

Briefing to the Incoming Minister

**Leading Social Development
in New Zealand**

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*Briefing to the Incoming Minister
Leading Social Development in New Zealand*

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Cover illustration: *Murals painted by children of Clyde Quay School, Mount Victoria, Wellington.*

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Overview

The Ministry of Social Development is providing you with three briefings:

- This briefing, *Leading Social Development in New Zealand*, presents an analysis of issues across the whole social sector – including social services, health, education, justice – from a strategic, cross-sectoral viewpoint.
- *Achieving Better Social Outcomes for all New Zealanders, our Families and our Communities* outlines opportunities to benefit New Zealand as a whole, through good decisions on social issues for individuals, families and communities, and the delivery of quality social services.
- *Managing for Outcomes* provides an organisational overview of the Ministry, including our reach into communities and our organisational capability to make a positive contribution to social outcomes in New Zealand.

The purpose of this briefing, *Leading Social Development in New Zealand*, is to take a wide view over the whole of the social sector, including the current state of the nation and trends, and to identify issues where government can make a difference across the social sector. This briefing contains four parts. They address the following issues:

- why social outcomes are important for New Zealand
- current social wellbeing in New Zealand, using the findings of *The Social Report 2005* and other key data sources
- key actors and trends that affect wellbeing
- how government can improve wellbeing in the future, and make real progress on fixing complex social problems
- how government can lead progress on social outcomes in New Zealand
- priority issues for the whole social sector.

**This briefing
analyses issues
across the
whole social
sector ...**

... and emphasises the value of effective social investment

This briefing presents opportunities for action so government can lead improvements in social outcomes to help New Zealanders achieve wellbeing. A key message is the need to tilt spending toward a greater investment approach across the whole social sector, to improve wellbeing. Smart investment will improve the capacity of people to deal with adversity, and reduce their future reliance on social protection and government assistance.

Key messages

- Good economic performance should not just pay for social programmes but should be achieved in a way that improves social outcomes. Improvements in social outcomes, as well as being desirable in themselves, will lead to further economic growth. We need to reinforce the virtuous circle between economic and social development.
- Education and employment bridge social outcomes and economic growth. People who have more skills and knowledge, and people who have good jobs, are much more likely to enjoy better social outcomes and contribute to economic growth. Increasing our focus on education and employment will continue to be critical.
- Capitalising on the advantages that New Zealand has as a country will make us more competitive globally. If we are doing well internationally, New Zealand will be better able to attract and retain highly-skilled and talented people. To compete globally, New Zealand has to succeed socially.
- Tackling critical social issues effectively requires work at the regional as well as at the national level. Information flows need to be strong from the regional to national level, and vice versa. We need to consider the extent to which interventions should be tailored for different regions. We need to work more effectively with regions.
- Families and communities play a critical role in improving the wellbeing of individuals. Governments' activities affect how well families and communities function. To improve social outcomes, we need to support families and communities to help them take responsibility for themselves and their members.
- Early intervention can address negative outcomes before they result in multiple personal and social problems. This approach is cost-effective: research demonstrates that savings are made from early investment.¹ Improving long-term outcomes requires us to invest early in life, and early in the life of the problem.
- Approximately 78% of total government expenditure in 2004/2005 was social spending. Around 73% of social spending was on social protection. Maintaining social protection is essential, but to achieve

better outcomes and growth, and mitigate poor outcomes in the future, we need to tilt spending towards social investment.

- To work out where we are going, we first need to know where we are. This will help us identify priorities and set clear goals to achieve better social outcomes for New Zealand. Research and evaluation will also help to develop better interventions based on what works. We need to build better evidence, track and monitor what we are doing, and regularly measure progress on improving the wellbeing of New Zealanders.
- Joint action across government agencies and other organisations enables us to address some of the most difficult issues. We need to set priorities and goals, develop action plans, and co-ordinate actions effectively at national, regional and local levels. Setting priorities across the whole social sector, using the best evidence available, is essential if New Zealand is to make real progress.
- It is important that Ministers and the public receive accurate information about the state of our social wellbeing. To improve this, it is important that we enhance our social indicator reporting practices. We need to promote reporting on the social “state of the nation” and progress made on social goals and strategies.

part one

Why social development is important

Part one : Why social development is important

Chapter 1: Improving social outcomes strengthens New Zealand

Introduction

Job-rich economic growth and a strong economy overall have delivered social gains for New Zealanders. The majority of people enjoy good health and higher living standards. More people are in employment and fewer rely on social assistance.

Looking to the future, the outlook is positive. Continuing economic growth presents the opportunity to take advantage of recent gains, and to position New Zealand in a way that will deliver better social outcomes across the board, both in the short-to-medium term and well into the future.

But to achieve these gains for the population as a whole, and to sustain strong economic growth, we need to match our performance on economic development with our focus on social development. If we continue to do what we do now and no more, we will miss the window of opportunity the current environment presents. We will limit our social progress in some areas and we will fall behind in others. Furthermore, we run the risk of constraining New Zealand's economic potential by, for example, not having the skills we need in our labour force.

To be sustainable, economic and social development must complement each other. If we match our progress on economic development with a strong focus on social development, we will have the best prospects for real, sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

A social development focus

Social development is a planned process of social change to promote the wellbeing of the population as a whole. It goes hand in hand with economic development. It aims to improve a wide range of outcomes including health,

We need to match our progress on economic development with our investment in social development

Social development has two elements: social protection, and social investment

education, housing, employment, living standards and safety, rather than focusing on any one outcome to the exclusion of others.

Social development involves both social protection and social investment. Through social protection, we support people with services and income assistance when they need help and are unable to support themselves. Through social investment, we strengthen the ability of individuals, families and communities to improve their own situation over time.

Social investment enables us to get ahead of some of the most difficult issues, reducing the demands they will place on social protection programmes into the future.

Social protection and social investment

Social protection addresses the negative consequences of unexpected events and social disadvantage

Social protection supports people in times of need

Social protection is about supporting people in times of need. The provision of social protection by society reflects the reality that we cannot always control the negative events that happen to us.

Social protection includes: providing an adequate level of income to older people and to those who become unemployed, sick or otherwise unable to work; providing free or subsidised health services; and providing child protection services to children suffering abuse or neglect.

Social protection programmes and services are essential in maintaining New Zealanders' wellbeing. Everyone needs access to health care and, when people retire, New Zealand Superannuation ensures they have a regular and stable income. (New Zealand has one of the lowest rates of poverty among older people in the OECD.)

Social protection accounts for 73% of government's social expenditure

Currently, most of government's social expenditure is weighted toward the provision of social protection. In the 2004/2005 financial year, out of total government social expenditure of \$35.4 billion²:

- \$8.8 billion (25%) was spent on health, the majority of which went to helping New Zealanders recover from illness and poor health rather than promoting or keeping them in good health
- \$14.7 billion (42%) was spent on social security and welfare, including benefit payments and New Zealand Superannuation³
- \$2 billion (6%) was spent on law and order.

In total, approximately 73% of social expenditure was social protection spending.

Social investment addresses the causes that lead to the need for social protection and seeks to create a brighter future

Social investment is about devoting time, effort and money toward something for future benefit. Much of it is focused on addressing the causes of future problems, so that future outcomes can be improved.

Social investment is more than just prevention. Individuals, families, communities and governments invest because they want to improve their situation in both the short and long term, and not simply to avoid dangers.

Education is a good example of social investment. We invest in our children's education because we see significant future benefits for both the children and New Zealand society as a whole. We invest in their future because we want them to be more knowledgeable, adaptable, employable and satisfied with life than previous generations. As well as benefiting them, this will benefit us. Our wellbeing is improved in a society where our family members, neighbours, fellow workers and taxpayers have these characteristics.

Simply providing social protection on its own does not always enable people to improve their circumstances. In the worst cases, it can lead to dependency on assistance. Strong and effective social development that

Social investment aims to prevent problems and improve long-term outcomes

aims to improve social outcomes requires both social protection and social investment.

Social investment changes lives and makes good economic sense

Research evidence from early intervention projects has shown conclusively that social investment has the potential to deliver significant returns. One landmark project was the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, a high-quality preschool programme in the United States. The programme was provided to 3 and 4 year old African-American children assessed as being at high risk of school failure. Follow-up studies showed very significant personal benefits to participants in comparison with those who did not participate. Benefits included increased high school graduation rates, increased incomes, and reduced arrests for criminal activity.

The programme was estimated to have returned \$8.74 for every dollar invested by the time participants had reached the age of 27⁴, and \$17.07 by the time participants had reached the age of 40⁵. Out of these returns, a portion represented fiscal savings (including savings in the justice and corrections, education and income support sectors, and a higher tax take), a portion represented private benefits to participants such as higher earnings, and another portion represented benefits across the population (eg the avoidance of financial losses to victims of crime that would have occurred in the absence of the programme).

Investment in social development is critical if we are to improve New Zealanders' quality of life, sustain economic growth and compete successfully in the global market place.

Better social outcomes improve our quality of life

Improved social outcomes are important because they improve the quality of life of individuals, families and communities.

If we continue to improve what we do in social areas such as health, employment, income and social connectedness, we will improve New Zealanders' wellbeing.

Social investment is critical for social wellbeing, economic growth, and global competitiveness

For example, improved health is a quality-of-life improvement in itself, but it also leads to improved employment outcomes, and an improved ability to be socially connected and to pursue leisure activities.

We need to aim to make improvements in each area of wellbeing that will bring improvements more generally (ie win-win solutions).

Social development contributes to economic development, which contributes to social development

Social and economic development go hand in hand. As well as being desirable in themselves, better social outcomes improve economic growth. A good example of this is improved education leading to more productive employees. Evidence from the OECD shows that, if those in the working-age population had had an average of one additional year of education (school or tertiary), this would result in around 6% additional per capita output.⁶ Healthier and more socially connected workers are more productive than those who are not.

In turn, economic development contributes to social outcomes. For example, paid employment provides people with income to meet their own and their family's material needs, and the economic growth created by employment enables New Zealanders to have a higher standard of living. At the same time, employment is as important for the sense of structure and purpose, and the social contact, that it provides people, as it is for its material rewards.

We need to promote forms of economic growth that improve social outcomes. In New Zealand, improvements in economic growth rates are generally linked to improvements in job growth. However, economic growth is not an end in itself – it is a means to improving wellbeing.

We need to pursue economic growth in a way that improves social outcomes

Social policy and economic growth are highly related (OECD)

In *Extending Opportunities: How Active Social Policy Can Benefit us All* (2005), the OECD⁷ commented on the links between social and economic policy.

