

A photograph of two women in a kitchen. The woman on the left is younger, with dark hair tied back, wearing a dark green top. The woman on the right is older, with white hair, wearing a blue patterned top. They are both smiling and looking at something in the older woman's hands. In the foreground, there is a table with various food items: a bowl of green salad, a plate of bread, a plate of fruit including watermelon, strawberries, and kiwi, and a plate of green grapes. The background shows a kitchen counter with a sink and a window with white curtains.

Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan

September 2026



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



Foreword – Hon Minister Simmonds

Kia ora koutou

Every day, between 500,000 and 1 million New Zealanders provide informal and unpaid care to individuals, families, whānau, and aiga who need assistance with their everyday living. They are our parents, siblings, spouses or children, and they are our close friends or our neighbours. They balance multiple responsibilities including full-time or part-time jobs, attending school or raising children, and yet they go about their work without fanfare. As our population ages and as people live longer, we can expect more people to need support, and the contributions from our carers will grow even more vital.

Building on the 2008 Carers' Strategy and its three successive action plans, I am pleased to introduce the next edition – Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan. This name may be familiar, as it has been retained from the previous action plan to acknowledge the successes achieved and recognise the work that still remains.

To help advance progress, this Action Plan sets out a new approach. For starters, it is designed to be ongoing with a focus on a core set of ambitious outcomes and three key priorities that carers told us were critical to address - health and wellbeing, financial security, and recognition and appreciation. As actions are achieved, new actions will be designed and implemented. This is a refreshing change from time-limited action plans – we will be better able to pursue activities that make meaningful, long-term change while retaining the flexibility to respond to emerging needs and challenges.

This new Action Plan reaches far beyond any single Ministerial commitment or responsibility. It instead is a cross-government effort that outlines the areas where agencies will work together to strengthen supports for carers. The Action Plan also sits alongside other government initiatives, such as the Disability Strategy and Better Later Life Strategy, and it has connections to the health and disability sectors, aged care, ACC, and the children's system. Most importantly, it acknowledges that carers touch on many aspects of our lives and supporting them requires a concerted approach.

The Carers' Strategy and its supporting action plans, including this new Mahi Aroha, could not have been delivered without the tireless support, dedication, and effort of the Carers Alliance. I would like to acknowledge the Carers Alliance and the wider carer community's efforts over not just the past 18 months but decades of work. Their valuable contributions helped make this Action Plan a reality and ensured that it was drafted within the context of real-world needs and priorities.



Hon Penny Simmonds

Associate Minister for Social Development and Employment

Foreword - NZ Carers Alliance

Carers Alliance foreword for Carers' Strategy

The Carers Alliance of 60 national not for profits has worked toward progress and change for Aotearoa's family carers since 2004. We came together at that time to seek government partnership for a Carers' Strategy for our country, a call that was answered in 2008 when the first Carers' Strategy and five-year Action Plan were launched.

There have been subsequent Action Plans since then, and it has been a privilege to engage with family carers, the community, government agencies, and the Government to develop this new Strategy and Action Plan.

We thank the thousands of carers and friends who contributed to this work. The result is an ongoing Action Plan that will focus on the priorities carers say are most important to them – greater awareness and appreciation of family caregiving, and better support for carers' physical, mental, and financial wellbeing.

These priorities were chosen by carers themselves in the recent public consultation leading to the launch of this Strategy and Action Plan. They are priorities that have changed little in our decades of work with family carers of all ages, ethnicities, locations, and caring situations. The challenge now sits with government to deliver meaningful progress in these priority areas in the years to come.

Family caring is an invaluable but often invisible role. It is a role we can all expect to have or depend on during our lives. It is a role that has a conservative annual economic value approaching \$18 billion. It is a role that has priceless social and family value, and one New Zealand must appreciate and protect to sustain this vital workforce of family, whanau, and aiga carers.

Supporting carers needs thoughtful commitment by all of us, for New Zealand relies as never before on family carers to make community-based care and 'ageing in place' viable.

With this new Strategy and Action Plan the Carers Alliance commits to ensuring the voice and experience of carers are valued and supported into the future. We look forward to working alongside government to address the wishes and needs of caring New Zealanders into the future – to sustain them so they can stay well themselves and sustain those who rely on them.



Catherine Hall
Co-Chair, Carers Alliance



Janine Stewart
Co-Chair, Carers Alliance



Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan

The Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan (Action Plan) is designed to support all people providing unpaid or informal care. This covers all care contexts and care needs, including full- and part-time care, and caring individually or as part of a family, whānau or wider care team. We know that when carers have what they need, they can better support those they care for, which is to the benefit of all of New Zealand.

