

The future of child protection and care: Q and A

What were the findings from the expert panel's interim report, which set out the case for change in CYF?

It concluded that the current system is not delivering effectively for vulnerable children and young people, and that transformational change is required. The agency is not effective in intervening early to provide the support that these children deserve, and demand for CYF services has increased as a result of children re-entering the system on multiple occasions. 64 per cent of the 61,000 children notified to CYF in 2014 had a previous notification.

A study found that by the age of 21, for children with a care placement who were born in the 12 months to June 1991:

- Almost 90 per cent are on a benefit
- Around 25 per cent are on a benefit with a child
- Almost 80 per cent do not have NCEA Level 2
- More than 30 per cent have a Youth Justice referral by age 18
- Almost 20 per cent have had a custodial sentence
- Almost 40 per cent have had a community sentence

The average age of children placed with family is 7-8 years old and they have already had an average 7-8 care placements by this stage.

The panel also found that:

- less than 25 per cent of CYF staff (760 out of 3,176) work directly with children in need of care and protection
- Less than 1 per cent of staff have a dedicated professional support role, such as psychologists and therapists.

A previous workload review found that around fifty per cent of staff time is spent on administrative issues.

How will the transformed operating model differ from the current system?

It will be focused on harm prevention and the long-term wellbeing and successful life outcomes for children, including the transition into adulthood, in addition to its current role of immediate crisis management. It will ensure that children's needs are placed at the centre of any actions, and that they have a voice in the decisions, strategies and services that affect them. The new model will act as a single point of accountability so that one agency is responsible for the long term welfare of these vulnerable children and young people, rather than funding and services being scattered across multiple agencies. It will also have the ability to directly purchase support services as soon as they are needed.

The new model will have five core services:

Prevention: using the investment approach and evidence it will develop and target early interventions to prevent harm and trauma. It will support families to develop stable and loving relationships to avoid young people having to end up in state care. New services to prevent youth offending will also be developed.

Intensive intervention: it will be a single point of entry for identifying and assessing the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. It will have a professional practice framework that explicitly recognises trauma, and will ensure there is access to therapeutic services.

Care support: to reduce the trauma of multiple care placement it will focus on getting children into a stable and loving caregiving family at the earliest opportunity. Mandatory National Care Standards will be developed, with greater scrutiny of caregivers to prevent re-victimisation. There will also be a recruitment strategy to create a large and diverse pool of suitable caregiver families, alongside increased financial and other supports for these families.

Youth Justice: using an investment approach children with complex needs who offend will be treated as a priority group, and evidence-based services which reduce offending and reoffending will be increased. Where appropriate and with public safety in mind, alternatives will be found for some young people currently remanded in secure residences to reduce the unintended long-term negative impacts this has on them.

Supported transitions into young adulthood: the minimum age of state care will be raised to a young person's 18th birthday, with options being developed to allow some young people to remain or return to care up to age 21. Consideration will also be given to having some kind of support in place, depending on needs, up to age 25.

How long will these changes take to implement?

Whilst the new operating model is scheduled to be in place by 31 March 2017, this is a long-term transformation programme over the next five years. It is not a quick-fix and we cannot run the risk of this being another knee-jerk restructure. There have been 14 such restructures in recent times, and the current system is still not working in the best interests of children.

Who will lead the changes?

The Minister for Social Development remains responsible for the new model, and there will also be a Ministerial Oversight Group. A reformed Vulnerable Children's Board with an independent chair, up to three independent members and relevant government chief executives will drive the transformation programme. This will include at least one independent Maori specialist. A transformation team made up of officials and experts will carry out the detailed work.

Will there be a new separate department with a new Chief Executive or a new name for the agency?

Decisions have still to be made on this. MSD and the State Services Commission will provide advice in the next few weeks on the structure to support the new operating model. Following Cabinet agreement on this a recruitment process will begin for new leadership.

What is clear is that the transformation and operation of the new model will require strong leadership. Work is underway on aspects of the new operating model as we await advice on the structure. CYF's current system will continue to be overseen by the chief executive of MSD until the new model starts operating at the end of March 2017.

How much is this going to cost?

It will require additional funding which is subject to the usual confidential Budget process. The full cost won't be known until further work is carried out on the details of the new operating model, which will take place over the course of the next year.

How will direct purchasing work?

To ensure that vulnerable children get timely access to the support they need to help them recover and thrive, funding will follow the child as part of the new operating model. Specialist services such as counselling, trauma, psychology, education and health will be able to be purchased on behalf of the child when they are needed. This is similar to the ACC model, and means staff won't have to spend time trying to negotiate with agencies to get kids the help they need, and can spend more time working with children.

