



# Families and Children

## **Every child deserves the best start in life and the opportunity to achieve their full potential.**

The best way to ensure all our children grow up with opportunity is by having a strong, dynamic and growing economy that provides every Kiwi adult with the means to provide for their children. Government can help by empowering parents through targeted support, particularly during the first 1000 days of a child's life, the most critical period for child development. There is also a responsibility for Government – working together with communities, whānau, schools, iwi and other parts of civil society – to intervene when children are experiencing material hardship, suffering from abuse, or being denied the basics that would enable them to thrive.

### **National will:**

- Implement enhanced screening, with pre-birth & post-birth GP visits, and a revamped B4 School check at age three to identify developmental concerns, screen for trauma, brain injury and foetal alcohol syndrome, and trigger early intervention services.
- Empower parents with a funding entitlement of \$3000 to allocate as they choose between whatever services they believe best meet their needs and the needs of their child.
- Establish a National Centre for Child Development, which brings together the best of health, education research and neuroscience and develops new products and services to support parents and children during the first 1000 days and beyond.
- Make non-disclosure of child abuse an offence, with a maximum three year sentence for failing to provide information about child abuse to police.
- Drive a reduction in child poverty by establishing a meaningful reduction target for what really counts – the number of children suffering material hardship.

- Implement regular reporting and a clear reduction target for the number of children experiencing physical and sexual abuse, to reveal the full extent of the problem in New Zealand and focus the public sector on stamping out abuse.
- Improve the reach of Whānau Ora to communities where it is not yet provided or more difficult to access.

## **Investing in the first 1000 days**

The first 1000 days of a child's life is the most critical period in their development and has an outsized impact on that child's life outcomes. This is the period when a child is at its most vulnerable, but it is also the stage of life where the brain is growing rapidly and is at its most malleable. Failure to invest in the wellbeing of women and children during this crucial period leads to worse economic outcomes in the future through lower productivity and higher health costs. We will empower parents to make decisions about their children and their own wellbeing.

### **National will:**

- Empower parents with an entitlement worth up to \$3000 for all expecting mothers that can be used to purchase services to support their child's first 1000 days of development. Mothers and babies who have higher needs will be entitled to up to \$3000 additional funding (\$6000 in total), along with the support of a "navigator" to help them choose the services they need.
- Implement enhanced screening, with pre-birth & post-birth GP visits, and a revamped B4 School check at age three to identify developmental concerns, screen for trauma, brain injury and foetal alcohol syndrome, and trigger early intervention services.



- Increase postnatal stays to three days for all new mothers to be able to stay in a postnatal facility of their choosing.
- Implement a system of child passports – an enhanced version of the current Well Child/Tamariki Ora book with electronic record-keeping, this will record needs identified through screening and track progress to key physical, emotional, developmental and education milestones. It will be used to ensure that, where required, early action is taken to address issues or additional needs.
- Parents will be given a choice about when they take their paid parental leave – either one parent at a time, as they now can, or both parents at the same time if that's what they prefer. We believe both parents should have the opportunity to bond with their baby during the first months of life, and we support parents to make the best decisions for their baby and family.

There is a growing body of evidence about the significant impact a child's experiences in their early years have on their later development. We believe in an holistic approach to child development that both recognises the vital role parents play in supporting their child's healthy development and that allows parents to have confidence that their children's developmental needs are being met at home and in early childhood education settings.

#### National will:

- Establish a National Centre for Child Development, headquartered at a university, that will bring together the best of child health, neuroscience and education research. Its job is to improve best-practice for child development throughout the early childhood system.
- Invest in interventions to support parents to read to children.
- Invest in programmes which help support the development of self-regulation in children and in programmes that support emotional and behavioural development.

- Improve families' access to early intervention services by ensuring early intervention assessments occur within 30 days of request.

## Supporting parental choice in ECE

National knows that parents are in the best position to decide what's best for their children. We support an Early Childhood Education (ECE) system that has parental control at its centre. The existing system for funding ECE is unnecessarily complex, it lacks transparency for parents, and has created inequities for some types of ECE services, including Playcentres, home-based care and Kōhanga Reo. National will simplify ECE funding and ensure the sector is responsive to the needs and requirements of parents around the country, rather than bureaucrats based in Wellington.

#### National will:

- Ensure the ECE funding system is fair, simple and transparent, and supports quality and parental choice.
- Amend the funding model for Playcentres to ensure funding levels better reflect the contribution these services make to supporting children's education, as well as the role these services play in supporting families and communities.
- Ensure home-based ECE services are funded fairly as a quality ECE choice for families.

National understands that not all family situations are the same, and the best way to support New Zealand parents is to provide them with choices and to back their decisions. Whether parents prefer to care for their children at home, or to take advantage of early childhood education, we want to ensure that all parents have the access, opportunity and information they need to make decisions about their children.



### National will:

- Improve parents' access to information about the quality of ECE on offer in their area, and ensure parents are directly informed by letter and email of any concerns about the quality of their child's ECE service.
- Explore ways of ensuring disadvantaged children are enrolled in and consistently attend high quality ECE, including by partnering with community organisations to overcome participation barriers.
- Require all new school builds to give fair consideration to co-location of new ECE services, to expand options for parents.

