

Oranga Tamariki response to *Outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori and their whānau in the oranga tamariki system 2024/25*

Response from Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children
to the Aroturuki Tamariki | Independent Children’s
Monitor report *Outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi
Māori and their whānau in the oranga tamariki system*
1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025

5 June 2026

Response to the second full report from Aroturuki Tamariki

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) acknowledges the Aroturuki Tamariki | Independent Children’s Monitor (the Monitor) report on Outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori and their whānau in the oranga tamariki system. This is the second Outcomes for Māori report.

We acknowledge the time and effort taken by the Monitor to engage with tamariki, whānau and kaimahi as part of this reporting cycle. The Monitor plays a pivotal role in the oranga tamariki system (the system), and we welcome the report’s holistic view of how the system is operating.

The Monitor’s key findings are:

1. More must be done to respond to the needs of tamariki and rangatahi Māori to address the impact of over-representation in the oranga tamariki system.
2. Failure to provide the right response at the earliest opportunity is evident in youth justice.
3. Tamariki Māori have higher unmet care and protection needs and worse outcome than non-Māori.
4. Successful iwi-led initiatives and strategic partnerships need to be the base for broader long-term change, and this should happen faster.
5. Current data does not show the full extent of disparity or enable system effectiveness to be measured.

Oranga Tamariki is the lead statutory agency for care and protection and youth justice in Aotearoa. In this response, we outline the actions Oranga Tamariki is taking to address the report’s findings.

However, Oranga Tamariki cannot meet the needs of tamariki and whānau on its own. The system is much broader than Oranga Tamariki and includes other central government agencies, contracted providers and iwi, Māori and community organisations. Collectively, these agencies share responsibility for providing services or support under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. We appreciate the Monitor’s acknowledgement in the report that *“Outcomes are not necessarily caused by involvement in the oranga tamariki system, and it is not [the Monitor’s] intention to attribute outcomes to any one factor or to the actions of any one agency”*.

Significant cross-agency work is underway through the integrated response to the Dame Karen Poutasi review [Ensuring strong and effective safety nets to prevent abuse of children](#) and the [Oranga Tamariki System Action Plan](#). Both work programmes are focused on improving how agencies in the system work together and are driving system-level change that will help address the report’s findings. This includes improving information sharing, enabling inter-agency collaboration, additional training and development and improving public knowledge and awareness of child abuse in Aotearoa.



Response to key findings

1. *More must be done to respond to the needs of tamariki and rangatahi Māori to address the impact of over-representation in the oranga tamariki system*

Overrepresentation of tamariki and rangatahi Māori in the system is evident. Additionally, there are significant wider socio-economic issues that disproportionately affect Māori and have a significant impact on the likelihood of child abuse, family harm, and tamariki becoming involved in the system. These factors include the ongoing impact of colonisation, inter-generational involvement with the criminal justice system or the oranga tamariki system, worse health and education outcomes, and higher instances of mental health issues and substance abuse.

The system itself does not have the resources or the mandate to address many of these factors which require a coordinated and sustained effort from across government to address.

The following work to improve how Oranga Tamariki responds to the needs of tamariki involved in the system is currently underway:

- Enabling Communities is working to shift resources and decision making closer to iwi and Māori communities, to better meet the needs of tamariki and whānau Māori involved in the system.
- The Integrated and Safe Care Response (ISCR) work programme is focused on ensuring all tamariki and rangatahi are safe, supported and receive tailored care, no matter where they are in the system. It is funded over four years until the end of financial year 2028/29, for seven deliverables¹ for community and remand homes, and individual caregiver settings.
- Through the Professionalisation of the Residential Workforce work programme, Oranga Tamariki will strengthen professional leadership in residences, improve the capability of the residential workforce and increase the proportion of residential kaimahi with a relevant qualification. The programme is funded over four years until the end of financial year 2028/29.
- The Oranga Tamariki Practice Approach is framed by te Tiriti o Waitangi, supported by a mana-enhancing paradigm for practice and draws on Te Ao Māori principles of oranga. Over the 2025/26 financial year, a range of new practice tools for frontline staff have been introduced to support our Practice Approach, including the Tangata Whenua and Bicultural Supervision Model which emphasises critical reflection, ethical practice and learning in relation to working with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori. Work is ongoing to embed the Practice Approach resources and tools to ensure they are used consistently, and we have received positive feedback from kaimahi on their value in supporting good practice.

