

Report



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA



Date: 1 October 2025 **Security Level:** Sensitive
To: Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Child Poverty Reduction
File Reference: REP/25/9/756

Government response to the Dame Karen Poutasi Review - Slides for Child and Youth Ministers meeting

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report provides you with a slide pack for your feedback, prior to circulating to Child and Youth Ministers for discussion at the 15 October meeting. This slide pack (**Attachment 1**) provides advice on the following two key areas of work as part of the integrated Government Response to the Dame Karen Poutasi Review:
 - 1.1 an enhanced report of concern process (recommendations 1, 2 & 6); and
 - 1.2 a mandatory training and reporting regime (recommendations 8 & 9).

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **indicate** your feedback on the slide pack (Attachment 1) at the Child Poverty Reduction officials meeting scheduled for Tuesday 7 October 2025
- 2 **agree**, subject to any feedback you may have, to circulate the slide pack to Child and Youth Ministers ahead of the 15 October 2025 meeting

Agree / Disagree

- 3 **forward** this report to the Minister for Children prior to circulation to Child and Youth Ministers, subject to any feedback you may have on the slide pack

Agree / Disagree

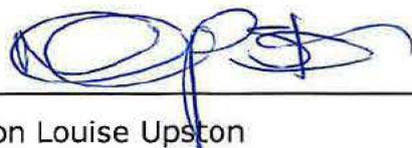


01/10/2025

Hannah Kerr

Date

Director, Child Wellbeing and Poverty
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20251002

Hon Louise Upston

Date

Minister for Child Poverty Reduction

Background

- 2 The Government has accepted all recommendations from the report by Dame Karen Poutasi on the Joint Review into the Children's Sector (the Poutasi Review) [CAB-25-MIN-0330 refers]. On 17 September 2025, Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee noted that the Government is focussed on four key areas of work to progress implementation of the remaining recommendations, including the following two areas:
 - 2.1 introduction of a mandatory child protection training and reporting regime for defined workforces (recommendations 8, 9 and 13)
 - 2.2 enhancements to the system to ensure that children whose sole parent is incarcerated are identified and their needs met (recommendations 1, 2 and 6) [SOU-25-MIN-0128 refers].
- 3 The Poutasi review is on the agenda for the 15 October Child and Youth Ministers meeting. We propose that Ministers discuss scope decisions in relation to the two key work areas above. This will support progressing the integrated Government Response to Ministers' intended timeframes.

Scope of two key areas of the Government response

- 4 **Attachment 1** provides slides with advice to Child and Youth Ministers on the all-of-government work to progress the design and implementation of the two key areas of work listed above. We are seeking your feedback at the Child Poverty Reduction officials meeting scheduled for 7 October 2025, ahead of circulation to Child and Youth Ministers later in the week.

Agreeing the scope of an enhanced Report of Concern process (recommendations 1, 2 & 6)

- 5 Agencies have collaborated to determine the circumstances that would require a Report of Concern (ROC) to be automatically made and 'flagged' in the system so that the enhancements to the ROC process apply.
- 6 Slides 6 and 7 of Attachment 1 provide more information about the cohort of children, young people and parents proposed to be in scope, and the points in the process where automatic ROCs should be made.
- 7 The proposed cohorts capture most situations that would cause significant disruption to care arrangements, while also being relatively straightforward to define and therefore operationalise. The proposed points at which automatic ROCs must be made would serve as overlapping safety nets, as envisaged by Dame Karen Poutasi.
- 8 We seek agreement from Child and Youth Ministers to this scope, to guide further work on the design and costings of the enhanced Report of Concern process ahead of the November Cabinet report back s 9(2)(f)(iv)
s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Agreeing the parameters of a mandatory training and reporting regime (recommendations 8 & 9)

- 9 Agencies have collectively agreed and recommend key parameters to guide further work on developing the mandatory training and reporting regime. The recommended parameters provide the greatest balance of maximising the pursuit of child safety as the key outcome, while minimising risks to the system that are detrimental to child safety.
- 10 The parameters have been developed in consultation with all relevant agencies, and informed by advice and insights from officials and academics in Australian jurisdictions - where mandatory reporting has been in place for some time.
- 11 A lesson learnt from multiple Australian jurisdictions is for initial implementation to focus on a narrow scope of types of abuse to prevent system overwhelm, due to a significant influx of reports. Advice from those we spoke to is that it is critical that the system demonstrates its ability to effectively detect and respond to cases that are reported, ahead of widening the scope.
- 12 We seek ministerial agreement to the scope and implementation approach, to progress more detailed policy analysis and design ahead of the November Cabinet report back, s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Next steps

