

# **Oranga Tamariki response to *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2025***

**Response from Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children  
to the Aroturuki Tamariki | Independent Children’s  
Monitor report *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa: Agency  
Compliance with the National Care Standards and  
Related Matters Regulations, 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025***

**27 February 2026**

# Response to the fifth full report from Aroturuki Tamariki

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) acknowledges the Aroturuki Tamariki | Independent Children’s Monitor (the Monitor) report on agency compliance with the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018. This is the fifth Experiences of Care in Aotearoa report and the first under the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Legislation Amendment Act 2025.

We recognise the Monitor’s statutory role under the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022 and the importance of monitoring the experiences of tamariki and rangatahi in care. We also acknowledge the time and effort taken by the Monitor to engage with tamariki, whānau and kaimahi as part of this reporting cycle.

The Monitor’s key findings are that:

1. There has been no real improvement in compliance with the National Care Standards Regulations.
2. This is because social workers are not always able to work effectively and other government agencies are not sufficiently prioritising access to help.
3. Areas of high and low compliance, although Oranga Tamariki developed regulations and should comply with them all.
4. New action plan is expected to improve performance.
5. Improved compliance may be easier with a more dedicated focus.

Both New Zealand and Oranga Tamariki have faced significant challenges this year, including a rise in Reports of Concern (ROCs), economic stress on whānau, a rise in methamphetamine consumption, and increases in sexual offending where the victim was a whānau member. As the Monitor has noted in their report, these factors mean that Oranga Tamariki are under significant pressure to respond to increasing concerns reported about the safety and wellbeing of tamariki not in our care, whilst also prioritising this alongside our obligations to tamariki who are.

Despite these challenges, Oranga Tamariki has continued to make positive progress towards achieving compliance with care standards and improving the experiences of tamariki in care. More tamariki are being supported to remain safely with their whānau, and of those surveyed, 96 percent of children in care tell us they feel safe, 90 percent feel supported to achieve their goals and 89 percent tell us they feel they have somewhere they belong. Caregiver supports continue to improve, youth offending initiatives are showing promise, and standards across residences are lifting significantly. We are investing in new frontline technology, professional supports and training, youth justice services, and have established a Child Protection Investigation Unit.

## Response to key findings

*There has been no real improvement in compliance with the National Care Standards Regulations*

The Monitor makes it clear in their report that they have seen a lack of progress in our compliance with Care Standards over the last 12 months of monitoring. Furthermore,



they note they have seen little evidence of any meaningful improvement over the five years they have been monitoring.

Oranga Tamariki continues to report annually to Parliament against the 21 lead indicators we use to monitor our compliance with the National Care Standards. A three-year summary of compliance was presented this year following auditing by Audit New Zealand.

Whilst we note that the Monitor has stated that Oranga Tamariki have only been able to meet all 21 lead indicators for 37 percent of children, there are high rates of compliance across a number of domains.

Of the 21 lead indicators:

- Compliance was achieved for three.
- Compliance was achieved most of the time for 13.
- Compliance was achieved more than half of the time for four.
- Compliance was achieved some of the time for one.

This suggests that many children are receiving care which is mostly consistent with our care standards whilst some continue to receive care which is below the standard that is expected and which they deserve.

It is pleasing that the Monitor has noted some areas of good practice, including a strong focus on maintaining whānau connection, improving use of plans to ensure caregivers receive support and collaborative practices with our community partners. These areas of quality are reflected in our own self-assurance where we continue to see consistent practice in a number of areas including the presence of some form of assessment and plan (86 percent of tamariki), with a focus on safety (90 percent of tamariki), health (86 percent of tamariki), education (92 percent of tamariki), recreation and play (90 percent of tamariki) and whānau connection (85 percent of tamariki). High rates of engagement with tamariki, their whānau and caregivers are also regularly observed with their views being more regularly included in assessments and plans. We note a number of examples in the report of social workers, whānau and caregivers feeling well supported by our kaimahi. Through our case file analysis, we continue to see similar examples of practice excellence.

Whilst it is our view that most children in care are experiencing a quality of care that is becoming more consistent with the expectations of the care standards, for too many children, in particular those who are older, who have spent more time in care and who have a range of complex health and disability related needs there are continued challenges for Oranga Tamariki to meet those full range of needs. We note the emphasis placed by the Monitor on the need for effective education, health and in particular mental health services for these rangatahi, reinforcing that Oranga Tamariki cannot meet the needs of tamariki in care alone. We continue to work with our agency partners across the entire children' system to better understand where the needs of tamariki are not being met and how best to respond.

Over the five-year period, and particularly between 2022 and 2023, significant gains were made across a range of our lead indicators. This year's report shows that these gains have been largely maintained. We nevertheless agree with the Monitor that it is



also clear there are a number of areas where we have not yet made the progress we would expect or that children in care deserve.