¹ The seven funded initiatives are: escalation pathway for care issues and risk; end-to-end caregiver approval, support, and investigation pathway; policy and monitoring assurance framework; real-time reporting mechanism; investigation and accountability framework; training and development for all staff and caregivers; and targeted training for kaimahi and caregivers.

2. *Failure to provide the right response at the earliest opportunity is evident in youth justice*

Oranga Tamariki takes a holistic approach to responding to youth justice needs, which includes consideration of care and protection needs. Since June 2023, the number of serious and persistent child and youth offenders has reduced by over 25 percent, exceeding the government target of 15 percent. However, we acknowledge the report's finding that the responses in place are not always consistently delivered or effective. Existing programmes focused on prevention and early response include:

- **Fast Track:** A joint Police and Oranga Tamariki rapid-response initiative for children (typically aged 10 to 13 years) who offend, providing a coordinated support plan within 24 to 48 hours. It began in South and West Auckland and has been expanded to multiple regions including central Auckland, Hamilton, Christchurch, Whangārei, and Rotorua, with local multi-agency teams working alongside iwi and community providers.
- **Oranga Rangatahi:** A programme that offers targeted support, alongside iwi providers, for children aged 11 to 14 years who are at risk of offending. It can also support younger children and older teens in some cases. An example of support the programme can give is helping young people who have been excluded return to schooling. Another example is supporting the wider family in their search for stable accommodation, by helping them speak to agencies who can help. Oranga Rangatahi is delivered in Huntly, Levin, Maraenui, Ahuriri, Wairoa, Flaxmere, Opotiki and Gisborne.
- **Supervision with activity:** Structured programmes where young people are supervised in the community while taking part in rehabilitative activities. These help them address the reasons for their offending behaviour and support their return to everyday life. For example, our provider START Taranaki runs a programme where young people spend time in nature hiking and camping, combined with chances to learn new skills that help them move into a training course or begin work. It is a core part of the youth justice system used across New Zealand to address offending behaviour and support rehabilitation.
- **Youth mentoring:** A community-based programme where trained mentors provide one-on-one support to young people, helping them address the reasons behind their behaviour and stay engaged in education, work, and positive activities. Mentoring is different for every young person, depending on what they need. For example, a mentor might help a young person get used to following a routine, by helping them plan their week and get to all their activities on time. Youth mentoring is delivered nationwide.

3. *Tamariki Māori have higher unmet care and protection needs and worse outcomes than non-Māori*

Oranga Tamariki is committed to improving outcomes for tamariki Māori in our care. However, as noted above, Māori are overrepresented across several socio-economic factors that are linked to an increased risk of child abuse. These factors increase the likelihood that Māori will have higher and more complex needs and face additional challenges that can limit the effectiveness of the system's response.

The National Care Standards (NCS) should be met for all tamariki in care, and we acknowledge that this is an area of improvement for Oranga Tamariki. In April 2025



we developed a NCS Action Plan (the Plan) to support the wellbeing and rights of tamariki in care and NCS compliance. The Plan identifies 10 focus areas based on what we heard from previous monitoring reports. As noted in our response to the Monitor's report *Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2024/25*, we have already seen incremental performance improvements through the Plan. We are confident that through a continued focus on this work, we will see sustained improvements over time.

