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Tēnā koe Arran

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 January 2025 sharing the Independent Children's Monitor's | Aroturuki Tamariki (the Monitor) annual report *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa* for the reporting period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

The Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora appreciate the work done by the Monitor on this report. This letter outlines our response to the health-related findings made in the report.

We recognise that children and young people in care have health, disability, and wider needs that the system needs to respond to, and that many of these children and young people have high and complex needs.

Over the past year we have focused our efforts on a small set of actions that health agencies are progressing in co-operation with Oranga Tamariki, with a view to improving the responsiveness of health services, and support improved health, educational, and wider social outcomes for children in care.

The cross-agency action areas that we have been working on include:

- **Improving the Gateway service** – the Gateway service plays an important role in assessing and planning for the needs of children coming into, or already in, the care system, but we know that it is not working as well as it could be. A review of the service conducted from March 2023 to April 2024 identified several areas for improvement. This may require some parts of the service to be redesigned. We expect to be able to share more information about changes to the service in coming months.
- **Considering making the care status of children in the care of Oranga Tamariki visible in some parts of the health system** – children in care and their whānau can have complex health needs and face additional barriers when it comes to having their health needs met. Currently the health sector is often unaware of these specific needs as there is no visibility of the child being in care within the current systems. Agencies are considering changes that would make the care status of children visible within certain parts of the health system, with a view to supporting more responsive services (for example in primary care). We are mindful that the sharing and use of information about the care status of children involves legal, privacy and ethical considerations that need to be worked through, and the timing of any changes is yet to be confirmed.
- **Developing specific guidance for frontline health workers, social workers, and caregivers** – a strong understanding of how to navigate health and social support systems is required to address often high unmet and complex needs of children in care. Clearer and more detailed guidance will support improved health outcomes outside of health settings (for example by improving the health literacy of caregivers), support people who are not health experts to navigate the health system and help health practitioners to better understand and respond to the particular needs of children in state care.
- **Improving information sharing for caregivers** – caregivers do not always know the health status of the child in their care or how to access the health system and supports. Work to address this is led by Oranga Tamariki and seeks to ensure that caregivers have the information they need to support the health needs of the children they are caring for.
- **Improving mental health support for children and young people in Oranga Tamariki care and residences** – children and young people in care have higher rates of mental distress and experiences of trauma and continue to face barriers accessing mental health services. We also acknowledge longer-term work is needed to ensure the most appropriate model of care is in place in the mental health services provided to this group of children and young people. To prepare for this type of work in the future Oranga Tamariki and Health New Zealand have

committed to work together to identify opportunities to improve interagency collaboration at local, regional, and national levels. Oranga Tamariki also plans to scope a long-term plan for increasing the mental health capability of Oranga Tamariki staff and caregivers.

This work is monitored and overseen by the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan Health and Wellbeing Governance Group, which is made up of senior managers from the Ministry, Health New Zealand, and Oranga Tamariki, and directs both policy development, and implementation. As these activities progress the group will look to establish mechanisms to monitor the impact of changes on the health outcomes of children and young people in care, and use this information to inform further actions.

Health agencies are committed to working alongside Oranga Tamariki and other children's agencies to improve access to health services, the responsiveness of health services, and health outcomes for children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki. The Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora welcome working with the Monitor on this important work.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Diana Sarfati
Director-General of Health
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora

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