- 13 We welcome any feedback you may have at the Child Poverty Reduction officials meeting on Tuesday 7 October 2025.
- 14 Subject to your feedback, we recommend you send this report and attached slide pack to the Minister for Children, ahead of circulating to Child and Youth Ministers, given her particular interest in this work.
- 15 Subject to your feedback, the slide pack will be included in the meeting pack for the 15 October meeting of Child and Youth Ministers.
- 16 We will include suggested talking points on the slides in the aide memoire for the Child and Youth Ministers meeting, which is due to be provided to you on 13 October 2025.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Slide pack - scope of key recommendations

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Government Response to the Dame Karen Poutasi Review Scope of key recommendations

Update to Child and Youth Ministers

15 October 2025

Cabinet has noted our integrated approach and key areas of work

On 17 September 2025, the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee (SOU):

- agreed to accept all recommendations from the Poutasi Review.
- noted that an integrated all-of-Government approach focussed on safeguarding children is being taken to implementing the remaining Poutasi Review recommendations, overseen by Child and Youth Ministers.
- noted that the outcomes to be achieved from implementing the Poutasi Review are:
 - a. children are safer, with a focus on supporting children whose sole parent is incarcerated; and
 - b. the children's system has a mature and consistent approach to sharing information and responding to suspected abuse.
- noted that the Government is focussed on the following key areas of work to progress implementation of the remaining recommendations:
 - a. introduction of a mandatory child protection training and reporting regime for defined workforces (recommendations 8, 9 and 13)
 - b. enhancements to the system to ensure that children whose sole parent is incarcerated are identified and their needs met (recommendations 1, 2 and 6)
 - c. reinforcing a clear expectation that children's agencies share information where there are safety and wellbeing concerns for a child (recommendation 7)
 - d. strengthening collective accountability for child safety (recommendation 12).

This set of slides focuses on parts a and b above.

Agreeing the scope of an enhanced Report of Concern process

Recommendations 1, 2 and 6 of the Dame Karen Poutasi Review

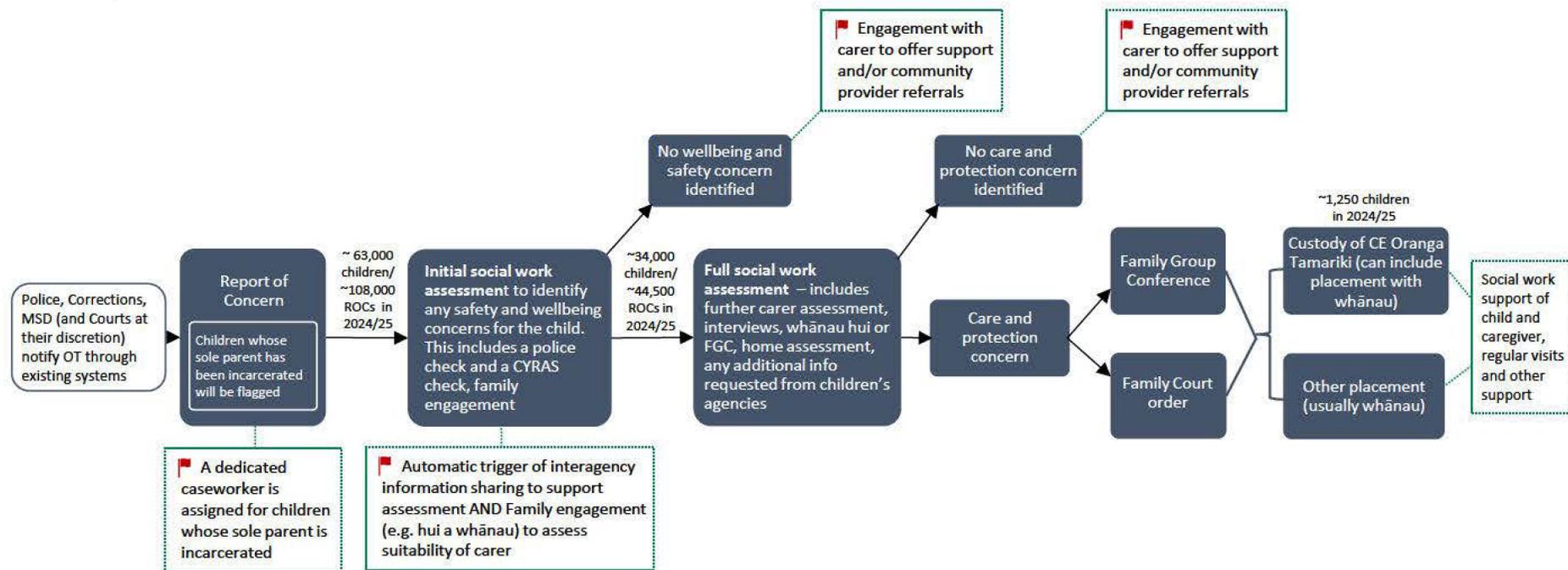
Child and Youth Ministers agreed to this enhanced ROC process



The cohort of children whose sole parents are taken into custody will be flagged in the Oranga Tamariki system to trigger enhancements

If at any point there are urgent concerns about the welfare of a child, emergency powers can be exercised to place child in custody of Oranga Tamariki CE

Caregiver vetting is undertaken when a child is placed into the custody of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki



Agencies are working on the detailed design of the enhancements to support effective implementation.

