

In Confidence

Office of the Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment

Social Outcomes Committee

Supporting carers' contributions: the Carers' Strategy Action Plan**Proposal**

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to the appended cross-government Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan (Action Plan) (**Appendix 1**). This follows in-principle agreement to the draft Action Plan in November 2025 [SOU-25-MIN-0149 refers].
- 2 I also seek agreement to launch the Action Plan in early September 2026.

Relation to government priorities

- 3 My proposal relates to the Government priority to reduce the need for more intensive services and ensure fairer, more consistent and sustainable access to services for people with the greatest need. We know that when carers have the support they need, they can better support those they care for, and all of New Zealand benefits.
- 4 My proposal also aligns with Government priorities to deliver better public services and greater fiscal responsibility.

Executive Summary

- 5 All New Zealanders benefit from the contributions of informal or unpaid carers, whose role is growing as our population ages and more of our people experience complex health needs.
- 6 To support these family, whānau, aiga, and individual carers, in November 2025 Cabinet agreed to a draft of the Action Plan and to undertake public consultation on it.
- 7 I now seek Cabinet agreement to the final Action Plan, which reflects feedback from that consultation. This new cross-agency Action Plan shows how the Government will support carers in response to changing needs, growing demand, and the increasing complexity of care.
- 8 The Action Plan includes nine Actions across three core priority areas – Health and Wellbeing, Financial Security, and Recognition and Appreciation – plus an overarching area on Monitoring and Evaluation.
- 9 To ensure the long-term success of the Action Plan, I propose a strengthened cross-agency governance arrangement, spanning both the Action Plan and the wider New Zealand Carers' Strategy (Carers' Strategy). This approach will contribute to addressing public consultation feedback on the need for a more coordinated and accountable approach across government to delivering meaningful outcomes for carers.

Cabinet agreed to a draft Action Plan to support informal or unpaid carers in November 2025

- 10 Following Cabinet approval of the draft Action Plan and public consultation approach in November 2025 [SOU-25-MIN-0149 refers], I am returning to report back on public consultation and to seek your agreement to the final Action Plan (**Appendix 1**), including the proposed governance arrangement to administer it.
- 11 My proposals have been drafted in close collaboration with agencies partnered to the Carers' Strategy and external partners, such as the New Zealand Carers Alliance (Carers Alliance), with the intention to fulfil the Strategy's vision to better support, value and recognise the increasing role and contributions of informal or unpaid carers (carers).

I seek Cabinet agreement to the appended Action Plan, which brings together work across many agencies committed to improving the lives of carers

- 12 Supporting carers today is an investment in the country's present and future. Economically, the more than 500,000¹ – but potentially as many as one million – carers are providing billions of dollars in unpaid labour and support. In 2022, for instance, carers' economic contribution for care labour was estimated at \$17.6 billion per year.²
- 13 Their work contributes to supporting our health, social, aged care, and disability systems and ensuring spaces in hospitals, clinics, and residential care are available for those who require urgent care. For dementia care alone, the replacement cost of unpaid carers (if this care was provided by paid workers) was estimated to be \$1.19 billion per year in 2020 and projected to rise to \$2.8 billion per year by 2050.³
- 14 With a population that is ageing and more people diagnosed with a disability or health condition requiring additional care and support, it is critical that we are well-positioned to support carers now and in the future. Improving how we support carers now ensures that they can keep contributing to their families, communities and wider New Zealand, or can take up other opportunities, such as paid work, education or learning.
- 15 The proposed Action Plan provides a way forward, guided by these considerations, to:
 - 15.1 focus on improving long-term outcomes for carers;
 - 15.2 shift from a time-bound Action Plan to an 'ongoing' approach, supported by public consultation and stakeholder feedback, to ensure it remains relevant to carers and builds on work across government in related sectors (including, but not limited to, work across the health, disability and social sectors;

¹ Stats NZ. (2024). *2023 Census: Unpaid care* [Data set]. Note that based on international figures and underreporting, Carers Alliance estimates that there are up to one million carers in New Zealand.

² Heyes, R., & Grimmond, D. (2022). *The economic contribution and sacrifices of unpaid family, whānau and aiga carers in New Zealand, for Alzheimers NZ, Carers NZ, the Carers Alliance, IHC and the Ministry of Social Development*. Infometrics.

