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Tēnā koe Arran

Thank you for your correspondence on 29 January 2026 sharing the Independent Children's Monitor's (Aroturuki Tamariki) finalised report *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2024/2025*.

As indicated in previous correspondence, I was pleased to see that your 2024/25 regional engagements showed that access to primary healthcare for children and young people in care is generally good, noting some constraints across services.

The report also highlights some ongoing challenges with Oranga Tamariki compliance with the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018.

For health agencies, our role involves supporting access to health services, such as Gateway assessments, health checks and mental health services. Appendix One sets out the relevant findings for health and what health agencies intend to do in response, including timeframes and how we intend to monitor the impact of any changes.

As requested, this response will also be provided to the Minister for Children (Hon Karen Chhour) and the Minister responsible for the Monitor (Hon Louise Upston).

We remain committed to working alongside Oranga Tamariki and other children's agencies to improve health outcomes for children and young people involved with the Oranga Tamariki system.

Thank you again for taking the time to write. I wish you well.



Nāku noa, na

Audrey Sonerson
Director-General of Health
Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora



Appendix One: Responses to findings in the *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2024/2025*

Report findings	Our response	Timeframes	Monitoring
<p>The report includes concerns about Oranga Tamariki assessing needs and developing plans and specifically references barriers to accessing Gateway assessments. These barriers are said to include a shortage of services and issues around agency funding that cause long waitlists to get Gateway assessments completed. The report states that funding cuts have created a barrier to accessing the services and supports identified as a result of the Gateway assessment process.</p>	<p>Health NZ and Oranga Tamariki are progressing national improvements to the current Gateway service to enable improved access to health, education, and disability services.</p> <p>These changes include improvements to contract settings, consent processes and clearer processes and pathways.</p> <p>Health agencies await next steps following the review by Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency.</p>	<p>National improvements to Gateway will be complete by the end of 2027.</p>	<p>Progress is regularly reported on through the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan reporting.</p> <p>Once fully implemented, changes to the Gateway service will help improve access to services and outcomes in meeting the health, disability and education needs of children and young people. Impact will be monitored by Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ.</p>

Report findings	Our response	Timeframes	Monitoring
<p>The report highlights a lack of assurance that health needs are being met and specific concerns that there has been no progress in ensuring that children in care have an annual health check. The regulations require that reasonable steps are taken to ensure children in care are enrolled with a primary health organisation (PHO) and accessing annual health and dental checks.</p>	<p>In December 2025, Minister Chhour and Minister Brown agreed to the proposed settings to ensure children in care are visible within the health system and funding was identified to support this work. A project plan with timeframes is currently being developed by agencies.</p> <p>Guidance for health practitioners will also be developed to support them to tailor their practice and respond to the unique needs of children and young people in care.</p> <p>This work will support health practitioners to be more responsive to the needs of children in care and support improved monitoring of health engagement and frequency.</p> <p>Work continues between agencies to develop a two-way Information Sharing Agreement to enable this work.</p> <p>As stated in the report, Oranga Tamariki has work underway looking at what the annual health check could involve, and the Ministry and Health NZ have been involved in this work.</p>	<p>We expect that children in care will be visible in the health system by the end 2027.</p>	<p>Progress is regularly reported on through the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan reporting. Agencies are working on a project plan with detailed timeframes to track progress. Monitoring methods will be developed, and impact will be monitored by Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ.</p> <p>If implemented, this change will enable more responsive healthcare through improved identifiability and guidance for health professionals about children and young people in care.</p> <p>It will also improve our knowledge of the frequency of health engagements and health needs for children in care.</p>

Report findings	Our response	Timeframes	Monitoring
<p>The report finds that access to mental health services is particularly challenging for children in care.</p>	<p>As stated in the report, health agencies are working with Oranga Tamariki on improvements to mental health support for children in care. This work includes training to support Oranga Tamariki social workers to increase capability and better support children with mental health and addiction needs and improvements for group homes and residences.</p> <p>Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ are focused on improving interagency collaboration at the service level, and regional and national levels and have established new liaison roles in both Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ settings.</p> <p>Health NZ has contracted training for mental health services to support working with Oranga Tamariki. Health NZ is working with Oranga Tamariki to provide training on mental health for Oranga Tamariki frontline workers.</p> <p>Oranga Tamariki has been working to scope a longer-term plan for increasing the mental health capability of its staff and take immediate actions where appropriate.</p>	<p>End of 2027.</p>	<p>Progress is regularly reported on through the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan. Impact will be measured and monitored by Oranga Tamariki and Health NZ.</p> <p>Once fully implemented, this will enable a trauma-informed, relational model of care to better support the complex mental health and addiction needs of children and young people in Oranga Tamariki care and residences.</p>

