Children and young people at greatest risk of experiencing abuse, neglect and violence, are also more likely to be at greater risk of other forms of harm. They often experience concurrent and compounding harms in different settings, with cumulative impacts on their long-term outcomes.

- 16 The current Strategy refers to *"the right to be safe and protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation"*. Addressing 'racism, discrimination and stigma' was one of the four priorities identified as the focus for Strategy implementation following the 2022 Strategy review, with work being progressed as part of the development of the National Action Plan against Racism<sup>1</sup> (led by the Ministry of Justice).

## **Stakeholders supported a broad scope for the child harm priority in the Strategy**

- 17 As part of the targeted consultation process to support the refresh of the Strategy, we sought stakeholder views about the scope of the child harm priority.
- 18 Feedback from stakeholders indicated support for child harm to be broadly scoped to encompass a range of types of harm, drivers of harm and responses to it. There was strong recognition of the long-term adverse impacts of harm experienced in childhood, particularly for mental health and offending behaviours, and the perpetuation of family violence across generations.
- 19 There was support for a life course lens on child harm, recognising that different types of harm are more prevalent at particular periods across infancy, childhood and adolescence. Stakeholders supported a focus on actions to prevent child harm by addressing the underlying drivers (e.g. alcohol and drugs, housing stress) and supporting parents and carers to build loving and nurturing relationships with their children. Children and young people in particular, highlighted the importance of young children feeling safe and loved, and that some parents need help with the skills and resources to provide a safe and nurturing environment.
- 20 Many stakeholders noted the need for better data on the incidence of harm experienced by children and more coordinated government action to address child harm. Some expressed concern about the possibility of a reduced focus on supporting youth mental wellbeing and addressing racism, discrimination and stigma.
- 21 Fuller information on stakeholder perspectives on child harm and the other priorities can be found in the summary provided to you on 24 July [REP/24/7/685 refers].

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice officials have advised that they are currently finalising the actions in the National Action Plan Against Racism, for sign-off by the Chief Executives of relevant agencies.

## Children's agencies have differing views about the scope of the child harm priority in the Strategy

- 22 We have also engaged with government agencies with a role, expertise and interest in child harm to understand the data, evidence, current activities and opportunities in this area. This included testing the potential scope of child harm that should be included in the Strategy.
- 23 Some agencies supported a broad definition and scope for child harm within the Strategy, noting the complex and widely varying experiences of harm at the individual level, common underlying drivers and the cumulative impacts of a broad range of harms that people can experience across childhood in different settings. Others supported a narrow scope, focused on prevention, to complement rather than duplicate the likely areas of focus picked up in other strategic documents, such as the second Te Aorerekura Action Plan and the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan.
- 24 Agency feedback also noted that the scope of the child harm priority in the Strategy should be informed by the purpose of the Strategy, noting that a narrow scope aligns better with the role of the Strategy as a framework to support prioritised, coordinated and evidence-based investment decisions in specific cross-cutting areas.
- 25 Agencies identified a range of activities and work programmes underway to prevent, reduce and respond to child harm including:
- funding for family violence and sexual violence services
  - parenting support services and whānau-centred approaches
  - investments by the Accident Compensation Corporation into primary prevention of child injuries and sexual violence (for 0–25-year-olds), including child sexual abuse
  - s 9(2)(b)(ii)
  - children's system oversight arrangements
  - the Government response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care
  - the Government response to the recommendations of the 2022 Dame Karen Poutasi report into the death of Malachi Subecz, s 9(2)(b)(ii)
  - the development of the Suicide Prevention Action Plan, which proposes an action on improved suicide prevention and postvention services for children and young people.



## Other direction-setting documents need to be considered when determining the scope of the child harm priority

26 Two other cross-government direction-setting documents are directly relevant to the scope of child harm in the Strategy:

- The **second Te Aorerekura Action Plan** (led by Te Puna Aonui), which sets out the Government's priorities and intended actions over the next five years to prevent and respond to family violence and sexual violence, in line with Te Aorerekura (the National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence). s 9(2)(b)(ii)
- The **Oranga Tamariki Action Plan** (the Plan), required under Part 1 of the Children's Act and coordinated by Oranga Tamariki. The Plan must indicate how children's agency chief executives will work together to achieve the Strategy's outcomes for core populations of interest to Oranga Tamariki, including by protecting them from abuse and neglect. The current Plan (and associated implementation plan) was agreed in July 2022 and identified eleven overarching actions and associated implementation initiatives.