Social policy is often disparaged as being a burden on society, damaging the entrepreneurial spirit, discouraging work and savings, and creating dependency on the state. Bad social policies can indeed result in all these negative effects, but there is nothing inevitable about bad policies...active social policies ...can benefit us all.

The OECD recommends three key objectives to social policy:

- giving children the best possible start in life
- helping prime-age individuals overcome barriers to quality jobs
- protecting the wellbeing of the elderly by enhancing their participation in economic and social life.

Active social policies hold the promise of reducing the negative effects of social protection systems on economic growth that have long dominated public discussions about the welfare state. Implementing this agenda would not only better serve the “public good”, but would also reduce social isolation and exclusion, help individuals realise their personal goals, and provide a more secure life in old age.

To compete globally, we need to succeed socially

International comparisons show that New Zealand compares well with other industrialised countries on most social outcomes aside from income. At the same time, there are very few social outcome areas where New Zealand currently leads the world. We should continue to aim for improvements in social outcomes, both because we can do better and because, in a changing global environment, continuing on the same path could see us slipping behind and losing global competitiveness.

**New Zealand
compares well
internationally
in most areas**

The increased globalisation of markets for goods and services, capital and labour affects our capacity to retain workers. Internationally, there is a strong demand for smart, healthy and skilled workers, and we already know that New Zealanders are highly mobile.

Demographic changes across the OECD mean that skilled people and younger people will become more sought after overseas, irrespective of what happens demographically in New Zealand. Our capacity to attract and retain skilled people including New Zealanders will be a significant issue in the coming years.

If we are going to compete globally, we need to succeed socially. We need New Zealand to be competitive in a global context by having a well-functioning society. If we can achieve this, New Zealanders will be better able to deal with new challenges as they arise, and to attract and retain talented people.

We need to continue to do well, so we attract and retain skilled workers in a global economy

Conclusion

Social development promotes wellbeing for all New Zealanders, while contributing to economic growth. To capitalise on recent gains, and to achieve improvements that will produce the greatest returns, we need to emphasise social investment, while maintaining the social safety net. To compete globally, we need to match our economic performance with our focus on social development.

Part two of this briefing provides a picture of New Zealand today that establishes where we are now. Part three identifies key areas where government can lead social development across the social sector to improve wellbeing for all New Zealanders. Part four outlines key priority areas for action to improve social outcomes in the areas of education, employment, health and prevention of violence.

part two

Where we are now

Part two : Where we are now

Chapter 2: New Zealand in 2005

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how social development and economic development contribute to each other and lead to wellbeing for New Zealanders. This chapter reports on New Zealand's social outcomes.

New Zealand's current social outcomes are best established through comparisons over time and with other OECD countries. However, New Zealand's aggregate social outcomes obscure differences between regions and within population groups.

Most indicators of wellbeing have improved over the last 10 years

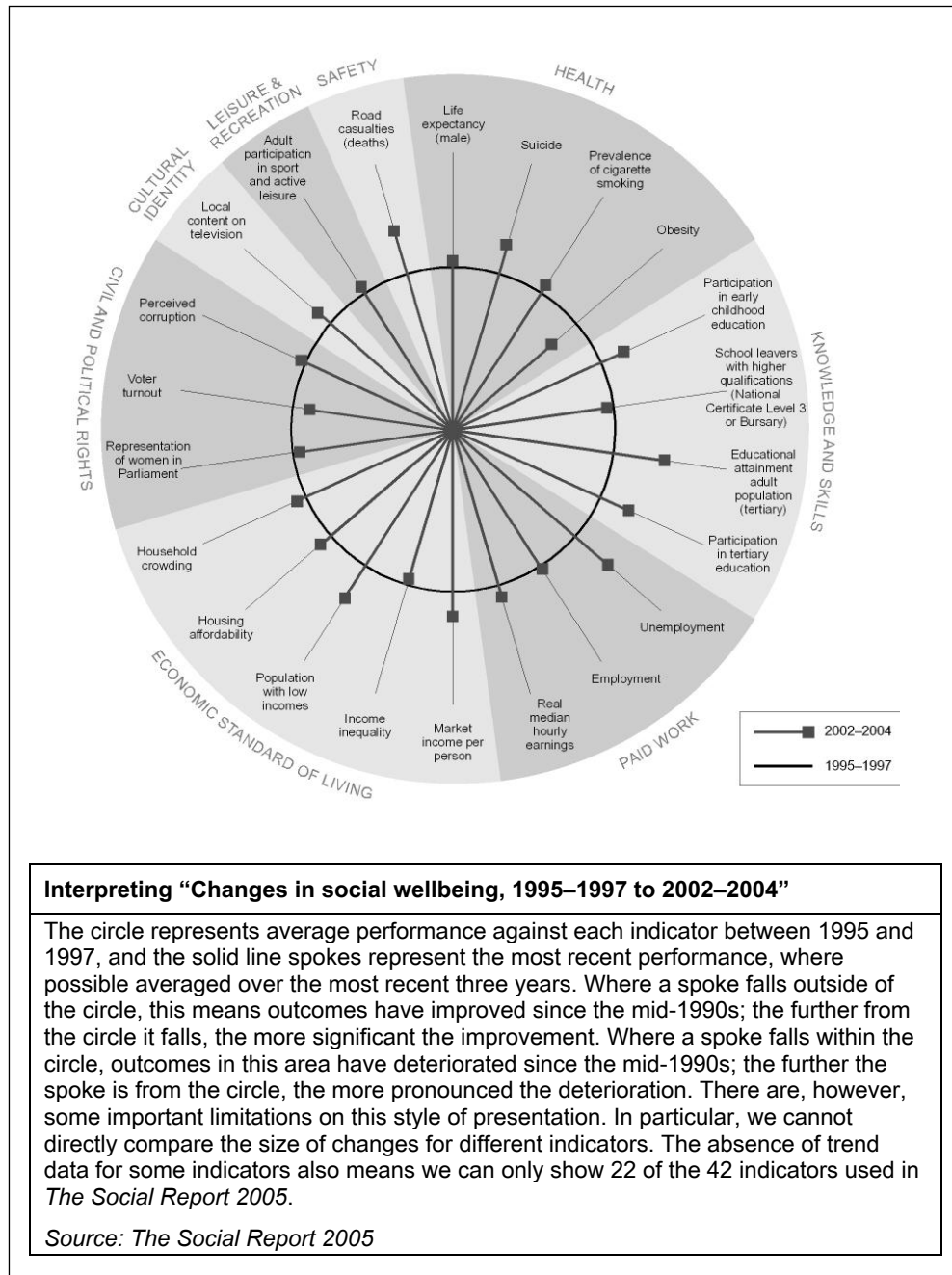
The Ministry of Social Development uses a wide range of data sources to analyse key social outcomes in New Zealand. Social indicators measure the level of wellbeing across the following 10 areas (also known as outcome domains):⁸

Health	Civil and Political Rights
Knowledge and Skills	Cultural Identity
Paid Work	Leisure and Recreation
Economic Standard of Living	Physical Environment
Safety	Social Connectedness

Figure 2.1 shows the improvement or deterioration in wellbeing indicators between 1995–1997 and 2002–2004.

To measure social wellbeing, we use indicators for 10 different outcome domains

Figure 2.1 Changes in social wellbeing, 1995–1997 to 2002–2004



Key indicators have improved since the mid-1990s

On key indicators of social wellbeing, New Zealanders’ lives are better, on average, than they were a decade ago. Sixteen of the 22 indicators

represented in Figure 2.1 have shown improvement, three have deteriorated slightly (obesity, income inequality, and voter turnout) and three show no real change (perceived corruption, school leavers with higher qualifications, and the representation of women in Parliament).

Since the mid-1990s, the most significant improvements in wellbeing have been in the educational attainment of the adult population, unemployment, the population with low incomes, real median hourly earnings, the suicide rate, and road deaths.

Trend data going back to the mid-1980s is available for a smaller number of indicators. This data, when combined with the data used in Figure 2.1, shows three main patterns of change over the past two decades:

- some indicators have improved on a fairly consistent basis or remained strong
- some indicators, particularly those related to economic circumstances, worsened in the late 1980s/early 1990s but have improved since then
- a small number of indicators appear to be in long-term decline or are static.

Some indicators have improved consistently, or remained strong, since the mid-1980s

Several social indicators have improved on a fairly consistent basis since the mid-1980s. They include indicators of life expectancy, the prevalence of cigarette smoking, participation in early childhood and tertiary education, the educational attainment of the adult population, and road casualties.

There has been a decline in the proportion of the population with low incomes and in the proportion of households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs. New Zealand has remained strong in relation to perceived corruption, with very low levels since surveys began in 1995.

In the knowledge and skills domain, children starting school are more likely to have participated in early childhood education, participation in tertiary education has increased, and the proportion of adults with tertiary qualifications has risen. In the year ended June 2004, 16% of adults aged 25–64 years held a tertiary qualification at bachelor's degree level or higher, up from 10% in 1996.

Some indicators have improved consistently since the mid-1980s

Some indicators worsened during the late 1980s/early 1990s, but have improved since then

In some instances, social indicators that worsened during the late 1980s to early 1990s have now returned to, or are better than, levels recorded in the mid-1980s. Market income per person⁹, unemployment, employment, housing affordability, the proportion of the population on low incomes, income inequality, and suicide rates deteriorated between the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Market income per person has steadily increased since the mid-1990s. Employment, unemployment and low incomes began to recover in the mid-1990s, levelled off or deteriorated slightly towards the end of the 1990s, and have been improving steadily since. Suicide rates and housing affordability began to improve towards the end of the 1990s; the youth suicide rate fell by 41% between 1995 and 2002.

At the same time, neither the proportion of the population on low incomes nor housing affordability have returned to the levels of the mid-1980s. Once fully implemented in 2007,¹⁰ increases in family tax credits and childcare payments are expected to significantly reduce the proportion of the population below poverty thresholds.¹¹ Of all age groups, children under 15 years will benefit most.

The proportion of people living in housing that is over-crowded has decreased since the early 1990s. Trend data does not exist to show how this compares with the mid-1980s. Real median hourly earnings have increased since 1997 (when the New Zealand Income Survey began).

A small number of indicators appear to be in long-term decline or are static

Voter turnout, obesity and income inequality have all worsened since the mid-1980s. Obesity rates increased between 1997 and 2003, from 17% to 21%, following a trend that has seen rates double since 1977. Growth in income inequality has occurred since the mid-1990s despite a decline in the proportion of the population on low incomes over that period. This suggests that, while incomes at the lower end of income distribution have grown, growth at the middle and upper ends of the distribution has been stronger.