³ Ma'u, E., Cullum, S., Yates, S., Te Ao, B., Cheung, G., Burholt, V., Dudley, M., Krishnamurthi, R., & Kerse, N. (2021). *Dementia Economic Impact Report 2020*. University of Auckland.

strengthening Disability Support Services; the Better Later Life Action Plan; the New Zealand Disability Strategy; the Child and Youth Strategy; and the Crown response to the Royal Commission's Inquiry into Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions);

- 15.3 identify key priority areas relevant to carers;
- 15.4 set the groundwork to address longstanding challenges with immediate deliverables;
- 15.5 ensure cross-agency work can begin immediately from within baselines, while adopting a progressive approach to address growing care needs over time;
- 15.6 improve the whole-of-government response by encouraging cross-agency strategies or policies on longstanding issues (such as the availability of respite or the ability for carers to take a break);
- 15.7 improve access to and the accessibility of services and supports.

Table 1: Summary of the Action Plan and initial steps

Priority area and outcomes	Initial steps
Health and Wellbeing Carers have equitable health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes	1. Establish: • a national overview of available respite and wellbeing break options and identify gaps, including for specific needs • outreach to let carers know about the different respite and wellbeing break options available, why taking breaks is important, and how they can access the support available. 2. Better support frontline staff to identify and refer carers to the right culturally appropriate, locally available supports and services. This can build on existing and new approaches, such as targeted carer assessments by Disability Support Services, Whānau Ora, or General Practitioner (GP) support.
Financial Security Carers have more responsive financial support, and education and employment pathways help carers to meet their needs and to plan ahead	3. Develop an overview of available government financial assistance for carers, focusing on the levels of support, coverage, gaps and inconsistencies. 4. Review: • what different supports and opportunities carers have to enter paid work, training or education during and after caring • the supports currently provided by 'care-friendly' employers (e.g. carer leave) and how these could inform future actions.

Recognition and Appreciation Carers are valued and the support they need is recognised and protected	5. Celebrate a national Carers Day in 2027. 6. Consider how all forms of cultural safety, including te ao Māori, Pacific and other ethnic community needs, can be better integrated into the delivery and promotion of existing services. Cultural safety can include wider consideration of people's needs when interacting with a service, for example LGBTQI+ identities, neurodiversity, gender, age, disability status, or the Deaf or hard-of-hearing community. 7. Consider how service access and navigation can be improved for carers.
Monitoring and Evaluation Effective monitoring of the Action Plan and improved carer data collection helps to shape services and supports over time	8. Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Action Plan. 9. Develop a government data and evidence strategy for carers, with the aim of building a consistent evidence base to improve services for carers over time. This will include: • reflecting the Crown's obligations through te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi • considering the current evidence base about carers and community-led evidence • exploring the development and use of a specific carers' marker in administrative data.

Consultation has shown support for the new Action Plan with minor revisions proposed

- 16 Public consultation on the draft Action Plan occurred between November 2025 and March 2026. This consultation was designed to hear from the widest range of carer voices through the use of targeted and public workshops, written submissions, an online survey, and community workshops. Overall, consultation participants supported the Action Plan, namely the three priority areas, the separate focus on monitoring and evaluation, the focus on outcomes and the 'ongoing' approach.
- 17 For the Action Plan to succeed, participants noted that it:
- 17.1 will require a strong and effective governance structure, and more regular monitoring and reporting to the public;
 - 17.2 must be adaptable to change over time, as carers and the people they care for are more reliant on government services and, therefore, more susceptible to economic shocks or policy and programme changes within the health, disability and social sectors;
 - 17.3 will require sustained action and investment for meaningful progress to be achieved.
- 18 Recommendations were also made on how to improve the Action Plan. I have taken into consideration this public feedback and, working in partnership with my

ministerial colleagues, the Carers Alliance, and the Carers Advisory Group, have made the following minor amendments:

- 18.1 the structure and language of the Action Plan summary table have been simplified and plain English used to ensure the Action Plan is relevant and accessible to a broad audience of carers in the community;
- 18.2 at the advice of the Carers Alliance, the title, 'Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan', has been retained from the previous Action Plan, which would align with the intent of this Action Plan to be ongoing and to build on previous work and partnerships;
- 18.3 additional detail of the diversity of carers and their needs has been included in the Action Plan preamble and will be further considered during implementation;
- 18.4 agencies have been listed as partnered and/or contributing to the Carers' Strategy and Action Plan as a whole, rather than to individual actions, to better enable joint ownership across government of carers' issues;
- 18.5 the Carers Day wording in the Action Plan has been revised from "Launch Carers Day in 2026" to "Celebrate a national Carers Day in 2027" to reflect this is no longer linked to the Action Plan launch and respond to feedback from the Carers Alliance and public consultation;
- 18.6 each priority area and action now have an outcome statement, which replaces the previous 'future state' title and aligns with the plain English approach.

Strengthening Action Plan governance to ensure long-term success

- 19 To ensure progress is achieved with this new, cross-agency Action Plan, I have heard that a strengthened governance arrangement is needed. While the current approach – which consists of a General Manager-level Governance Group including members of the Carers Alliance executive and supported by an officials-level Working Group – has helped highlight the importance of carers, a new process is required that can leverage meaningful action within and across agencies' work programmes. This will also ensure that the ongoing Action Plan is supported to ensure its long-term success.
- 20 I considered a range of governance options, focusing on existing processes with a preference towards groups with membership across the key agencies that are partnered to the Carers' Strategy to enable greater coordination and collaboration across portfolios and priorities. In addition, I considered what structures or groups provide the best means to maintain existing partnerships with the Carers Alliance and other stakeholders as well as those forums that would be best positioned to support all carers as opposed to a specific population of carers (e.g. older carers, carers of disabled people, or young carers).
- 21 To this end, I propose that the Social Sector Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) group provide a higher level of oversight and policy direction to support the Carers' Strategy and Action Plan, with the Social Sector Chief Executive (CE) group providing oversight on issues as required. This higher level of governance aims to improve agencies' accountability for progressing the Action Plan commitments and to

strengthen Carers' Strategy linkages into related cross-agency workstreams that impact on carers. The new governance structure is provided in **Appendix 2**.

- 22 These groups will provide leadership and guidance on the Carers' Strategy and Action Plan, and I anticipate that their responsibilities will include overseeing:
 - 22.1 implementation of commitments and activities, including identification of existing work programmes and alignments;
 - 22.2 monitoring and reporting on progress;
 - 22.3 the provision of advice to Ministers on future directions.
- 23 Following the launch, the agencies listed as partnered or contributing to the Action Plan will work collaboratively to implement the ongoing Action Plan over time. The first stage will be to develop an agreed work programme and deliver on the Action Plan's initial steps within 1–3 years. This work programme will include linking with existing and planned work and ensuring that the application of the Action Plan is clearly understood across agency responsibilities. In addition, efforts will be made to identify any key issues requiring further attention, such as addressing gaps in support to carers and ensuring greater consistency between government supports (e.g. individual, family, and whānau engagements with the Oranga Tamariki system or Disability Support Services).

Monitoring and evaluation will be critical to sustaining progress

- 24 The accountability and momentum of the Action Plan is important to ensuring the Action Plan delivers outcomes for carers. Agencies, stakeholders and public consultation have also raised that greater monitoring and accountability are essential for the Action Plan to be successful.
- 25 Due to the significance of a robust cross-agency monitoring and evaluation approach and a need for broader consultation, I intend to return to Cabinet at a later date with a more detailed, cross-agency approach. This will include how outcomes will be measured and tracked (building on existing processes), what the frequency of Cabinet report backs and public reporting will be, and what involvement external stakeholders will have.

Cost-of-living Implications

- 26 The Action Plan includes a priority on Financial Security, as carers have stated that higher costs of living have affected their ability to provide care.

Financial Implications

- 27 During this launch phase, implementation can be managed within baselines.
- 28 The Ministry of Social Development expects there to be opportunities for further investment in future years, should Ministers introduce new programmes or expand existing programmes and services for carers because of recommendations in the Action Plan (i.e. support for service navigation). Any future funding requests will be considered through the annual Budget process.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

- 29 The Ministry for Regulation has advised that this proposal will not be subject to the regulatory impact analysis requirements.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

- 30 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this policy proposal, as the thresholds for significance are not met.