The Action Plan provides a cross-government framework to better support carers now while addressing the longstanding challenges carers face over time as people, members of families, whānau and households, and within their communities.

How the Action Plan works

- There are **three priority areas** that carers have told us are most important to them: **Health and Wellbeing, Financial Security, and Recognition and Appreciation**, and an additional area of **Monitoring and Evaluation**.
- There are **nine actions** under the priority areas. Each priority area and action has an **outcome statement** to show what we will work towards over time.
- **Initial steps** are what will happen first (in the 1–3 years following launch) to start making progress towards the outcomes.

Implementing and updating the Action Plan over time

The Action Plan is ongoing and will be updated and built on over time, and work will continue with carers and across government to ensure it remains relevant to carers and is informed by adjacent work across related sectors (for example, the health, disability and social sectors) which impacts on carers and the people they care for.

Carers are family, whānau, aiga, friends or individuals who provide unpaid or informal care to a person or people for reasons such as disability, ageing, physical and mental health conditions, addictions, neurodiversity, injury, or palliative care.

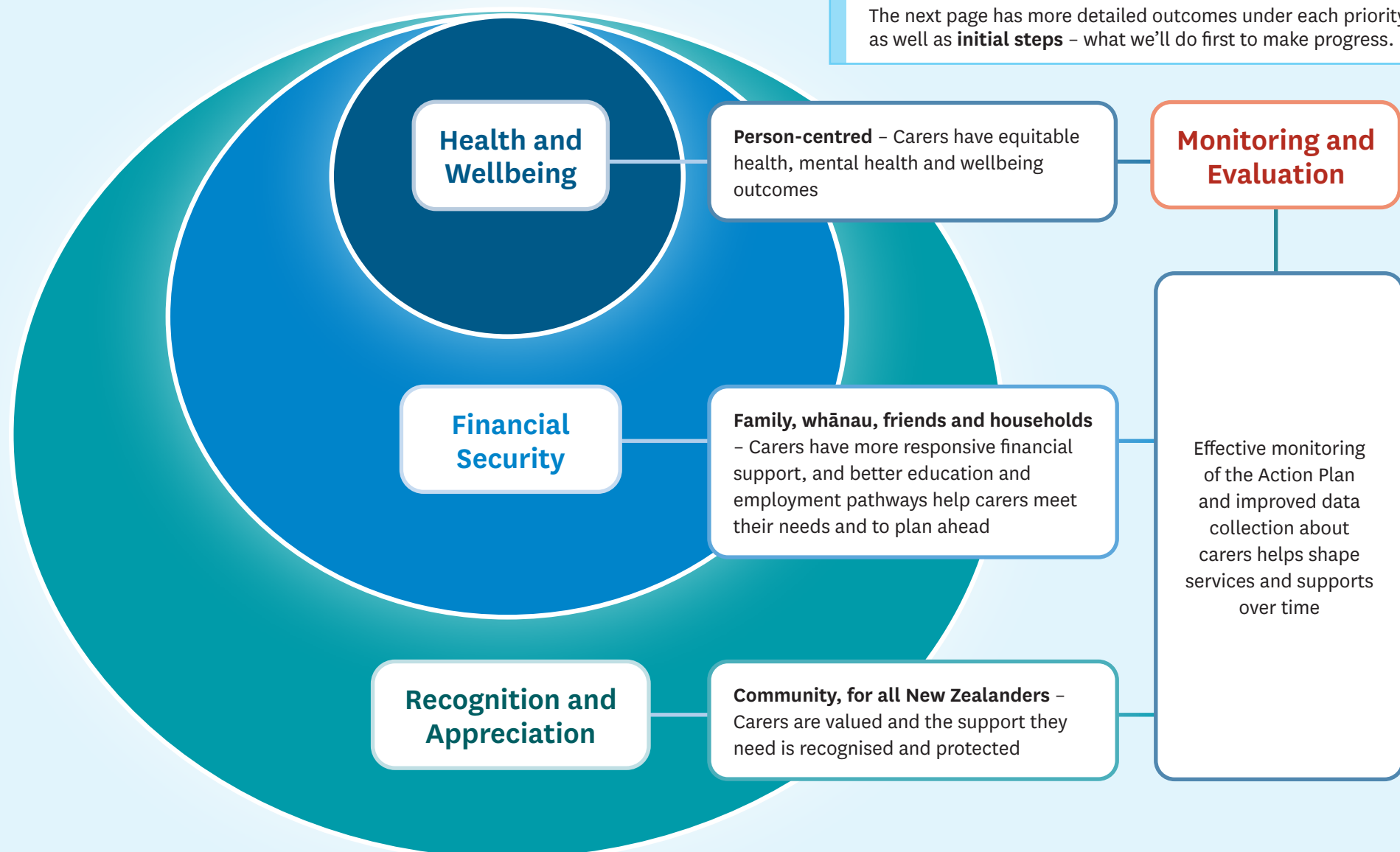
Many of us will provide and receive care at different stages of our lives, although not everyone calls themselves a 'carer'.