A small number of indicators have remained the same, or have worsened

Child deaths due to intentional injury almost doubled from the mid to late 1980s, and there has been little change since then.

There was little change in the proportion of school leavers with formal qualifications from the early 1990s through to 2003.

New Zealand's wellbeing outcomes are mixed, compared to other OECD countries

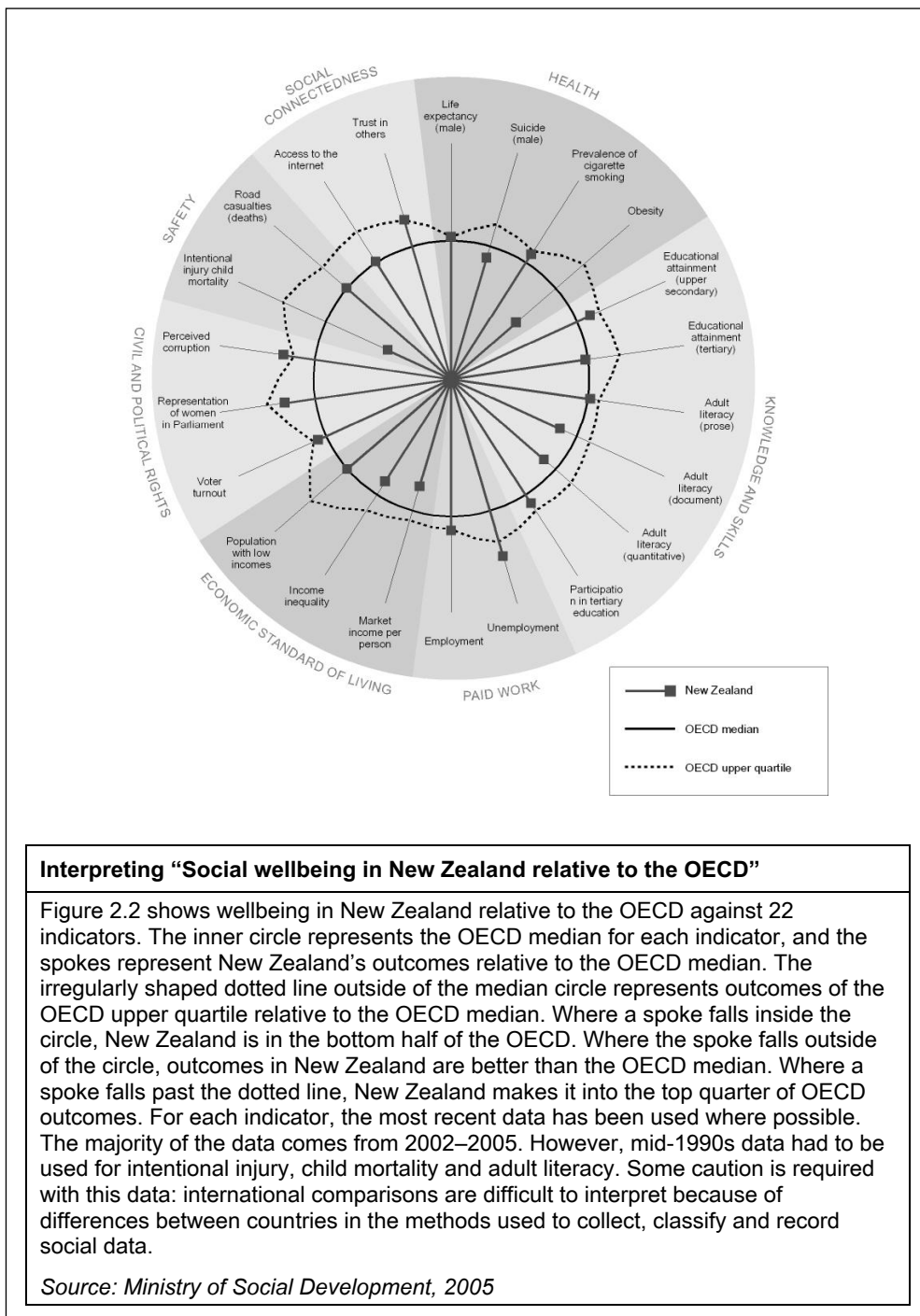
The most up-to-date international comparison data shows that:

- New Zealand is an outstanding performer in lack of perceived corruption and low unemployment
- New Zealand is in the top half of the OECD for the majority of indicators for which we have comparisons, including indicators of life expectancy, a range of education indicators, employment, trust in others, and the prevalence of cigarette smoking
- New Zealanders report high levels of satisfaction with their lives compared to people in other OECD countries
- New Zealand is an average performer in relation to road deaths, voter turnout, and the population with low incomes
- New Zealand is in the bottom half of the OECD for per capita incomes, income inequality, living standards and rates of suicide, and compares particularly poorly for rates of child death by intentional injury, and obesity.

Figure 2.2 shows that we are doing relatively well in indicators of social wellbeing in areas where we have OECD comparisons.

New Zealand is in the top half of the OECD for most indicators we can compare

Figure 2.2 Social wellbeing in New Zealand relative to the OECD



Social wellbeing varies between different regions

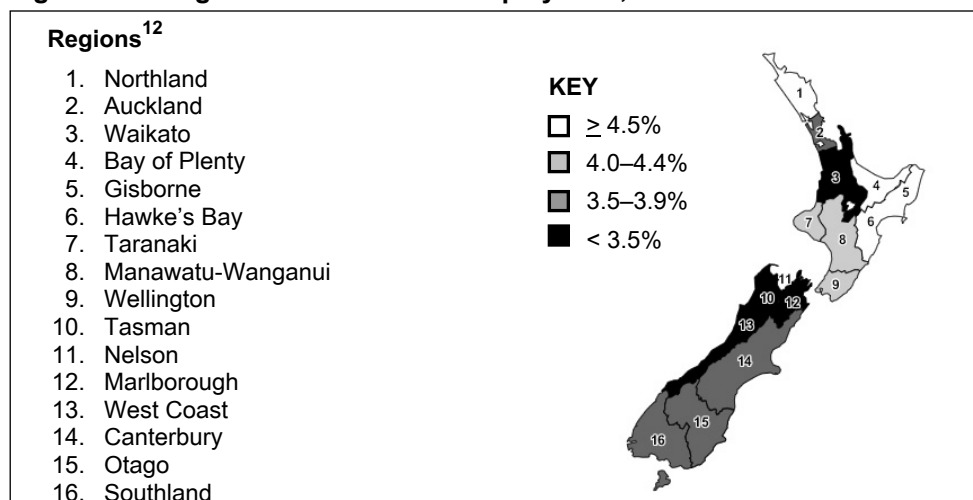
Regional indicators demonstrate the variation in social wellbeing across New Zealand. A number of key social indicators can be broken down to a regional level, including life expectancy, the prevalence of cigarette smoking, adult educational attainment, school leavers with higher qualifications, employment, unemployment, the population with low incomes, and household crowding.

In summary, Canterbury, Wellington and Nelson are strong across a number of key indicators, while the West Coast, Northland and Gisborne have generally poorer outcomes. However, most regions have mixed performances across the outcome domains. For instance, the West Coast, despite having poor educational outcomes, has the lowest unemployment rate, along with Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough. Health outcomes, and knowledge and skills outcomes, are generally better in the main urban areas.

These regional variations in social wellbeing point to the value of having local or regional based analyses of problems and responses. Figure 2.3 shows the regional percentages of people aged 15 and over who were not employed and who were actively seeking and available for paid work in 2004 (annual averages).

Regional variations show the value of local-level analysis and response

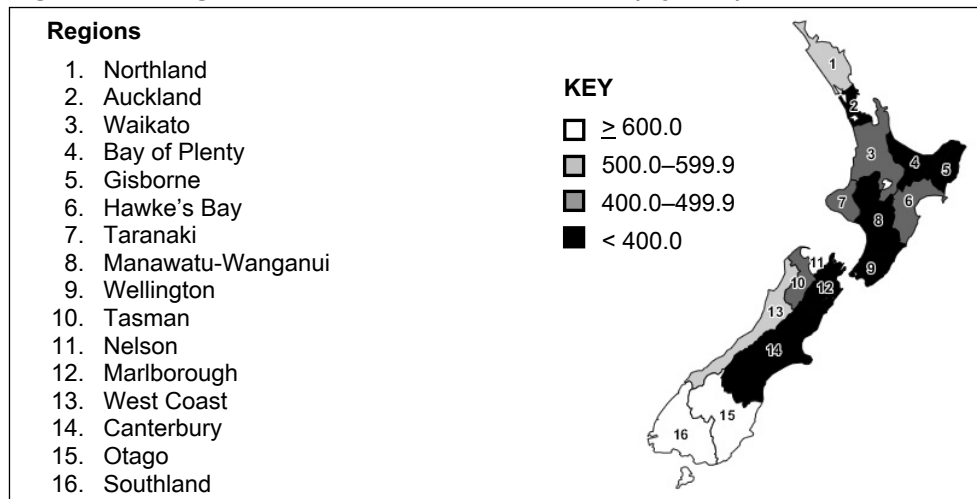
Figure 2.3 Regional variation in unemployment, 2004



Source: Statistics New Zealand, Household Labour Force Survey, August 2005

Figure 2.4 shows the number of people injured in motor vehicle crashes per 100,000 of the population in 2003.

Figure 2.4 Regional variation in road casualties (injuries), 2003



Source: Land Transport Safety Authority, 2003

New Zealand is becoming more ethnically diverse

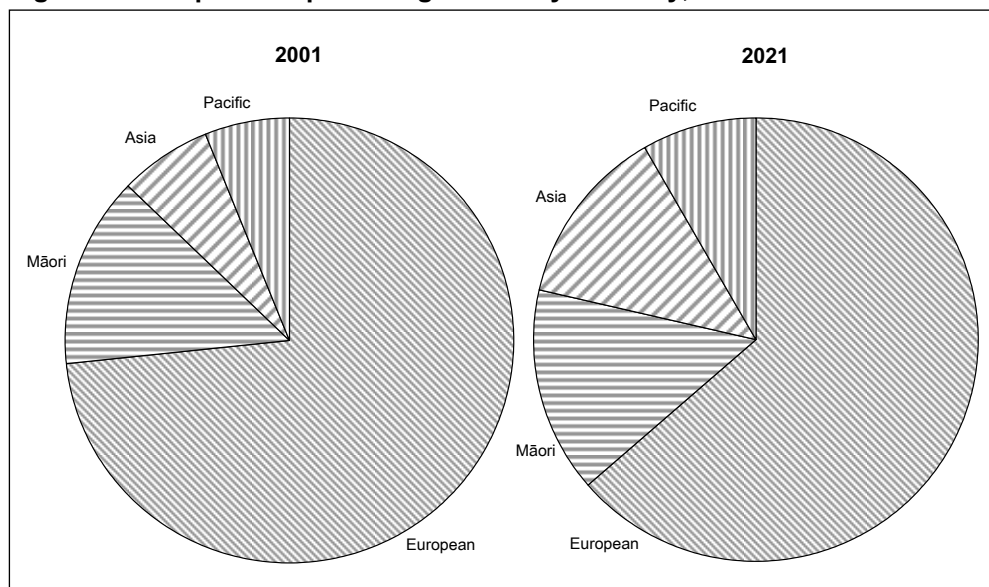
Growing ethnic diversity is a consequence of growing Māori and Pacific populations, and increased immigration from a greater range of people, including ethnic Chinese, Indian, and African immigrants from various countries.