## Protecting vulnerable children

The vast majority of children in New Zealand grow up in loving households that provide for their basic safety and material needs. Unfortunately, and inexcusably, this is not always the case. That's why it is vital that we have systems in place to intervene where necessary to protect vulnerable children. National will work across the social sector and relevant public agencies to support a workforce with a shared culture of child protection, and with whānau, communities and schools to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all our children. National will unapologetically operate a zero tolerance policy for anyone who engages in or facilitates child abuse, including anyone who stands by and allows child abuse to take place without notifying the authorities.

### National will:

- Make non-disclosure of child abuse an offence, with a maximum three year sentence for failing to provide information about child abuse to police.
- Work with the sector to find solutions to workforce challenges within Oranga Tamariki and NGOs.
- Progress a closer working relationship between Whānau Ora providers and Oranga Tamariki.

- Extend the hotline for schools to access priority response from healthcare professions.
- Improve support for foster and kin carers, and grandparents raising grandchildren.

## Social investment

National will bring back our pioneering Social Investment approach to delivering Government services and support. Drawing on the best available data and a true evidence-based approach to spending, we will ensure the 'invest now to save later' ethos is firmly embedded throughout the public sector. While in some cases this may result in higher levels of spending in the short term, we know that tackling problems early in life will pay off through lower costs to the taxpayer and more New Zealanders thriving over the long term.

### National will:

- Target support for vulnerable children by using evidence of what works to positively impact their life course.
- Extend the use of Social Impact Bonds so that new ways of contracting for social outcomes can be implemented, with greater long term benefits.
- Provide intensive home visiting programmes to all new mothers under the age of 20.
- Establish a wraparound service for parents under 20 to increase the number who achieve NCEA, and the number who go on to complete post-secondary study.

## Whānau Ora

National's world leading innovative Social Investment approach resulted in many initiatives that provide evidence based interventions to improve the lives of our most vulnerable. Whānau Ora is an important part of National's Social Investment plan. Whānau Ora supports their journey, work towards independence and pursue their aspirations. While the exact support it provides is tailored,



managing health issues, pursuing further education and life skills as well as economic security are core focuses for Whānau Ora. By placing whānau at the centre of decision making, they are supported to build a more prosperous future. Issues continue to be raised by service providers outside of the provider network and families who cannot access Whānau Ora. Proactive steps need to be taken more to make Whānau Ora accessible in all communities throughout New Zealand.

#### National will:

- Improve the reach of Whānau Ora to communities where it is not yet provided or more difficult to access.
- Review the commissioning agency funding model that limits incentive funding for achieving outcomes.
- Ensure Pasifika and other families are able to access Whānau Ora on an equitable basis.

## Getting parents back to work

National believes that the best way to ensure all children have access to opportunity is for their parents to be in paid employment so they are able to provide for their family and have more choices in life. That requires a strong, growing economy and the right incentives to ensure as many people as possible are moving out of welfare and into paid employment.

#### National will:

- Deliver a strong, growing economy that enables all adult New Zealanders to be able to provide for their children.
- Get Kiwis into work with JobStart, our policy to offset the costs of hiring and incentivise job creation through a \$10,000 cash payment to businesses that hire additional staff.

- Ensure the social security system is focussed on people preparing for and finding work, and set targets to ensure cross-agency work focusses on reducing the number of people receiving benefits and reducing the number of children in benefit-dependent homes.

## Targeting what matters

When in Government, National implemented a range of serious public sector targets in areas like immunisation, early childhood participation and NCEA attainment. We also held ourselves accountable to these targets through regular, public reporting, which helped us drive significant improvements across a range of areas that are important to New Zealanders. The current approach of targeting multiple different measures of child poverty, including relative measures tied to median incomes, makes these targets meaningless and removes accountability for the Government's failures. National will establish a meaningful target for reducing child poverty, with indicators that identify actual hardship and deprivation. Counting the number of children living in material hardship measures the actual day-to-day living conditions of households and their ability to afford basic items that most people would regard as essential.

#### National will:

- Drive a reduction in child poverty by establishing a meaningful reduction target for what really counts – the number of children suffering material hardship.
- Introduce clear, focussed targets in other areas that are essential to improving the quality of children's futures, including immunisation, participation in early child education, educational progress and achievement, and access to stable housing.
- Focus the entire public sector on improving the lives of children in New Zealand.



## Reducing family and sexual violence

Family and sexual violence ruins lives and devastates communities. New Zealand has one of the highest rates of child abuse in the developed world and one of the worst rates of child death by maltreatment within the family. Fourteen per cent of young people report being hit or physically harmed on purpose by an adult at home, and twenty per cent of girls and nine per cent of boys in New Zealand report unwanted sexual touching or contact. More than a third of New Zealand women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime. National is committed to helping save families from the trauma of violence and sexual abuse.

### National will:

- Implement regular reporting and a clear reduction target for the number of children experiencing physical and sexual abuse, to reveal the full extent of the problem in New Zealand and focus the public sector on stamping out abuse.
- Extend the Integrated Safety Response (ISR) initiative – a police-led programme which provides a rapid collaborative response to family violence – to reach more communities and expand the model from just crisis response to also cover prevention, early intervention and long-term recovery.
- Recommit to the Risk Assessment Management Framework and strengthen it to ensure there are 'no wrong doors' that victims turn down.
- Expand the use of services that focus on the perpetrator and minimise disruption for victims.
- Implement programmes focussed on the prevention of loneliness, social isolation and elder abuse in ethnic communities.