In April 2025 we developed a National Care Standards Action Plan to support the wellbeing and rights of children in care, alongside compliance with the National Care Standards. The Action Plan focuses on 10 areas<sup>1</sup> of the care standards which we are monitoring closely as part of our overall performance. The areas of focus reflect the messages we heard clearly from previous monitoring reports and were discussed with and strongly supported by the Monitor. Whilst it was too early to see the impacts of this focus on the 2024/25 monitoring period, in the period May to February 2025 we observed:

- A nine percent increase in the percentage of children visited at least weekly in the first four weeks following a return home.
- A nine percent increase in the number of approved and up to date All About Me Plans.
- An 18 percent increase in the number of children who had details of their GP recorded (noting enrolment rates are high for tamariki in care).
- Consistently high rates (between 95 and 97 percent) of children being seen by their social worker at least once in the last 8 weeks.
- Increased referrals (78 percent) of rangatahi eligible for transition support.
- A five percent decrease in the number of rangatahi in residence for who a report of concern was made.

We note these improvements are incremental for most measures, and we anticipate the plan will need to remain in force for some time to achieve improved compliance levels.

Oranga Tamariki intends to maintain its focus on these core areas of performance over the current reporting period.

Based on our quality assurance activities, we agree with the Monitor that we are not yet fully compliant across all care standards for all children. However, we are of the view that more progress has been made than this finding might reflect.

*This is because social workers are not always able to work effectively and other government agencies are not sufficiently prioritising access to help*

We acknowledge that there are significant challenges facing our social worker workforce, for a number of reasons, and remain committed to improving the capacity

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<sup>1</sup> The 10 focus areas are: Percentage of young people and children who return/remain home are visited at least weekly in the first four weeks of return; Percentage of children in care (more than eight weeks) visited by their social workers at least once every eight weeks; Percentage of open and approved All About Me Plans for children in care that have been edited in last six months; Number of children in care with an approved assessment report in the last 12 months; Percentage of children in custody (C&P and YJ) have GP recorded; Percentage of children in residential care with a report of concern during their stay (includes non-care related ROCs); Percentage of tamariki Māori have an iwi recorded; Percentage of caregivers who are visited in line with their Caregiver Support Plan, and at least once every six months; Number of children placed with unapproved caregivers (Category A & Category B); Percentage of transition eligible rangatahi with transition planning indicators.

for our kaimahi to have the time and resources they need to provide the best support possible to tamariki in care.

The Frontline Technology Systems Upgrade (FTSU) will provide frontline kaimahi with a new case management system that makes recording and accessing information faster and easier. This will allow kaimahi to focus more time on engaging with tamariki and whānau. While the FTSU programme progresses, Oranga Tamariki continues to invest in and support frontline kaimahi through changes to existing technology. The development of a new tool to record All About Me Plans is on track for kaimahi to use by mid-2026.

Oranga Tamariki is also involved in a number of cross-agency programmes to improve access to services and supports from across the children's system. New focus areas for the Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan for 2025/26 include gateway and trauma-informed health services, improved education support, stronger housing transitions and improved data and information sharing. These initiatives seek to embed and expand what's already working across health, education, housing and data sharing and is guided by reviews, including Experiences of Care in Aotearoa reports.

Under the integrated response to the recommendations made in Dame Karen Poutasi's review into the death of Malachi Subecz, Oranga Tamariki recently established an Inter-Agency Hub in our National Contact Centre. This hub brings together representatives from Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Social Development, Health NZ, Ministry of Education, Department of Corrections, and the Police, and aims to provide an improved safety net for tamariki whose sole parent or carer is remanded in custody or sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Whilst not currently specifically focused on children in care, initiatives such as the hub are enabling agencies to develop and strengthen ways of working which will ultimately benefit all children with whom Oranga Tamariki is involved.

*Areas of high and low compliance, although Oranga Tamariki developed regulations and should comply with them all*

As noted, we are pleased that the Monitor has identified areas of quality practice in their reporting whilst acknowledging there are areas where performance must also be strengthened. This is consistent with our own analysis of practice.

We recognise that much of the Monitor's analysis of our performance is drawn from their engagement with tamariki, rangatahi, caregivers and staff. This is an important source of evidence of whether tamariki and caregiver experiences of care are changing over time. However, it is important that these qualitative experiences are understood and carefully weighed alongside the considerable quantitative evidence provided to the Monitor by Oranga Tamariki. We recognise that the Monitor has included a range of direct quotes which evidence both positive and negative experiences of Oranga Tamariki. Without questioning the validity of these experiences, at times we remain concerned that the inclusion of some individual experiences without further context may infer a more serious pattern of concern than other sources of evidence might suggest.



*New action plan is expected to improve performance*

We are pleased that the Monitor is supportive of the National Care Standards Action Plan. As noted, we have already seen performance improvements as a result of this plan and are confident about seeing sustained improvements through our continued focus on this work.

*Improved compliance may be easier with a more dedicated focus*

We agree that improving compliance with the National Care Standards requires a dedicated focus, which is why we developed the National Care Standards Action Plan.

Oranga Tamariki is committed to meeting all National Care Standards. However, the depth and breadth of care standards are by their nature ambitious, which is no less than children in care deserve. With the support of the Monitor, the Action Plan has helped us focus on a smaller subset of areas and as noted this has resulted in improvements, albeit incremental for most measures. We will continue to use the Action Plan to drive increased compliance across these important areas of focus whilst continuing to use the lead indicators to support our broader subset of monitoring. Once the 10 current priority areas in the National Care Standards Action Plan are consistently achieved, we will broaden the work programme to address further standards, drawing from insights from the Monitor and our own self-assurance activities.