Scoping the enhanced Report of Concern process

- Agencies have collaborated to determine the situations where a ROC should automatically be made and 'flagged' in the system so that the enhancements to the ROC process apply.
- Once a ROC is made, more detailed considerations about a child's particular circumstances can be made through the initial assessment. In many cases, this may result in a case being triaged out of the system quickly because the alternative care arrangements are safe. However, it is important that this decision is made as a result of the initial assessment (or in some cases at a later stage in the process), rather than by a frontline worker who may have an incomplete picture.
- If a scenario falls outside the scope of the enhanced process, ROCs can be made as usual where there are concerns.

Dame Karen Poutasi identified a system gap in...	We are responding with...	In the medium-term, outcomes to be realised are:
... identifying needs of a dependent child when charging and prosecuting sole parents through the court system	... enhancing to the system to ensure that children whose sole parent is incarcerated are identified and their needs met (recommendations 1, 2 and 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children whose sole parent has been incarcerated are identified early and are visible through the system• Children's wellbeing needs are supported by agencies and providers

Who is in scope of the enhanced Report of Concern process?

We propose that the enhanced ROC process apply to **dependent children and young people under the age of 18 whose care arrangements are disrupted due to the sole parent/carer responsible for them being remanded in custody and/or incarcerated.**

The scope of sole parents/carers includes the following circumstances:

- single parent not in a relationship
- non-biologically related adult with formal relationship to the child – e.g. adoption, foster, step-parent
- sole carer with no legal mandate – e.g. whāngai
- sole parent where there is a non-biologically related adult in the household with no formal relationship to the child/ren – e.g. parent is in an undefined co-habiting relationship

Why this scope?

- Under 18 is the age range that falls within OT's care and protection mandate. A ROC process is only available for children under 18. It also aligns with the definition of 'child' in the Care of Children Act 2004.
- Definition of 'sole parents/carers' captures most situations that would disrupt care arrangements of dependent children, to ensure the safety of these children.
- A clear statement is critical for ease, speed and consistency of use by frontline workers.
- A clear scope is also important for the ability to understand the cohort from available information, to inform modelling and costing.

When must an automatic Report of Concern be made?

The Poutasi Review recommendations aim to ensure that overlapping safety nets exist to:

- identify and address risk to child harm
- enable collaborative action on-the-ground reduce harm and protect children.

Agencies have identified a range of points where dependent children of a sole parent remanded in custody and/or incarcerated could be identified.

From these, we have assessed which points should require an 'automatic' / mandated RoC in the enhanced process. Multiple points serve as overlapping safety nets, as pictured right.

Note that ROCs can continue to be made at any other point in the process where there are concerns.

Overlapping safety nets of points that require an 'automatic' ROC



1. Opposition to bail (Police)

Police oppose bail and a defendant is remanded in custody.



2. Immediate Needs Assessment (Corrections)

Assessment of prisoner's needs upon arrival at Corrections facility.



3. Corrections data match (MSD)

Match between Corrections data and MSD client data to identify clients whose entitlement may have changed due to incarceration.



4. Application for or change to assistance (MSD)

Request made in respect of or including a child who is not the applicant's.

Agencies considered other points to require automatic ROCs

Point	Rationale for exclusion
Arrest (Police)	This would flood the system. Not all arrests would result in disruption to care arrangements of dependent children – for example where a person is bailed.
Prosecution report (Police)	Some low level matters will be resolved quickly and sometimes with a fine.
Criminal court proceedings	The judiciary has developed a new process ('Making children visible in the court process') to improve information available to the criminal court about the existence of dependent children – however, legislative change would be required to mandate the courts to share information gathered in this process with the Executive.
Opposition to bail (Corrections)	This process is unlikely to uncover the existence of dependent children.
Bail Information Report (Corrections)	The number of reports that Corrections write is not high, and sporadic across Courts. Corrections don't follow through the outcomes of the bail.
Pre-sentence report (Corrections)	It is difficult to predict which people will receive a custodial sentence, especially if they've been in the community on a form of bail. Most don't result in a custodial sentence (and often the ones that do are written with the person already remanded in custody).