27 s 9(2)(f)(iv)

• s 9(2)(f)(iv)

• s 9(2)(b)(ii)

28 Officials from Te Puna Aonui, Oranga Tamariki and the Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group consider that the content of these Strategies should, in totality, look to address the continuum of approaches to addressing child harm (from prevention and early intervention, through to response and healing). This would reduce the risk of gaps and duplication across the three documents.

## A range of dimensions of child harm are relevant when considering the scope of the child harm priority

29 The Strategy could include a broad or very specific scope with respect to each of the following dimensions of child harm:

- **types of harm** (e.g. abuse, neglect, intentional injury, bullying, accidents and unintentional injury, self-harm, and structural and systemic harms such as racism and discrimination)
- **places where harm can occur** (e.g. families / whānau; institutions such as schools, early childhood settings and residential care settings; online platforms; wider structural and systemic mechanisms that cause and perpetuate harm) and
- **approaches / interventions to address harm** (e.g. primary prevention, early intervention / secondary prevention<sup>2</sup>, and responses once harm has occurred).

### There are pros and cons of both a broad and more narrowly defined scope

30 We have identified a range of advantages and disadvantages associated with the adoption of a narrow and broad scope of child harm in the Strategy. These are outlined in the following table:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Broad Scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligned with stakeholder feedback</li> <li>• Minimises the risk of gaps across Government actions and investment to address the range of different types of harm (e.g. stakeholders and agency representatives noted online harm as an area for further attention).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would encompass a wide range of policies and activities, making it more difficult to agree specific areas for further action and / or investment.</li> <li>• Would require a wider range of indicators and measures for the purposes of reporting on progress.</li> </ul>
<b>Narrow Scope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would address some of the disadvantages identified for a broad scope (as outlined above).</li> <li>• Consistent with the steer provided at the 1 August Child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not align with stakeholder feedback.</li> <li>• Some types of harm may not be given sufficient priority or attention if not included in the Strategy, other</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Primary prevention refers to targeted and universal programmes and services that build protective factors and prevent risk factors, to prevent harm from happening. Early intervention (sometimes called secondary prevention) refers to programmes and services targeted to those with early indicators or risk factors for child harm occurring. Such programmes and services are often strengths-based and can be focused at the individual, family or community level.



	<p>and Youth Ministerial Group meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent with your previous directions that the Strategy should identify clear priorities, adopt a more streamlined measurement approach, and provide a framework for investment.</li> </ul>	<p>cross-government action plans, or individual agency work plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If focused on child abuse and neglect, may result in potential 'clutter' or overlaps across the Strategy, the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan and the second Te Aorerekura Action Plan.</li> </ul>
--	---	--

## On balance we recommend that the child harm priority in the Strategy adopt a narrow scope

- 31 Based on our assessment of the considerations outlined in the table at paragraph 29, the Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group recommends the adoption of a narrow scope for the child harm priority in the Strategy. We further recommend that this scope be defined as **'preventing child abuse and neglect within the context of family / whānau'**.
- 32 This scope would focus on preventing and addressing underlying and early risk factors and strengthening protective factors to reduce the risk of children entering the care and protection system. We do not envisage it encompassing policies and activities relating to the care and protection system (once children have come into the care of Oranga Tamariki), given other processes and work programmes that are in train (e.g. changes to the Oranga Tamariki operating model, the Government response to the Royal Commission into Abuse in State Care, and the implementation of the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan).
- 33 The following table identifies the dimensions of harm that would be within scope of the Strategy, and the rationale for each:

Dimension of Harm	Proposed scope of the Strategy	Rationale
Types of harm	Abuse, neglect and intentional injury of children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Māori children, children with disabilities, and children from low-socio-economic households are over-represented amongst victims of violence, abuse and neglect.</li> <li>• Children who experience violence, abuse and neglect are at significant risk of other forms of harm, poor physical health, mental health, employment and justice outcomes across their life course and inter-generationally.</li> <li>• Provides clearer line of sight to Government and portfolio targets, with evidence suggesting that actions to prevent abuse and neglect of children may contribute to sustained reductions in youth offending over the longer-term, as well as other areas for which the Government and portfolio Ministers have set targets (e.g. school</li> </ul>



		attendance and achievement, benefit dependency, and physical and mental health).
<b>Places where harm occurs</b>	<b>Within the context of family and whānau</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A focus on families / whānau is aligned with the focus of the other two priorities in the Strategy (the First 2000 Days; reducing material hardship).</li> <li>• The importance of feeling safe and nurtured by parents and family was highlighted in feedback from engagement with children and young people. The 'Loved, Safe and Nurtured' outcome area of the Strategy also suggests a particular focus on the child in the context of the family / whānau.</li> <li>• A focus on institutional settings would bring a wide range of matters in-scope, including residential youth justice and care and protection facilities, and aspects of the Government response to the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care. These matters are subject to separate processes and decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Approaches / interventions to address harm</b>	<b>Primary and secondary prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder feedback supported a prevention focus for the child harm priority.</li> <li>• Primary prevention is not addressed in the 2nd Te Aorerekura Action Plan or implementation focus for the Oranga Action Plan.</li> <li>• A primary and secondary prevention focus aligns with other aspects of the Strategy, including the life course approach, and a focus on those with greatest needs and risks of poor outcomes.</li> <li>• Primary prevention includes approaches to address stressors and risk factors and strengthen resilience and protective factors at the individual, family / whānau and community level.</li> <li>• Many of the underlying stressors and risk factors for child abuse and neglect also drive other types of harm, with the potential for primary prevention approaches (including those focused on building protective factors) to achieve wider benefits and reduce violence, abuse and neglect over the long-term.</li> </ul>

34 The diagram at **Appendix 2** identifies various dimensions of child harm and whether they are in-scope for the Strategy.

## Next steps

35 Following your consideration of this briefing, we can progress work on drafting the child harm aspect of the refreshed Strategy, including appropriate measures and indicators of child harm. We will also work with relevant agencies to identify

potential areas of focus (including for investment and / or reprioritisation) that fall within the agreed scope of the child harm priority.

- 36 We intend to provide you with further advice in August, seeking key decisions on the refresh of the Strategy, to inform the development of a Cabinet paper in October. This will include confirming the approach to using the Strategy as an investment framework, and the framing, scope, and potential areas of focus for all three priorities.

Author: Barbara Annesley, Chief Advisor, Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group.  
Rosie Lazar, Graduate Analyst, Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group

Responsible manager: Hannah Kerr, Director, Child Wellbeing and Poverty Reduction Group



# APPENDIX 1: Child Harm A3 provided to Child and Youth Ministers (8 May 2024)

DRAFT

Child and Youth Ministers Meeting 8 May 2024

IN-CONFIDENCE

## Child Harm

as a priority area under the refreshed  
Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

### What is child harm?

Child harm can be defined in multiple ways and can cover a spectrum of experiences, including direct physical harm to a child (abuse, neglect, sexual violence), exposure to harm (family violence, online abuse), selfharm, peer-to-peer harm (e.g. bullying), and other adverse childhood experiences that affect physical and emotional health.

Experiencing harm can have cumulative, longterm and inter-generational effects. Within Te Ao Māori, harm is acknowledged as a violation of mana andora.

Harm can occur within different settings, including families, institutions and online platforms. There is also a range of drivers and determinants of harm. Different agencies focus on preventing and responding to different aspects of child harm.

