



He Mana tō ia Tamaiti
Every Child Counts

Submission on the Productivity Commission draft findings and recommendations on improving outcomes for New Zealanders from social services

This submission is on behalf of Every Child Counts.

About Every Child Counts

Every Child Counts (ECC) is a coalition of organisations working to improve the status and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand children, driven by Barnardos, Plunket, UNICEF, Save the Children, and Te Kahui Mana Ririki. The key objective of the coalition is to advocate for the policies, practices and attitudes that enable children to thrive.

ECC has five specific goals:

- Place children at the centre of policy and planning.
- Ensure every child gets a good start to the early years.
- End child poverty.
- Reduce maltreatment, child abuse and neglect.
- Increase the status of children and of the child rearing roles of families, whānau, hapū and iwi.

Key points

What follows is a brief summary of our views on the report.

- We welcome the whole system view of the report and agree fundamental reform is required.
- Change needs to take time. It needs to be done carefully, systematically and in partnership with social service organisations. The process should begin with the development of a vision, followed by investment in people (skills) and processes (systems) needed to realise the vision, and then development of appropriate funding and contracting systems.
- Reform is not starting from an empty / clear base or 'point zero' – therefore it is necessary to ensure that the 'base' reform will operate from (i.e. the social services sector) is strong enough to support and see through change. Our concern is that this is currently not the case. There are immediate issues creating a crisis in the social services sector that need to be addressed before embarking on a programme of change.
- Many social service organisations are under considerable stress and strain – having been reforming, paring back and dealing with uncertainty for a very long time. This is a result of the way in which the sector has been managed and funded over several

decades – including bare bones funding, continual reviews, changes to plans, funding rounds etc.

- All of this means many in the sector are not operating from a stable base – affecting their ability to effectively participate in a programme of change, innovate and deliver quality, sustainable services. This is of considerable concern given that the involvement of social service organisations will be critical in ensuring change is effective and workable.
- Therefore before beginning a programme of change it is necessary to think about how the sector can be supported and stabilised through a change process e.g. how can very real funding issues be addressed in the short term or over the change period, what steps can be taken to avoid organisations staggering through the next couple of years in continual crisis?
- A coherent, systematic plan is required that focuses on the whole system. We would be concerned if change consisted of, for example, only isolated parts of the report being implemented rather than a comprehensive package – we believe this would risk simply exacerbating the issues referred to above and even do more damage than good.

We finish by stressing that we are very eager to see change happen, we believe many in the social services sector are struggling and without significant change, the current crisis will escalate.

We also emphasise that we are up for change and the challenges it will bring, we are up for exploring different options and trying new approaches.

However, at the same time, our coalition represents many, many decades of experience in the sector and for change to happen successfully and improve outcomes, we believe the points raised above must be properly addressed.

Our coalition is available to talk further on any of the points raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Woods
Every Child Counts
Executive Officer