There have also been high rates of ethnic intermarriage, especially between European, Māori and Pacific New Zealanders. Children born to parents of mixed ethnicity have led to growth in the numbers of New Zealanders identifying with multiple ethnic groups.

Higher fertility rates and a younger age profile mean that Māori and Pacific people's share of the population will rise. The youthful age structure of Māori and Pacific New Zealanders presents a major opportunity to improve outcomes for these groups at an early age.

Immigration, inter-ethnic marriage, and higher birth rates for some groups are changing New Zealand's ethnic profile

Figure 2.5 Population percentage share by ethnicity, 2001 and 2021



Source: Statistics New Zealand, projection ethnic series 6 and national series 5 (median projection base 2004). Ethnic groups are not mutually exclusive, so percentages add to more than 100%. Assumptions: between 2001 and 2006, there will be a net increase of 4,000 Europeans; there will be a net migration loss of 25,000 Europeans per 5-yearly period until 2021.

Figure 2.5 shows the projected changing ethnic share of the New Zealand population as it shifts from 2001 to 2021. It shows that the Māori proportion of the population is likely to increase slightly up until 2021, to approximately 15%, while the Pacific proportion is likely to increase slightly to about 8%, and the Asian proportion is likely to double from around 6% to around 14%.

Outcomes differ between population groups

Outcomes differ between Māori, Pacific peoples and Europeans

Most indicators for which we have time-series data have improved for Māori since the mid-1990s, including indicators for life expectancy, suicide rates, and participation in early childhood and tertiary education. Unemployment and employment rates, the size of the population with low incomes, and housing affordability have also improved.

Māori and Pacific peoples have had strong improvements in outcomes since the mid-1990s, although disparities with other groups remain

Improvements for Māori have been greater than improvements for the European population in many of these indicators, including life expectancy, unemployment and the size of the population with low incomes. Disparities remain in the areas of health, paid work, education, economic standard of living, and safety.

Pacific peoples have also experienced improved social outcomes since the mid-1990s, including in the areas of participation in early childhood education, housing affordability, and unemployment. However, the population with low incomes has only decreased slightly.

Improvements for Pacific peoples have been greater than European improvements for a smaller number of indicators, including housing affordability, median hourly earnings, and participation in early childhood education. Current outcomes for Pacific peoples are still relatively poor against the large majority of indicators, particularly in health, knowledge and skills, and economic standard of living.

Māori and Pacific groups often share common disparities against the European group, but there is significant variation in social outcomes between the two groups. Pacific peoples, particularly females, have significantly higher obesity rates than Māori, while Māori have a rate of smoking 15% higher than Pacific peoples. Pacific peoples generally have higher educational outcomes than Māori.

Māori have better outcomes than Pacific peoples in the economic standard of living domain, particularly in the proportion with low incomes and those who live in crowded households. This is despite Pacific peoples having slightly lower unemployment rates and similar median hourly earnings.

Other Ethnicities have much higher educational outcomes, but lower than average standards of living, than other groups

Other ethnicities¹³ made up 7.3% of the population in the 2001 Census (6.6% of the population were categorised as Asian). The Other ethnicities group has a much higher educational attainment of the adult population than other groups, partly due to the emphasis on skills in immigration. However, they have lower-than-average economic standard of living outcomes. This group has higher-than-average rates of people in low-income households and of people spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Outcomes differ by sex

Outcomes vary across different aspects of wellbeing by sex. Women have better outcomes than men in some areas and worse outcomes in others.

Unemployment rates are slightly higher among women (4.4%) than men (3.5%), although the employment rate gap between women and men has narrowed since the mid-1990s. Women have lower median hourly earnings (\$14.40) than men (\$16.50). However, the growth in women's real median hourly earnings since 1997 has been double the growth rate experienced by men.

Sole parents are a vulnerable group in terms of paid work and economic living standards, and 83% of sole parents in New Zealand are women. Sole parents have lower-than-average employment rates and are more likely to be on lower-than-average incomes. However, in a significant shift, the proportion of sole parents on low incomes has declined by 15.3% since 2001.

Women are less likely than men to feel safe in their communities (45.2% of women feel unsafe, compared to 11.1% for men). Rates of obesity are higher among the female population, but this gap has narrowed since 1997 due to an increase in male obesity rates.

Men have a higher suicide rate and lower life expectancy than women, although this gap has narrowed since the mid-1990s. Men are more likely than women to experience a workplace injury or a road traffic death, and are less likely than women to leave school with qualifications or to participate in tertiary education. The gap in outcomes for these last two indicators has widened over the past decade.

Outcomes differ by age group

Outcomes for children and young people have improved against some key indicators but remain relatively poor in a number of other areas.

The proportion of children living in low-income families has declined, from 27% in 2001 to 21% in 2004. Child poverty rates are still higher than for the rest of the population (in 2004, the total population poverty rate was 19%). Children are also more likely than adults to live in families that are spending

Women have slightly higher unemployment than men, and lower median hourly earnings

Men have a higher suicide rate and lower life expectancy than women

more than 30% of their incomes on housing, and to live in crowded households. While poverty rates are still higher than they were in the late 1980s, outcomes for children relative to adults have improved substantially.

Younger people are considerably more likely to experience criminal victimisation and road casualties, and are more than twice as likely as older groups to be unemployed. Real median hourly wages have increased for 15–24 year olds since 1997, but the increase has been less than that for older age groups.

People aged 65 and over continue to experience relatively good outcomes in economic standard of living, compared to the population average. In 2004, the poverty rate of older people aged 65 and over was 6%, compared with 20% for working-age people and 21% for children.¹⁴ New Zealand has the lowest rates of poverty among older people in the OECD.¹⁵ Older people also have lower rates of smoking and suicide than other age groups.

Outcomes differ for people with disabilities

In the 2001 New Zealand Disability Survey, 20% of New Zealanders reported some level of disability. The prevalence of disability increases with age. Forms of disability are diverse, with the lack of mobility and agility, and hearing loss, being the most common.

The outcomes for people with disabilities across domains like health, paid work, knowledge and skills, and economic standard of living are lower than those of the general population. Between the 1996 and 2001 Disability Surveys, the proportion of adults with disabilities without qualifications decreased, from 43% to 31%. This decrease was higher than the decrease among the rest of the population. Employment outcomes for 15–64 year olds with disabilities are also lower than average.

The poverty rate for children is over three times that for older people

People with disabilities have consistently poorer outcomes in many key areas

Chapter 3: Key actors and trends affecting wellbeing

Introduction

Key actors and trends have significant impacts on social outcomes, both separately and through interaction. They point towards ways in which we can have a more positive impact on social wellbeing.

Key actors affecting wellbeing

The Social Report 2005 describes social wellbeing in New Zealand today. In order to make good choices on how to improve wellbeing, we also need to understand what influences wellbeing. This chapter discusses four crucial actors that impact on wellbeing in New Zealand:

- families
- communities
- the labour market and the economy
- government.

To allow us to understand how these actors impact on social outcomes in New Zealand, we need to examine:

- how these actors generally contribute to wellbeing
- how they have changed over time
- how they are likely to change in the future
- the shifting boundaries between them.

Understanding the key actors helps us to anticipate future trends. It also helps us to make better decisions about who we need to work with, and how we need to work with them, to improve social outcomes.

Families in New Zealand today are more complex

Families play a critical part in how society develops and are the primary providers of things that contribute to wellbeing, including emotional and

More sole-parent households and households where both parents work are part of the change in family structures

material support, and care and protection, particularly of children and older family members.

Children are more likely to live in changing family structures than they were a generation ago. Instead of spending all their childhood in a two-parent family, 40% of New Zealand children will experience a period in a sole-parent family and 20% of children will be part of a blended family, when a parent enters a new relationship with a partner with children.¹⁶

The increasing number of sole-parent households and two-parent families where both parents are in paid work can mean there is less time for families to care for children, older relatives, and sick or disabled family members.

Local community engagement is decreasing

Communities contribute to social wellbeing by maintaining norms and values, passing on cultural practices, and building links and networks between people and groups.

Communities encompass a wide range of groupings with varying degrees of formality, from school boards and sports clubs to parents involved in play centres or schools, people who gather on the marae, and groups of friends who get together socially. They can be divided into two categories of community – geographic and communities of interest.

Geographical communities are declining, meaning less 'face to face' communication between people

The way networks bind communities is changing. Geographical communities are less strong than they were, while new types of communities have developed. Use of the internet and mobile phones means face-to-face contact is less common than 30 years ago. In many parts of New Zealand today, neighbours are more likely than they once were to be only passing acquaintances. However, other communities that are not as dependent on geographic location sometimes develop in their place.

It is generally accepted that there has been a decline in local community engagement in industrialised countries. We need to understand this evolving situation, given the importance of communities to wellbeing. This decline appears likely to continue.

The labour market and the economy strongly influence social outcomes

High unemployment between 1987 and 1992 placed considerable strains on our people and communities, increasing the need for income support, housing, employment assistance, health services, policing and corrections services.

Unemployment rates are currently very low at 3.7%.¹⁷ The challenges in today's environment have changed. Labour and skills shortages, and the changing composition of the beneficiary population, place the focus on removing barriers to participation in sustainable employment, in order to improve economic growth. People with low levels of skills, people from a minority ethnic background, young people, mature workers, people with health problems, people with disabilities, sole parents, and migrants face greater barriers to sustainable employment than others.