We acknowledge that providing appropriate support to care-experienced rangatahi transitioning to adulthood has a significant impact on long term outcomes for care-experienced rangatahi. In 2019, changes were made to the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 to reflect our responsibility in this area, which resulted in the rollout of Transition Support Services (TSS) from 2019 to 2022. The four-year evaluation Transition Support Services (TSS) in 2024 showed the service was valued by rangatahi and was improving their lives.

There were lower referrals and uptake of TSS from 2022 to 2023. Since then, Oranga Tamariki has taken specific actions to increase awareness and engagement with TSS, including:

- Directly informing rangatahi of eligibility for TSS, their entitlements and how to access the service.
- Providing social workers with annual practice prompts on their transition-related NCS obligations.
- Partnering with the Howard League NZ driving programme to support 16 to 21-year-olds to attain their driver licence.
- Uptake of TSS is monitored through quarterly referral rate reporting, which includes data on disparities between Māori and non-Māori. As at 31 March 2026, the referral rate was 71 percent for Māori and 69.4 percent for non-Māori.

We are also in the process of mapping the system of housing supports and services, and the current barriers and gaps for rangatahi accessing housing supports. This work is expected to be completed by December 2026 and will inform a plan to work with other agencies and housing providers to increase access to support with housing.

4. *Successful iwi-led initiatives and strategic partnerships need to be the base for broader long-term change, and this should happen faster*

Oranga Tamariki developed the Enabling Communities programme to test iwi-led initiatives and consider different approaches to responding to the needs of tamariki and whānau. It is our intention to use the insights from the programme to inform how Oranga Tamariki will work in the future. However, expanding this work needs to be carefully sequenced. As our partners take more responsibility in the system, greater support and assurance work is required. It is important that we implement this in a way that ensures iwi and Māori providers are set up for success, with appropriate capability, resourcing, and evaluation in place.

While many of the iwi-led models highlighted in the report show excellent early promise, individual prototype evaluations have not yet been completed. These evaluations will provide the potential blueprints for new community models of care. The Enabling Communities final evaluation report is due to Ministers in December



2026. Further consideration will then be required to determine where it will be most effective to scale-up investment. We expect to make decisions on next steps in 2027.

Our refreshed commissioning approach responds to the need for broader long-term change that relies on needs assessment, service design, and engagement with providers (including iwi). This will enable open procurement to be delivered within organisational capacity, without introducing unacceptable risk to service continuity or child outcomes.

We are also developing a phased procurement plan that will underpin our re-procurement of all of our services.

5. *Current data does not show the full extent of disparity or enable system effectiveness to be measured*

Oranga Tamariki acknowledges that better quality data is required to ensure accurate and actionable insights on disparities. We are currently in the process of upgrading the recording of ethnicity in our case management system, CYRAS, from level 3 to level 4 in the Stats NZ ethnicity classification hierarchy. Level 4 is the most detailed level in the hierarchy and will support far greater accuracy, equity and cultural relevance. It captures specific ethnic identities by country and moves away from generic geographical definitions, will give data more diversity and relevance, and supports multiple identities and combined ethnicities.

We are also removing the recording of primary ethnicity, instead having ethnicity reflect the dynamic nature and contextual environments. Using primary ethnicity as a default data representation can lead to over-representation of a single ethnicity and reduce visibility of multiple ethnic identities. This aligns Oranga Tamariki practice with ethnicity as 'cultural affiliation' not a single fixed trait.

In the long-term, Oranga Tamariki is continuing to progress the Frontline Technology Systems Upgrade (FTSU), which will provide a single place for important information about a child to be stored and cared for. This is a multi-year work programme that will greatly enhance the quality of our data and further enhance available insights into disparities and system performance.

Conclusion

Oranga Tamariki is committed to continuing the work identified in this response. We are confident these work programmes will contribute to addressing the report's findings and improve outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori and their whānau over time.

Many of these programmes are significant, multi-year pieces of work and we look forward to seeing incremental progress in future reports from the Monitor as this work continues.