For many, care is a natural part of whānau, family or community responsibility, love or duty. Examples of caring include a:

- spouse providing care to a partner with dementia while navigating their own health needs
- parent supporting neurodiverse tamariki while working part-time
- tangata whaikaha living an everyday life with whānau support
- sibling caring for their brother's health after school
- friend supporting their ageing neighbour after a fall
- parent supporting their adult child with episodic illness to navigate the health and disability system
- person managing their partner's palliative care at home
- older parent caring for their adult child with an intellectual disability.



Priority areas and outcomes



This page provides an overview of the Action Plan's main priority areas and outcomes.

The priority areas are what carers have told us matter most for them.

The outcomes under each priority area are what we will move toward as the ongoing Action Plan progresses.

The next page has more detailed outcomes under each priority area, as well as **initial steps** – what we'll do first to make progress.

Actions and initial steps

Health and Wellbeing Carers have equitable health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes		
Actions	Outcomes	Initial steps
Action 1: Respite and breaks	Carers have more respite and break options, and can access services that support both carers and care recipients to take the breaks they need. Respite and wellbeing break options are flexible to meet the choices and needs of both the carer and care recipient, culturally appropriate, age-appropriate, regionally available, and accessible.	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.
Action 2: Targeted support	Carers get targeted support from frontline staff, and their needs are considered early and fully.	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 meet their needs and plan ahead		
Actions	Outcomes	Initial steps
Action 3: Financial support	Government financial supports for carers are more responsive to carers' needs and are sustainable.	3. Develop an overview of available government financial assistance for carers, focusing on the levels of support, coverage, gaps, and inconsistencies.
Action 4: Skills, education and employment	Carers get appropriate targeted supports for training and learning during and after caring. Carers are supported to pursue their chosen work and education opportunities to support their financial security during and after caring. Carers' skills and value are recognised, and carers are better supported by their employers and education providers.	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

Actions	Outcomes	Initial steps
Action 5: Awareness	The New Zealand public and frontline staff have improved awareness of the diverse carers of New Zealand and their contributions — including those who don't see themselves as carers.	5. Celebrate a national Carers Day in 2027.
Action 6: Culturally appropriate support	Carers get support that suits their culture and needs. All government services use culturally appropriate, mana-enhancing and inclusive ways of talking about carers and caring.	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 also include wider consideration of people's needs when interacting with a service, for example LGBTQI+ identities, neurodiversity, gender, age, disability status, or the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.
Action 7: Service access and navigation	There is accessible local and national information available on government supports and services, and services are easy to find and use. Information is available in accessible formats and multiple languages. Frontline staff proactively help carers to navigate the supports and services available.	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 shape services and supports over time

Actions	Outcomes	Initial steps
Action 8: Monitoring	The Action Plan is tracked using a monitoring and evaluation framework. The framework tracks achievement against outcomes over time.	8. Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Action Plan.
Action 9: Data and evidence	Government agencies collect key statistics and information about carers in New Zealand, where appropriate, to understand carers and upcoming needs.	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.

Agencies partnered with or contributing to the Carers' Strategy and the Action Plan

The current agencies partnered with or contributing to the Carers' Strategy and the Mahi Aroha Carers' Strategy Action Plan who are responsible for jointly progressing or contributing, where practicable, to actions are:

- **Ministry of Social Development**
- **Ministry of Health**
- **Health New Zealand**
- **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha**
- **Te Puni Kōkiri – Ministry of Māori Development**
- **Office for Seniors**
- **Ministry for Pacific Peoples**
- **Accident Compensation Corporation**
- **Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children**
- **Ministry for Women**
- **Ministry of Education.**

Acknowledgements

MSD would like to extend thanks to the Carers' Alliance, the Carers' Advisory Group membership, and everyone who took the time to share your own feedback and stories with us to inform the Action Plan development process.

We look forward to continuing to work with the community into the future to implement the Action Plan over time.



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