Population Implications

- 31 Carers come from all walks of life and caring is deeply shaped by cultural values, family, whānau and community expectations. The Action Plan has been designed to contribute to addressing the key priorities that carers across the population have told us matter to them, benefiting the widest range of carers, and, therefore, care recipients, their families, communities and households.
- 32 Consideration of different groups, outlined in **Appendix 3**, applies across the whole of the Action Plan and will be further considered at the implementation phase. These groups include women, Māori, Pacific peoples, older people, disabled people including people with health conditions, rural peoples, young carers, Asian peoples, ethnic communities, LGBTIQI+/rainbow communities, and others – all of whom participated in the targeted and open workshops during the consultation phase.

Human Rights

- 33 By enacting the vision of the Carers' Strategy to ensure that "New Zealand Aotearoa is a society that values individuals, families, whānau or aiga who support others who need help with their everyday living", the proposed Action Plan looks to improve the rights of carers by improving their social and economic rights.
- 34 This is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993. This approach is aligned with New Zealand's obligations under international human rights law such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (specifically Articles 19 and 23).

Use of external resources

- 35 An advisory group, consisting of members selected from the Carers Alliance and wider carer representatives, provided expertise and insights into the lived experiences of carers to develop the draft Action Plan. This was resourced from the Annual Carers' Strategy Budget.

Consultation

- 36 The Ministry of Health, Health New Zealand, Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha, Office for Seniors, Accident Compensation Corporation, Te Puni Kōkiri – Ministry of Māori Development, Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Ministry of Youth Development, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Ministry for Women, the Treasury, the Department of Corrections, the Executive Board for the

Elimination of Family Violence and Sexual Violence and the Social Investment Agency, have been consulted. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has been informed.

- 37 The Carers Alliance were engaged in the preparation of this proposal. The Carers Alliance has provided the following statement:

37.1 Carers are the backbone of the health and social services sector, making a significant contribution to the sustainability of community-based care and ageing in place. We support the Government's efforts to better support carers through the proposed ongoing Action Plan, including its high-level outcomes, governance arrangements, and the development of outcome measures and a reporting framework. It will be important that early actions deliver tangible improvements for carers within the initial phase of the Action Plan. We look forward to continuing to work with the Government to implement the Action Plan for the benefit of family, whānau and aiga carers.

Communications

- 38 I intend to launch the Action Plan in early September 2026, pending your agreement to the recommendations below.
- 39 The launch will be communicated through established agency and partner channels, including social media, newsletters, and/or community media sources as available budget permits. I also intend to work closely with the Carers Alliance and other key stakeholders to ensure broader reach and the successful launch of the Action Plan.

Proactive Release

- 40 I intend to proactively release this paper when the Action Plan is intended to be launched, which falls within the 30-day period for proactive release.

Recommendations

The Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that the Government introduced the New Zealand Carers' Strategy in 2008 with the vision to ensure that "New Zealand Aotearoa is a society that values individuals, families, whānau or aiga who support others who need help with their everyday living";
- 2 **note** that in-principle agreement to the draft Carers' Strategy Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in 2025;
- 3 **agree** to the attached ongoing Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan;
- 4 **agree** to launch and release the Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan in early September 2026;
- 5 **note** that I intend to use the Social Sector Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) group, with oversight from the Social Sector Chief Executive (CE) group as required, to deliver a

higher level of governance oversight for the New Zealand Carers' Strategy and the Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan;

- 6 **note** that the agencies listed as partnered or contributing to the Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan will work collaboratively following the launch to develop a work programme and deliver on the Action Plan's initial steps within 1–3 years of the launch;
- 7 **note** that implementation of the Action Plan will include linking with existing and planned work across agencies to ensure a broad range of carers are considered, and that the application of the Action Plan is clearly understood across agency responsibilities;
- 8 **note** that I intend to return to Cabinet in due course with a cross-agency implementation and monitoring and evaluation approach;
- 9 **authorise** the Ministry of Social Development to make minor editorial, design and formatting changes to the Action Plan as required prior to its public release.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Penny Simmonds

Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment

Appendices

Cabinet paper Appendix 1: Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan

Cabinet paper Appendix 2: Governance

Cabinet paper Appendix 3: Consideration of key groups