A relatively strong economy and a buoyant labour market also provide opportunities for government to work in a co-ordinated way to improve outcomes for people facing such barriers. Taking a more active approach toward helping beneficiaries into work has contributed to our recent achievement in having the lowest unemployment rate in the OECD.¹⁸

The nature of work itself has changed. Non-standard working arrangements are more common. There have been increases in part-time work, fixed-term contracts and self-employment, although permanent, full-time contracts remain the norm in most OECD countries.¹⁹ More people are working over 50 hours a week.

These labour market trends have impacts on social outcomes, and not just income and employment outcomes. For example, the increased participation of women in employment has significantly decreased the time families have available to provide care for older family members.

Governments must adapt to a changing social and economic environment

Part of improving social outcomes is recognising the areas government is most effective in leading, the areas where government will be most effective in a supporting role, and the areas where government has no role. By removing inappropriate interventions, government can free up resources to make positive contributions to wellbeing in other ways.

Unemployment rates are very low

... giving us the chance to focus our efforts on people who need more support to move into work

Changes in New Zealand society mean our social assistance system needs to become more flexible and partnership-oriented

New Zealand's income support, health and education systems evolved after World War II. Systems were designed to support a social structure of two-parent families with children where the man worked in the paid labour force while the woman worked unpaid in the home – also known as the breadwinner model.²⁰ Times have changed.

An increasingly diverse society has created major new challenges for delivering government services. One size, if it ever fitted all, certainly does not fit all today. To this end, and over time, governments have:

- devolved some services to promote better responses to variations in local conditions while maintaining central control over others
- placed greater emphasis on consultation and partnership in dealing with people
- made different decisions about the degree to which they purchase services through government systems.

Government is under greater spending pressures than it was in the past. For example, the price of meeting the expectations of citizens in health care has increased significantly. This trend, along with an ageing population, will continue to put pressure on government spending. An increase in resources committed to a new area will generally need to be financed by savings in other areas. It follows that there will need to be a strong focus on providing services efficiently and effectively.

Key trends affecting wellbeing

As well as an understanding of key actors, a strategic focus also requires a consideration of how future trends will impact on society. Four key trends are:²¹

- globalisation
- population ageing
- increasing ethnic diversity
- increasing urban concentration.

We need to stay attuned with the global environment

International changes affect New Zealand, and can have significant impacts on New Zealanders' wellbeing. For this reason, wellbeing needs to be considered in a global context. We also need to be attuned to the experiences of other countries already facing some of the challenges we are anticipating, including ageing and health-care issues.

Demographic changes across the OECD mean that skilled people and younger people will become more sought-after overseas, irrespective of what happens demographically in New Zealand. Our capacity to retain skilled New Zealanders will be a more significant policy issue in the coming years.

To achieve a high-performance economy and a strong society, New Zealand needs to retain skilled New Zealanders, and attract skilled migrants.

New Zealand offers a relatively safe, clean and attractive environment when compared to some developed countries. There is some evidence expatriates and people with other reasons to feel connected to New Zealand (eg previous experience working here) are already making New Zealand their preferred home.

We are facing an ageing population

One of the major demographic shifts in New Zealand, and in other OECD countries, is an ageing population. The ageing population presents both opportunities and risks.

In the short term, the decreasing size of the working-age population will be partially offset by the baby blip – a relatively large generation of babies born around the early 1990s. The baby blip boosts our population of young people until 2010.

In future, further increases in life expectancy and lower fertility rates will lead to a higher proportion of older people in the population. The baby blip will offset the decreasing size of the working-age population until around 2010, when significant numbers of baby boomers (people born between 1945 and 1965) begin to retire.

We need to retain skilled New Zealanders and attract skilled migrants

An ageing population will put greater demands on government services, but also present new opportunities for our workforce

An ageing population will lead to greater demands for government expenditure on older people, especially on key health and social services. It will also present new opportunities for older people to play a critical role in families and communities, and in paid employment, which will contribute to industry demands for labour and skills.

New Zealand is becoming more ethnically diverse

New Zealand has become a more ethnically diverse society in the past 30 years. Ethnic diversity is one of New Zealand's strengths, in the same way that it is a strength of countries like Australia, Canada and the United States. Governments need to adjust to increasing diversity to ensure the effectiveness of social development.

Growing ethnic diversity is partly a consequence of a growth in the Māori and Pacific populations. There has also been increased immigration from a wide range of countries.

The New Zealand population will continue to become more ethnically diverse due to the higher growth rate of non-European ethnic groups. While natural increase is projected to drive continuing Māori and Pacific population growth, high rates of immigration are projected to be the main contributor to Asian growth. The slowing projected rate of growth for New Zealand Europeans is due to declining rates of natural increase and projected emigration.

There is increasing urban concentration, particularly in Auckland

Owing to both internal migration and international immigration, New Zealand's population is increasingly concentrated in large urban centres, especially Auckland. Of New Zealand's population, 85% live in urban areas (urban areas are defined internationally as towns with 1,000 people or more).

Urbanisation is a trend throughout the industrialised world. It presents both opportunities and risks.

There are significant social and economic benefits in having large urban centres. Vibrant urban centres generate new ideas and new ways of doing things. Concentrations of people concentrate skills. They also provide

lifestyle benefits that are attractive to skilled migrants, which further enhance the good things about urban concentration.

The challenge of urban growth is to ensure that real benefits are not undermined by problems associated with size. These problems can be as diverse as traffic congestion, noise pollution, lowered social connectedness and an overburdened infrastructure. Auckland is experiencing particular infrastructure stresses, in line with international cities. We should be learning from the experience of cities overseas (whose population growth has been and continues to be far greater than Auckland's) when addressing these problems.

There is also a risk that urban growth occurs at the expense of regional growth, increasing regional inequalities. As rural areas shrink in terms of population size, they are less likely to have the same access to goods and services that people in urban areas expect. For example, the viability of local schools may reduce.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 outlined the big picture of social wellbeing in New Zealand. It is a relatively positive picture but includes a number of groups facing ongoing disadvantage, and some areas where we are not doing as well as we should in comparison to other OECD countries. Having viewed the position of New Zealand across the range of social indicators today, Chapter 3 identified the key actors and trends that will impact on social indicators tomorrow. Part three of the briefing discusses what we need to do to improve our effectiveness across the entire social sector and identifies opportunities for action to achieve improvements.

Our rapid urban growth presents challenges for urban infrastructure and regional development

part three

What works and getting it right

Part three : What works and getting it right

Chapter 4: Making progress on social outcomes

Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 outlined the big picture of social wellbeing in New Zealand and the actors and trends that will influence that picture in the future. This chapter discusses what we should do to improve our effectiveness across the entire social sector. To improve social outcomes, we need to:

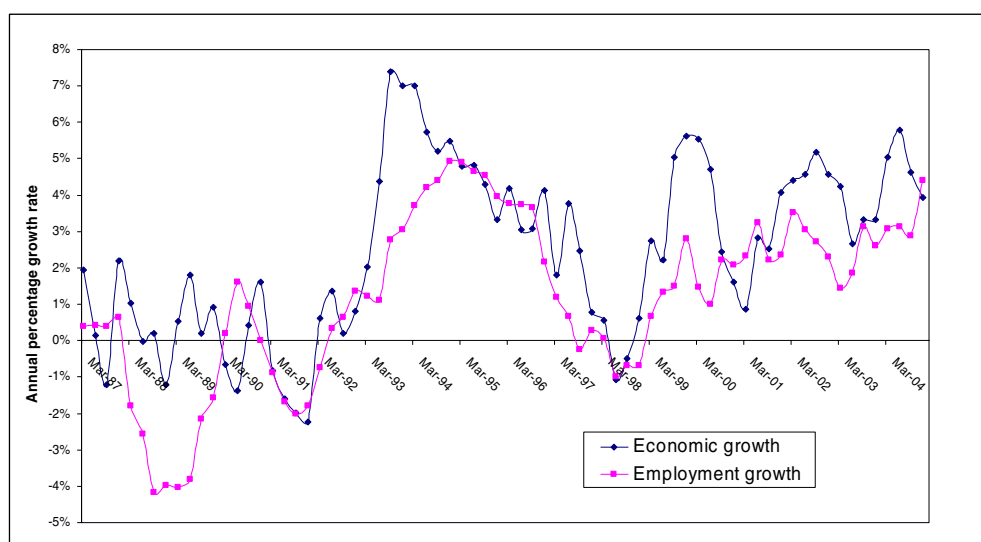
- reinforce economic development
- focus on employment and education
- become better attuned to the global environment
- work with regions
- develop and use evidence
- take a life-course approach
- support families and communities
- co-ordinate active approaches to social policy and delivery
- tilt social spending toward social investment.

Reinforce economic development

As discussed earlier, economic growth and social outcomes are strongly linked. Good social outcomes, like education and child health, improve people's future economic contributions. Governments should take expected social impacts into account when making economic decisions, and take expected economic impacts into account when making social decisions. Figure 4.1 illustrates the close relationship between employment outcomes and economic growth, which have been strongly linked since the early 1990s.

There are strong links between employment and economic growth

Figure 4.1 Link between economic growth and job growth



Source: Statistics New Zealand, 2005

We should capitalise on the strengths of economic settings by recognising their role in promoting better social outcomes. As long as government creates and enforces reasonable rules that help prevent people's actions adversely affecting others, well-functioning markets can promote improved social outcomes. For example, we need to recognise and reinforce the positive role of the business community in creating income growth and new jobs. We want to increase the likelihood that businesses will adopt practices that have positive social, as well as economic, outcomes. One way to do this is to improve the formal recognition of overseas qualifications, reducing employment barriers for immigrants with non-New Zealand qualifications.

Our current low unemployment rates have produced changes in the nature of the beneficiary population. People receiving benefits are more likely to be difficult to place in employment. Those with low levels of skills, people from a minority ethnic background, young people, mature workers, people with health problems, people with disabilities, sole parents and immigrants face greater barriers to sustainable employment.

A buoyant labour market provides additional opportunities to improve outcomes for people facing additional barriers to employment. A more active approach toward helping beneficiaries into work has contributed to New Zealand recently achieving the lowest unemployment rate in the OECD.²²

Work support has helped to deliver the lowest unemployment rate in the OECD

Demographic changes mean there will be a decline in the size of the working-age population from around 2010. For this reason, long-term downward pressure on unemployment is likely to continue, while skill and labour shortages are likely to increase.

Demographic changes mean labour and skills shortages will increase

The ratio of people over 65 to those of working age will rise from 18:100 in 1999 to 43:100 by 2051.²³ An ageing population will place greater demands on government expenditure and on key health and social services.