Services could be purchased from DHBs, education providers, NGOs, and specialist services such as psychologists. Some of the funding for this approach could be reallocated in future years from relevant departments. It should be noted that CYF currently involves a whole range of NGOs and providers, eg Barnados, for services such as placements, and this year has contracted out services worth around \$81 million to such providers.

What will this mean for staff?

Staff will be better supported and be able to devote more of their time to working with vulnerable children. New, strong leadership will be expected to lead a culture change within the organisation focused on prevention, rather than simply reacting to crisis. This ethos is similar to the changes made by New Zealand Police when they made a conscious decision to focus on crime prevention as part of the Policing Excellence model, which has helped to reduce crime rates. Early discussions have already taken place between the team involved in the CYF transformation and Police

about any lessons that can be learned from the Police experience as this culture change is embedded within the new operating model.

How will success be measured?

The expert panel recommended using targets based on a reduction in actuarial liability, or the ongoing cost through the welfare and corrections systems, to measure success.

We're doing some more work on what the performance framework and targets will look like, but they are expected to include:

- Improved long-term outcomes for those vulnerable children who are at significant risk of harm now or in the future as a consequence of their family environment, and/or their own complex needs; and children and young people who have offended or may offend in the future
- Reduced liability for future social, economic and fiscal costs
- Reduction of churn in the number of care placements, and stability of care through long-term relationships in safe and loving homes
- Reduction in the rate of statutory response due to increased prevention and intensive support for children and their families and whānau
- Reduction of re-abuse and re-victimisation (including in care)
- Reduction of re-offending rates for youth offenders
- Reduction in the over-representation of Māori children and young people in the care and protection and youth justice system
- Improved outcomes for Pacific children and young people

What changes to legislation are required and when will they come into force?

Legislative changes will be made in two parts.

The first piece of legislation will raise the age of care to include 17-year-olds as a first step, and set up the advocacy service to give children and young people a voice in the system. It will also broaden the range of professionals who can perform functions under the Act, subject to final approval by Cabinet.

This will be passed by the end of 2016.

The second piece of legislation will ensure the legislation is child-centred and will enhance information sharing abilities under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act.

This will be passed by mid-2017.

Which other professionals will be able to carry out some functions under the Children Young Persons & their Families Act?

Under the new operating model social workers would still be the main professionals responsible for carrying out functions under the Children Young Persons & their Families Act, however there will be flexibility for the new leadership to allow other professionals to play a role, as the expertise within the new model is widened.

For example, if a high and complex needs specialist such as a psychologist or paediatrician is assessing a child and identifies a need for care and protection to ensure the child's immediate safety, then they would be able to seek the appropriate declaration from the court, rather than having to go through the social worker, who currently is the only person with legal power to prepare and present the affidavit and other documents at court.

This would mean that action would be able to be taken sooner to keep a child safe, by cutting down on bureaucracy and allowing the specialist to make a detailed and informed case to court, and reducing any risk of any misinterpretation.

These changes are subject to Cabinet approval. Responsibility for any actions or interventions will remain with the state.

How much did the expert panel cost?

An initial budget of \$375,200 was set aside for the Expert Panel across two financial years. The actual cost of the Expert Panel to 29 February 2016 was \$250,203.

How will more quality caregivers be recruited?

Work has already begun on a strategy to engage all New Zealanders on what they can do for vulnerable children and the first national awareness campaign is expected to be complete by 31 March 2017. This includes attracting a wider pool of caregivers so that the right, long-term placement can be found for children in care.

We will also be ensuring caregivers have the right support to provide long term, loving and stable homes for children and young people.

How much more funding and support will caregivers be given?

Many of the children who come into state care have a range of complex issues and needs and it's vital we give caregivers the right training and tools so they can support these children to heal and grow, ensuring a stable and healthy placement.

While the exact amount has not yet been determined, we need to ensure caregivers are adequately funded to fully cover the costs involved in providing care for these children and young people.

What are the costs of raising the age of state care?

Early estimates of including 17-year-olds in the care and protection system put the cost at \$6 million in year one, rising to \$39 million by the 2019/2020 financial year, as a result of 500 young people staying in care following their 17th birthday in the first 12 months of the new operating model.

It is worth noting that overseas analysis showed that every \$1 spent on foster care after age 18 returned \$2 of benefits to the young person as a result of future earnings.

When will the independent youth advocacy service get underway and how will it be funded?

The new independent advocacy service will be launched from 31 March 2017 and will be funded in partnership with the philanthropic sector.

The philanthropic sector have been engaged in the design process, which is expected to complement the current specialist legal advocacy provided through the Courts, and the broader oversight provided by the Office of the Children's Commissioner.