Discussion and decisions for Ministers

It is recommended that Child and Youth Ministers:

- **discuss** the proposed scope to guide further work to design an enhanced Report of Concern process
- **agree** to the proposed scope for an enhanced Report of Concern process
- **note** that, subject to your feedback, agencies will continue to progress work on detailed policy design, with decisions for a November Cabinet report back

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Agreeing the parameters of a mandatory training and reporting regime

Recommendations 8 and 9 of the Dame Karen Poutasi Review

Mandatory reporting regimes aim to identify cases of child abuse and neglect

- Mandatory reporting laws in other jurisdictions have been developed in response to the largely hidden nature of child abuse, with the purpose of bringing cases to the attention of child protection agencies.
- Mandatory reporting alone does not achieve better outcomes for children. The system needs to be supported by
 - quality training that embeds practice change, and
 - timely, effective service responses that are appropriate to improve the long-term outcomes of affected children and their families and whānau.

Dame Karen Poutasi identified a system gap in...	We are responding with...	s 9(2)(f)(iv)
...a lack of reporting of risk of abuse by some professionals and services.	...the introduction of a mandatory child protection training and reporting regime for defined workforces.	

Embedding practice change and the provision of effective responses are critical to achieving our intended outcomes

- To enable high quality reporting, faster system responses and the provision of appropriate supports, an effective mandatory reporting regime should be supported by:
 - a **quality training programme** that prioritises continuous learning (including the necessity of in-person training components, and refresher e-learning)
 - practical **decision-making tools** and resources that are appropriate to the operational context
 - a fit-for-purpose **reporting platform** for making a mandatory report of concern
 - national and organisational **leadership** that demonstrates a **culture** of child safeguarding
 - an adequately **resourced system** that can effectively detect, investigate and respond (immediate and ongoing) to reported cases of suspected abuse.
- Mandatory training will cover, at a minimum, identifying signs of all types of abuse, interagency information sharing (recommendation 7), and the obligations of, and reporting processes to be followed by, mandatory reporters.
- Subject to Ministers' agreement, s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Discussion and decisions for Ministers

It is recommended that Child and Youth Ministers:

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

- **note** that, subject to your feedback, agencies will continue to progress work on detailed policy design, with decisions for a November Cabinet report back

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Annex 1: Interpretation of key terms

Term	Description	
Children's worker	means a person who works in, or provides, a regulated service, and the person's work— (a) may or does involve regular or overnight contact with a child or children (other than with children who are co-workers); and (b) takes place without a parent or guardian of the child, or of each child, being present	Children's Act 2014 definitions
Core children's worker	means a children's worker whose work in or providing a regulated service requires or allows that, when the person is present with a child or children in the course of that work, the person— (a) is the only children's worker present; or (b) is the children's worker who has primary responsibility for, or authority over, the child or children present	
Serious harm	Sometimes a single traumatic event can have a significant impact on and may constitute serious harm. Often, serious harm is the cumulative impact of events or circumstances, both acute and long-standing, which interrupt, change or damage a child's the physical and/or psychological development.	Oranga Tamariki definitions
Risk of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the harm has not happened yet, but there are concerns regarding the likelihood of events or circumstances (an incident, incidents or actions or inactions) which may result in serious harm in the future, or there is a concern that serious harm has already occurred (and may reoccur). 	
Physical abuse	when the actions of an offender result in, or could potentially result in, physical harm or injury being inflicted on te tamaiti. This is also known as a non-accidental injury.	Child Protection Protocol definitions
Sexual abuse	an act involving circumstances of indecency with, or sexual violation of te tamaiti, or using te tamaiti in the making of sexual images.	
Neglect	when a person intentionally ill-treats or neglects te tamaiti or causes or permits te tamaiti to be ill-treated in a manner likely to cause te tamaiti actual bodily harm, injury to health or any mental disorder or disability. The ill-treatment or neglect must be serious, and avoidable.	
Emotional/ psychological abuse	a parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards the child or young person that the child or young person has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm.	Term borrowed from NSW legislation
Exposure to family violence	Can include a child or young person seeing, hearing, being directly involved in (eg trying to intervene), or experiencing the aftermath of family violence. As a result, they are at risk of serious physical harm, psychological harm or other impacts on their safety and wellbeing.	Provided by Centre for Family Violence & Sexual Violence Prevention

Annex 2: Summary of key engagements and inputs

- We have met with:
 - officials from Child Protection teams in Victoria, South Australia, and NSW – all of which have mandatory regimes with varying parameters.
 - academics from Australia and New Zealand –experts in the fields of law, child protection, and social work.
 - policy, operations and data and practice/clinical specialists from across NZ public service agencies.

We have also considered:

- the experience and learnings from Health NZ of implementing the Violence Intervention Programme, which has been training specific health workers on identifying, assessing, reporting and responding to signs of child abuse and neglect, and intimate partner violence since 2007.
- previous targeted engagement by Oranga Tamariki with key stakeholders, including iwi and Māori.
- international evidence about mandatory reporting regimes.