Given the links between economic and social outcomes, it is desirable to aim for win-win solutions that improve both social and economic outcomes. One successful way to improve linkages between portfolios is Ministers working in teams to develop solutions that incorporate both social and economic goals.

Opportunities for action to reinforce economic development

- To achieve win-win solutions that improve social and economic outcomes we need to champion the linkages between economic growth and social outcomes at all levels: in Cabinet, among departments, in regional and local government, in the community and voluntary sector, and in businesses.
- As part of this approach, we can work to improve the exchange of information and expertise between social and economic agencies, including business and industry groups.

We can champion the links between social and economic development at all levels

Focus on employment and education

Employment outcomes are key to improving wellbeing.²⁴ Paid employment provides many people with a structure within which they can build a successful life. Good secure jobs provide people with sustainable income, which allows them to provide for their own and their families' material needs. People with jobs are much more likely to be satisfied with their lives than people who are unemployed. In general, paid employment also leads to better physical and mental health.

To promote good employment outcomes, we need to understand and engage with the business community and the labour market.

Other countries share our strong economic performance, but have made less progress in reducing unemployment

At the same time, there is a vital role for unpaid work in promoting social wellbeing, including raising children, working in the home and contributing to the wider community.

New Zealand's recent strong economic performance has been important to reducing unemployment and the number of people receiving benefits. However, New Zealand's very active approach to people receiving unemployment benefits in recent years has also had a major impact on people's job-seeking behaviour. Other countries with strong economic performance are making far less progress in reducing unemployment.

Active approaches include encouragement, planning and incentives to get people moving in the right direction. They often address barriers to employment such as a lack of childcare or health problems. Active approaches have proved more effective in getting results than income transfers alone.

Opportunities for action to focus on employment

- To promote greater participation in paid employment, we can help people overcome barriers to employment, for example, by supporting people on health-related benefits to be work-ready, and increasing the availability of childcare and out-of-school care and recreation.
- We need to actively engage and support employers to take on people who have previously been marginalised from the workforce.

We can continue to remove barriers for people who have been marginalised from the workforce

Improving employment outcomes

In the 2004 *OECD Employment Outlook*, Raymond Torres included the following core messages:

- The OECD Jobs Strategy was formulated a decade ago, when cutting high and persistent unemployment was the main objective. The challenges to future economic growth and living standards posed by ageing populations now loom large on the policy agendas of most OECD countries.
- Unless participation rates of would-be workers such as lone parents, people aged over 50 years, youth, and women are improved, population ageing will lead to a significant slowdown in labour force growth, with adverse consequences for future economic growth.
- Measures to improve employment should be reconciled with other social objectives such as adequate social protection, job security, better reconciliation of work and family life, and equity outcomes.
- The adoption of a 'mutual obligations' approach to welfare benefits may help to meet both employment and social protection objectives. At the same time, 'making work pay' schemes may help welfare recipients get back to work.

PATHS – helping people on benefits get into work

Operating in five sites around New Zealand, PATHS (Providing Access to Health Solutions) is a programme that assists people receiving a Sickness or Invalids Benefit get into paid work. If a beneficiary has no immediate entitlement to health care or interventions through the public health system, Work and Income and the local district health boards investigate what health-care options might assist the client return to work. The client is then helped to access these options, which may include primary and secondary health care.

PATHS currently provides beneficiaries with access to a range of health interventions, including intensive physiotherapy, access to pain clinics, fitness programmes, and extra visits to health professionals for the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma.

From early childhood to tertiary level, education has a massive influence on economic and social wellbeing

Education is also a key link between social outcomes and economic growth. An effective education system prepares children for their life ahead, including paid employment. Higher levels of skills and adults who ‘know how to learn’ mean that people can get jobs and move into better jobs.

A child who participates in quality early childhood education has a significantly greater chance of succeeding at school and having good outcomes as an adult, including being more likely to be in employment, earning a high income, and not being involved in criminal activity. As noted earlier, research indicates that a dollar invested in early childhood education for a preschool child can return more than \$8 in fiscal and private savings by the age of 27.²⁵

Achievement at school, in particular the gaining of recognised qualifications and skills, also increases young people’s chances of success in later life.²⁶

We need to align tertiary education with the labour market

We need to align tertiary training and education more strongly with labour market requirements and employment outcomes. We should encourage quality on-the-job training and apprenticeships while the labour market is strong. We need to discourage people from entering low-value tertiary courses, by adjusting regulatory and funding settings.

In addition to enhancing people’s employment prospects, there are other positive pathways from education to wellbeing. Overseas research indicates that such positive effects may exist in the following areas:²⁷

- good secondary school outcomes for young men are associated with a reduction in crime
- higher education among mothers is associated with better infant health, and may lead to longer-term health outcomes as well
- there is good evidence that higher levels of education are positively linked with civic participation. A better-educated public leads to a stronger democratic process.

Opportunities for action to focus on education

- to achieve better child development outcomes, we can promote the participation of all children in high-quality early childhood education by improving affordability, accessibility and supply, particularly for children at risk of not participating

We need to promote early childhood education for all children ...

- to improve education outcomes, we need to address the long tail of low achievement in the school sector (this issue, and appropriate actions, are described in further detail as a key priority for the social sector in Part four).

... and address the long tail of low achievement in schools

Become better attuned to the global environment

Social outcomes improve in the context of a world that is increasingly global in flows of people, capital, information and ideas. Together with New Zealanders' mobility, this is broadening our views, insights and values.

As a society, we need to improve social outcomes by developing our national comparative advantages. We are unlikely to ever be the richest country in the world in terms of market incomes, nor the poorest. We cannot compete for labour on the basis of having the highest salaries, nor can we compete for job creation on the basis of the lowest wage structure. We need to recognise our niche position and build on our advantages. We are a relatively safe and clean country, removed from many of the problems experienced by other developed nations. We can attract and retain good people through the strength of our social outcomes as much as by the size or growth of our market incomes.

New Zealand has a niche position we can use to attract talented workers

We compete for our children with the world.

(Christchurch Mayor Gary Moore, in his address to the Local Government Conference 2005)

To achieve a high-performance economy and a strong society, New Zealand needs to retain skilled New Zealanders and attract skilled migrants. These challenges require a whole of government response.

We also need to learn from the experiences of other countries that are already facing some of the challenges we are anticipating, including issues associated with the ageing population.

We need to develop a competitive edge by providing good working conditions, family-friendly policies, a high standard of living, and opportunities for people to achieve self-reliance and security. We need to provide good settlement services and a welcoming environment for

Living standards, security, working conditions, and diversity can all be drawcards

We need to provide high-quality education ...

... develop better selection and settlement policies for immigrants ...

... and learn from international experience

migrants, so they are more likely to be willing and able to contribute to our society. We need to do more to understand the needs and cultures of New Zealand's new migrants.

To capitalise on our advantages as a country, we should aim to have high-quality education provision, and to be open to the flow of people and ideas from around the globe. We also need to capitalise on our existing ability to attract talented expatriates back to live and work in New Zealand.

Opportunities for action to become better attuned to the global environment

- To attract overseas people with skills and talent to New Zealand, but also to ensure they can be employed and integrated into the labour market with minimal barriers, we need an immigration policy that improves both our selection and settlement policies.
- To exchange ideas about best practice as soon as they are available, we need to increase our engagement with international bodies, including the OECD.

The New Zealand Settlement Strategy

Nearly 20% of New Zealand citizens and residents were born in another country. While outcomes for migrants and refugees are often very positive, there is room for progress in a number of areas. The New Zealand Settlement Strategy was launched in December 2004 to address the most important settlement-related issues for people who have come to live here permanently.

The Strategy's six goals are for migrants, refugees and their families to:

- obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills
- become confident using English in a New Zealand setting, or to be able to access appropriate language support
- access appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (eg housing, education and services for families)
- form supportive social networks and establish a sustainable community identity
- feel safe expressing their ethnic identity, and to be accepted by and become part of the wider host community
- participate in civic, community and social activities.

Work with regions

If we are to improve social outcomes, we need to co-ordinate both regionally and nationally. Regional and national activities to improve social wellbeing should be well connected and mutually supportive. Some local issues can be better addressed by local solutions than by national ones, while in other cases national solutions are fairest and most appropriate. When making policy decisions, we need to consider whether flexibility in policy approaches is required, so interventions can be tailored to the needs of regions.

Regional implementation of national strategies

The New Zealand Disability Strategy, released in 2001, encouraged government to work collectively to implement a plan of action to address the barriers faced by people with disabilities. Waikato-based government agencies established a working party led by Work and Income and supported by regional managers from a range of government agencies.

The working party undertook a stocktake of local government activity in this area and conducted a consultation process to develop Waikato's Employment Strategy for people with disabilities. The strategy comprises the following key projects:

- a universal assessment tool
- innovative mental health case management
- rural Māori employment strategies.

A key outcome of the project has been the increased transition of clients with mental health disabilities into employment. The project has been successful: of the 141 mental health clients case-managed for employment, 44 have gained employment to date; another 70 clients have been referred to developmental activities.

With the expanded role of local government created by the Local Government Act 2002, the importance of central government working with local government has increased. Local government is now tasked with producing Long Term Council Community Plans (known as LTCCPs), which

We need strong regional partnerships to get good regional outcomes

We need to share regional successes, and gather good regional information

can have major implications for central government agencies. We need strong partnerships to improve social outcomes.

People working at the regional level are well placed to identify policy issues and feed this knowledge into the policy development process. People in the regions can help identify and clarify emerging policy and operational issues, and assist with the resolution of these issues. To improve outcomes, information flows need to be strong from regional level to national level and vice versa.

Improving infrastructure in Northland

Recognising that substandard housing is often symptomatic of wider social problems, a cross-government project was established in July 2001 to eliminate substandard housing in Northland, East Coast and Eastern Bay of Plenty. In Northland, Work and Income case managers were seconded to work with Housing New Zealand to address the needs of families in substandard housing. As work progressed, it became apparent that problems with infrastructure also needed to be dealt with. Waste water management was a particular need in many Northland communities.

The need to resolve Northland's waste water management issues motivated the establishment of a Northland Regional Waste Water Group that included the Ministry of Social Development, the Northland Regional Council, the Far North District Council, Housing New Zealand, and the Northland District Health Board. This group provided strong Northland representation on the national Sanitary Works Technical Advisory Committee (SAWTAC), which had identified that the Sanitary Works Subsidy Scheme (Sewerage), while intended to assist with improving waste water treatment, was not being taken up by some local communities. The Northland representatives, collaborating with the other representatives on SAWTAC, examined the problems with the subsidy scheme and options to solve them.