### Experiencing harm negatively impacts children's outcomes in the short and long -term including



#### Brain development

Physical, verbal and emotional abuse can have detrimental effects on brain development

#### Interactions with the justice system

97 per cent of 10 to 13 -year-old children who committed serious offences had been the subject of a prior child welfare notifications to Oranga Tamariki



#### Educational outcomes

Exposure to and experience of child harm can negatively affect school achievement and attendance

While most children are safe and free from harm, a significant proportion of children and young people are not

89%

of children and young people aged 12-18 years agree they feel safe at home

12,743

cases in year to June 2023, where Oranga Tamariki found individual children had been abused or neglected

19%

of NZ teens have experienced an unwanted digital communication that negatively impacted their daily activities

37%

of young people said they'd experienced bullying in the past 12 months.

23.5%

of children born in 1998 had been the subject of a Report of Concern by age 17.

13%

of children and young people aged 12-18 years had been hit or physically hurt at home or saw others at home being hit or physically hurt. These rates are significantly higher for Māori children and disabled children (21% and 24% respectively)

A focus on child harm has a strong alignment with a social investment approach, including linkages to the Government's targets and priorities

Target 3  
Reduced  
child and  
youth  
offending

Target 4  
Reduced  
violent  
crime

Target 6  
Increased  
student  
attendance

Target 7  
More  
students at  
expected  
curriculum  
levels

Priority  
Improved  
youth  
mental  
health

### Work is underway across government to reduce child harm

#### Te Puni Kōkiri

- Embedding whānau-centred approaches and Whānau Ora commissioning models
- A range of initiatives, including Ngā Tini Whetū

#### Te Puna Aonui

- Second Te Aorerekura Action Plan
- Workforce and Organisational Development

#### Accident Compensation Corporation

- Investments that prevent child injuries and child sexual abuse

#### Ministry for Social Development

- Oversight of the children's system
- Family violence and sexual violence services
- The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care

#### Oranga Tamariki

s 9(2)(b)(ii)

- Oranga Tamariki Action Plan (cross-agency plan)
- Young Serious Offenders and Military Academies

### Further work is needed to identify specific areas of focus for a child harm priority

It will be important to establish the scope of child harm to be covered in the refreshed Strategy. This work will be underpinned by further analysis and engagement to:

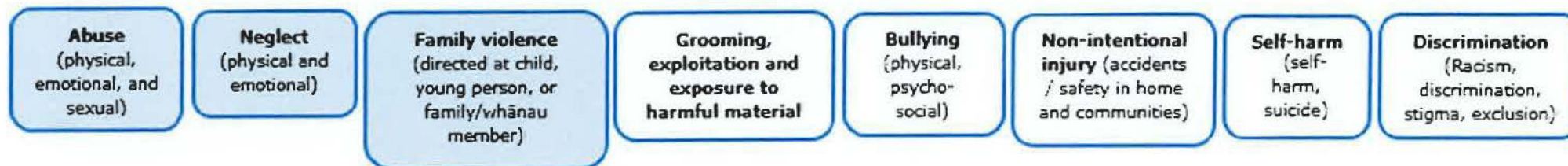
- understand who is most impacted by harm and whether there are particular types or domains of child harm have the most acute impacts, as a basis for setting priorities
- identify gaps and opportunities in current policy settings, data systems, workforce capability, system oversight, and service provision.



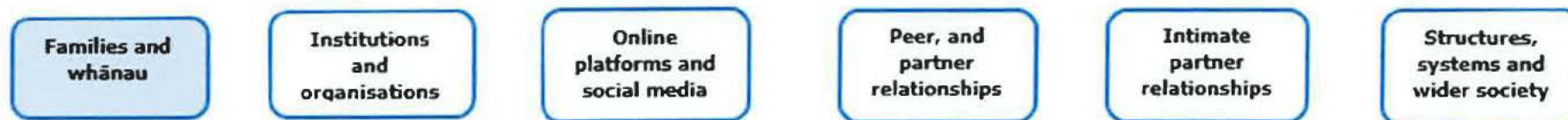
## APPENDIX 2: Dimension of child harm

*(Shaded boxes indicate dimensions that would be within scope of the Child and Youth Strategy)*

### Types of harm experienced by children and young people



### Places where harm occurs



### Approaches to reducing child harm