As a result of this work, the subsidy was made more flexible to provide additional support to disadvantaged communities.

Unlike several other industrialised countries, such as Australia, Canada and the United States, New Zealand does not have a federal structure. This means our linkages between central government and the regions tend to be

closer and co-operative solutions are more easily achieved. This is a competitive advantage for New Zealand.

Opportunities for action to work with regions

- Currently, some regions are excellent models for co-operation between agencies working to improve social outcomes. We need to learn from each other's success stories, and share them across the country and across agencies.
- We need to improve the ability of regions to act from a region-relevant evidence base. To assist with this, we need to continue to build the regional data we collect (eg in *The Social Report*). We also need to identify effective means to share the data and to facilitate its use by local authorities, the community and voluntary sector and businesses.

Develop and use evidence

Good social outcomes for New Zealanders rely on sound policy built on robust evidence. Government interventions in people's lives must be effective and grounded in what works. We need excellent information, knowledge and understanding about the social environment in New Zealand.

We need to undertake research to international standards, develop and analyse administrative and statistical data, and conduct high-quality evaluations of government policies. We need to develop policy-relevant knowledge about individuals and groups in New Zealand. Research helps us to anticipate the impacts of social, demographic and economic change.

Research contributes to better outcomes for New Zealanders by increasing knowledge of the state of the nation, social and economic dynamics, and barriers to development. It provides information about major transitions in people's lives and the success factors that help people fulfil their potential. Research also helps us to assess the impacts of change on different groups over time. Examples within the Ministry of Social Development include our *Living Standards* research programme and research on income distributions, barriers to employment, the impact of debt on beneficiaries and low-income earners, ageing in place, providing for retirement, and the determinants of outcomes for children.

**Sound social
policy requires
excellent
research ...**

Evaluation results need to feed quickly into programme development

Better results for social spending depend on us learning from evaluations of current government activities. High-quality evaluations give us information on what works. Evidence needs to be progressively accumulated as various programme and policy approaches are tried in a range of settings.²⁸ To get the best value for money on social spending, we need to be prepared to stop spending if something is not working. In other cases, government should consider increasing investment on well-performing activities.

Government is under more pressure to spend than in the past. Spending in a new area will generally need to be financed by savings in other areas. There will need to be a strong focus on both prioritising spending, so that we get best value for money, and providing services efficiently.

There are advantages in having the results of evaluation feed back quickly into the way programmes are run, particularly when clear lessons are being learned. Governments can then make appropriate changes to interventions while they are running. This type of evaluation can lead governments to do one of two things: either continue to improve the intervention (and possibly expand it) or discontinue it and retain the resource.

Evaluations make a difference

The WRK4U seminar for Unemployment Benefit applicants was piloted in three Auckland sites between March and August 2003. Evaluation of WRK4U showed a substantial reduction in the number of people who chose to apply for Unemployment Benefit after participating in the seminar (26% fewer applications and 20% fewer grants). Based on this knowledge of 'what works', WRK4U was rolled out nationally in August 2003.

Research and evaluation of the Domestic Purposes and Widows Benefit reforms led to new resources for developing Personal Development and Employment Plans for these clients, as well as supporting new service responses, such as specialised family violence co-ordinators to work with clients who disclose family violence. The final stages of the evaluation will assess the impact of the 2002 reforms on clients' outcomes and will be reported in December 2005. These reforms will be examined alongside other factors that include population change, changes in family structure, and economic and employment changes, providing evidence to shape future policy and programmes.

Important areas of research for the Ministry include longitudinal research, such as the Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Families. Longitudinal research tracks people over long periods of time and informs us about the longer-term outcomes of interventions. These data collections provide an invaluable resource for future policy development. The Ministry will also work closely with Statistics New Zealand in coming years as they continue to develop key data sets, including the Social Statistics Programme. These data sets will provide us with state of the nation data to strengthen our research and evaluation work.

We need stronger linkages between government strategy and decisions and organisations that undertake internationally-recognised research in areas related to social wellbeing, including New Zealand universities, and the private and community sector. To this end, the Ministry co-ordinates the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Committee (SPEaR), which helps ensure that research and evaluation activities across government are aligned with government's social policy priorities. In addition, Ministry of Social Development publications and knowledge need to be made more accessible to groups inside and outside government, to ensure that work

**The SPEaR
Committee
builds stronger
links between
research and
policy**

across the social sector is guided by the best possible knowledge and evidence.

Opportunities for action to develop and use evidence

- To ensure decisions are based on sound evidence, we need to increase our investment in research and evaluation, in particular:
 - we need to continue to invest in *The Social Report* and the *Living Standards* research programme, and to expand our efforts to longitudinal research programmes, which follow individuals through their lives and provide a richer picture about people's outcomes
 - we need to increase the quality and policy-relevance of evaluations across the social sector.
- To inform social decisions, programmes and services, we need to improve accessibility and make better use of existing social sector data.

Take a life-course approach

Different social issues are relevant to children and young people, working-age people and older people. Governments should tailor their responses to people's needs at transition points in the life course, so interventions are balanced and mutually reinforcing.

A person's life is marked by transition: from early childhood to school, from education into labour market participation and then into retirement. Outcomes can be at risk during each of these transitions, and at intermediate stages such as the transition from primary to secondary school.

Taking a life-course approach enables us to build on the foundations put in place during previous stages of life. Social decisions and programmes need to reflect the principle that early success makes later success more likely, while early problems, unaddressed, make later problems more severe. For example, government currently spends large sums of money on compulsory education between the ages of five and 16 years. But children who are disadvantaged before the age of five often cannot fully benefit from much of this spending. As well as enhancing the effectiveness of later expenditure,

We aim to increase the quality of social research and evaluation, and make its results more accessible

Transitions to school, work and retirement can present risks

We need to build good foundations at each stage, through ...

ensuring good foundations improves social equity²⁹ and increases the dividends on social investment.

Intervening early in the lives of vulnerable young children is one of the best ways to avoid or reduce future negative outcomes and the resulting personal, social and economic costs. For this reason, it can also be cost-effective for governments.³⁰ Children who consistently experience poor social outcomes often come from families experiencing multiple and sustained disadvantage. Long-term studies and research into child development demonstrate that early intervention is the key to successful outcomes for such families and children.

To prepare for an ageing population, we need to ensure effective investment, by both families and government, in today's children, because they are the adults, parents and workforce of the future, whose taxes will support future social services.

Tertiary students face issues including indebtedness. In the majority of cases, tertiary students go on to higher-than-average incomes. The key issue for government is to encourage students to borrow only on a needs basis.

Working-age people face a wide variety of issues that are unique to the individual. For many, labour market participation continues fairly smoothly throughout their adult years up to retirement. For others, barriers to labour market participation are a problem at certain times of their adulthood, while some choose not to work and are financially supported by others (eg parents raising children at home). The challenge for government is to ensure its regulatory settings promote working-age people being responsible for themselves and their families. This includes ensuring access to health services and lifelong learning, and helping address barriers for people who are capable of working and want to enter the labour market.

Today's older population live longer than previous generations, and many older people remain active well beyond the age of 65. This means that, in some ways, society needs to change its definition of what it means to be old. Older people's social and working lives will be of increasing importance to New Zealand as the population ages.

We need to help students minimise debt

... early intervention for very young children

... investing in the future workforce

... and supporting vulnerable workers to stay in work

Valuing the skills of older people

Making the most of the knowledge and experience of older people in the community so they can help families in need is the basis of the new Family and Community Services initiative SAGES. This initiative provides funding for mentoring programmes. Older volunteers pass on their life skills to families and individuals in need of assistance. Volunteers work with families to develop their skills in areas like home management, cooking, budgeting and positive parenting. SAGES supports people to:

- care for themselves and their families
- budget to make the best use of their resources
- develop a sense of belonging to their community
- improve their problem-solving skills and the way they cope with challenges.

Older Māori and Pacific peoples are more likely than average to experience poverty, problems with housing and health problems. Average Māori life expectancy is approximately eight years less than non-Māori.³¹ While both Māori and Pacific peoples have lower life expectancy than New Zealand Europeans, their average life expectancy is increasing.

Health and transport are key issues for people aged 80 and over. Many of these people experience accidents or live with chronic health conditions. Other issues for this group are housing and social connectedness. While most people in this group have stable housing, a minority do not. Getting home care and being able to 'age in place' – ie continue to be independent and live in your own home – are priorities for many. Lack of transport, lack of community networks and poor health can also contribute to diminished social connectedness and lower wellbeing for this group.

Opportunities for action to take a life-course approach

- We need to improve our understanding of where social spending priorities are emerging, and to ensure that areas are targeted for action, by taking a life-course approach and targeting programmes and services to points of transition in people's lives.

- We need to address immediate issues but also take action that results in better outcomes in the medium and longer terms, by identifying potential risks and problems early.

Support families and communities

Improved social outcomes result from families and communities functioning well. How well they function is affected by government decisions, and the programmes and services government delivers. Much of government activity across the social sector is undertaken to support families and communities to look after themselves and their members.

Family structures and needs are changing

Children are more likely to live in changing family structures than they were.³²

There have been significant changes in gender roles in the last 40 years, including increased participation in the labour force by women. Women are generally having fewer children and delaying child bearing until later in life. It is also likely that women are not having additional children for reasons that include financial constraints.

Māori and Pacific peoples' households continue to be larger than the national average, with younger average ages of mothers at birth and higher rates of sole parenthood. These differences have implications for areas like employment, education and training, and income.³³

The increased number of sole-parent households and two-parent families where both parents are in paid work can mean there is less time for families to care for children, older relatives, and sick or disabled family members. This is leading to an increased demand for family-friendly workplace practices and affordable, high-quality childcare.

Family violence, abuse and neglect have a major negative impact on families' abilities to function. Negative effects can be lifelong and can affect the outcomes of the next generation of children. It is critical that these problems are prevented as much as possible. We need to support parents

Family structures, gender roles, and the pressures faced by families are very different to a generation ago

to keep children safe and secure, and to strengthen government responses to violence.

Early intervention to help vulnerable families

The Family Start programme identifies vulnerable families at the time of childbirth, and offers them the assistance of a family worker. Vulnerable families are those whose children are at risk of poor health, education and other social outcomes. The family worker undertakes a thorough needs assessment, provides support to the family, teaches parenting skills and links families with required services, so they can develop the skills they need to meet their individual and family needs.

Communities have diverse forms and purposes

Communities encompass a wide range of groupings with varying degrees of formality. They can be geographic communities or communities of interest. Both contribute to social wellbeing by maintaining norms and values, passing on cultural practices, and building networks between people and groups.

Community engagement has an ethnic dimension. Māori are more likely to engage in community activity through iwi or urban Māori organisations, while for Pacific peoples, cultural groups play a vital role in community engagement.

Technology has changed the way many people network and is having an impact on communities. There is less face-to-face contact these days, and communities are formed between people who do not necessarily live in proximity to each other. We need to better understand this evolving situation, given the importance of communities to wellbeing.

To build a well-functioning, inclusive society, we need to take advantage of diversity within and between communities.

Communities of interest are growing as communities of location decrease

Government needs to work more closely with the community and voluntary sector

The community and voluntary sector exists to support families and communities. The sector is made up of organisations that provide support, advocacy, advice and other services to individuals and families. It depends substantially on unpaid people to perform much of its work, although it also engages significant numbers of paid employees.

When people experience new issues or problems, workers in the community and voluntary sector are often the first to know, and they have a good understanding of the lives of their clients. We need to improve communication channels with the sector; by working more closely with sector workers, we can strengthen both policy and programme development.

Government processes can cause unreasonable compliance costs and other difficulties for the community and voluntary sector. We need funding practices that provide a good balance between ensuring accountability and minimising compliance costs, particularly for smaller organisations. We need to support capacity-building projects for the sector through initiatives that strengthen leadership, infrastructure, workforce development, and communication channels.

We need capacity building and good funding practice to support the community and voluntary sector

Opportunities for action to support families and communities

- All families face challenges and pressures. We need to ensure all children get the best possible start in life by supporting parents and families, and shifting the emphasis of our social investment towards children.
- To meet community needs, we need to work across the whole of government and the community and voluntary sector to build capacity and capability, and to improve infrastructure.

Co-ordinate active approaches to social policy and delivery

Outcomes in different parts of the social sector – health, education, justice, income support and employment – are interlinked in complex ways. Actions

Many social problems require agencies to work together, formally or informally

that are successful in one area can have positive consequences for other areas, but in some cases they can have adverse consequences elsewhere.

Government should continue to champion cross-sectoral ways of working, because they are often the most effective means of improving outcomes in areas where more than one agency takes an interest. We need to consider whether social problems cross departmental boundaries, and to address such social problems with co-ordinated responses, aligned outcome goals and co-operation between national and regional-level government agencies. As well as aligning policies so they work towards desired outcomes, service delivery sometimes needs to be 'joined up'. In general, a cross-government approach is needed where:

- the nature of a social problem means no one agency can address it on its own
- changes in one area of government activity will significantly impact on outcomes beyond those being targeted
- a problem issue would otherwise not be picked up by any agency.

There will often be positive results where central government agencies can effectively work in partnership with businesses, iwi and other community organisations that have common goals.

Working together does not always need to be formal (eg through shared reporting lines or combined accountabilities). It can mean agencies recognising that they contribute to common outcomes, and different agencies approaching them on different paths.

... and high-quality evaluations of programmes

Joining up central government services

The Mangere Integrated Service Delivery project is one key initiative underway to achieve better outcomes for clients who require extra help from different agencies. The project involves co-locating Housing New Zealand staff with Ministry of Social Development staff at the Mangere Work and Income Service Centre. Clients who are common to both the Ministry and Housing New Zealand are given a housing needs assessment and information about income support entitlements they may be eligible for. Both agencies are now considering extending this initiative to other Work and Income sites.

While there are benefits to interagency working, it is not cost-free. It will not be appropriate in every case where different agencies have an interest.³⁴ Without a strong mandate and clear focus, interagency working can be time-consuming, with limited progress towards desired outcomes.³⁵ Accountability arrangements and performance measurement become more complex when outcomes cut across agency boundaries. Getting accountabilities and incentives right is critical.

There are a lot of good things happening in terms of joint action between agencies. Our challenge is to capitalise on them by sharing information about effective initiatives.

We need to continue to improve our understanding of when working together provides the greatest pay-offs, and when it is more effective to concentrate on sector-specific policies and services.

Opportunities for action to co-ordinate active approaches to social policy and delivery

- We need to step back and look at our government co-ordination mechanisms to ensure they are working as well as they can. For example, we need to consider governance issues and to look at getting the incentives right for agencies to work together effectively.
- We need to learn more about what works, and to capitalise on existing successful co-ordination initiatives by having good feedback loops, and sharing good practice initiatives across the country.

Tilt social spending toward social investment

Social protection will continue to play an important role

New Zealand has experienced strong economic growth in recent years, but the need for an effective social safety net remains. The ageing population will increase demand for superannuation and health care. The economy will continue to experience cycles of strong and weak growth, and there will be a fluctuating demand for unemployment assistance. As part of living in a cohesive and inclusive society, it continues to be important to New Zealanders to support those who are disadvantaged.

To make the most of cross-sector work, we need to share good practice among agencies

We need to tilt the balance to emphasise social investment

As well as a strong safety net, we need more effective social investments if we want to improve wellbeing for all New Zealanders for the long term.

Effective social investment has these features:

- It contributes to economic development and growth. As recent labour shortages show, without a skilled workforce, economic growth and productivity levels are weakened. Effective investment in the right types of education and skills will enable more New Zealanders to participate in the economy.
- It mitigates poor outcomes in the future. The evidence is steadily building that our experiences when very young are a major influence on how we do later in life. Investment in early intervention will unlock a lot of potential and avoid future problems for disadvantaged young people.

Investing in housing and health to improve future outcomes

Healthy Housing is a joint project between Housing New Zealand (HNZ) and district health boards. The programme aims to:

- raise awareness of infectious diseases such as meningococcal disease, rheumatic fever, tuberculosis, cellulitis and respiratory diseases
- improve access to health and social services
- reduce the risk of housing-related health problems
- reduce overcrowding.

HNZ staff and a public health nurse meet with participating HNZ tenants to discuss and identify housing and health issues. Both agencies ensure the tenant and their family have access to the housing and health services they need and that people are connected to other social service agencies if necessary. Between 2001 and the end of 2004, 2,700 assessments were completed, and HNZ carried out 3,800 housing improvements.

We need make existing social protection more active and more investment-focused

We also need to take a more active approach to the provision of social protection, to make our interventions more effective. For example, repeatedly treating a child suffering from respiratory infections would be unnecessary if we addressed the factors that led to the infections, like poor housing, overcrowded conditions, and shared water bottles. As another example, there is no need for someone who is physically able to remain on a benefit indefinitely when job opportunities exist.

Instead of simply paying a benefit, a more effective way of providing social protection is using active case management to address the barriers to work that people face, such as a lack of training or a lack of childcare.

A sound investment approach will have significant and long-lasting benefits for both individuals and society. New Zealanders have all benefited from earlier social investments in areas like education, clean water and immunisation.

Opportunities for action to tilt social spending toward social investment

- Overall, we need to do more of what works, and less of what does not. In particular, we need to tilt our spending towards those activities that address the fundamental problems rather than just addressing the current need.
 - In the health sector, we need to prioritise health promotion and primary health care.
 - In the justice sector, we need to prioritise crime prevention and rehabilitation, particularly among young people, to reduce future offending outcomes. Early intervention approaches are promising because we have more information about the risk factors displayed by children who are at risk for future offending.
 - In the education sector, we need to address problems early by, for example, promoting reading and addressing learning difficulties, to get better outcomes for school leavers.

Social protection needs to be more active, focusing on causes rather than effects...

... and social investment can be more effective if we use good evaluations to guide our decisions

- In the social services, we need to take an active approach to people receiving benefits, to improve employment outcomes and reduce the likelihood that they and their families will have to continue to rely on the state for their income.

Conclusion

The challenges set out in Part three provide advice on how to improve social outcomes across the whole of the social sector over the coming years. Part four discusses the ways in which governments can take a stronger leadership role across the social sector to improve outcomes, and also provides advice on priority areas across the social sector for improvement.

part four

Improving outcomes for New Zealanders

Part four : Improving outcomes for New Zealanders

Chapter 5: How government can lead social development

Introduction

To maintain and strengthen effective cross-sectoral leadership, government needs to:

- develop our key tools to measure social wellbeing
- set priorities across the whole social sector to improve wellbeing
- enhance social reporting practices to improve ongoing decision making on social priorities
- strengthen leadership on social outcomes at a regional level.

Develop our key tools to measure social wellbeing

Since 2001, the Ministry of Social Development's annual *Social Report* has provided a framework for regular public reporting on the wellbeing of New Zealanders. The report monitors trends and changes and identifies how we are doing in terms of wellbeing internationally, nationally, regionally and locally, and where we should focus our actions. Along with other data from the Ministry and other government and non-government agencies, *The Social Report* is critical in helping government decide on priorities, identify goals, and develop action plans.

The Social Report is widely used by government and non-government agencies. At a recent conference in Canada, the OECD spoke of *The Social Report* as world-leading in social monitoring and reporting.³⁶ The report has filled an information gap in our social sector evidence base.

As social statistics develop, *The Social Report* will provide a more sophisticated picture of New Zealand's social landscape. In 2005, for example, *The Social Report 2005* added data on social wellbeing at regional

The annual *Social Report* is a critical basis for policy, goals, and actions

Our *Social Report* and *Living Standards* research programme, have received international recognition

and local authority levels. This will help New Zealanders better understand the issues faced by different regions.

The Ministry's *Living Standards* research programme has developed world-leading tools and indicators of material wellbeing, including the Economic Living Standards Index. This research programme is now working towards a comprehensive understanding of factors associated with variation in New Zealanders' living standards. Factors being explored include health, education, social networks and support, life history, marital dissolution, financial history, and current living arrangements. This research has been nationally and internationally recognised as offering highly-valuable new approaches to measuring and monitoring wellbeing.

The Social Report and the *Living Standards* research programme help us to measure New Zealand's success, and to make choices about the areas that require attention.

Opportunities for action to develop our key tools to measure social wellbeing

- We need to strengthen our key tools to measure social wellbeing. Examples include building the social report and other data at the regional and local levels, increasing the breadth and sophistication of our data, and increasing data collection on subgroups of the population.
- We need to ensure the data we publish is easily accessible to groups inside and outside government, to help us work with them successfully. This involves identifying effective ways to share the data and to facilitate its use by local authorities, the community and voluntary sector, and businesses. Building on the Ministry's internet resources is likely to be part of the solution.

We need to continue to build and improve this world-leading research, and make it more widely accessible

Set priorities across the whole social sector

Governments cannot address all aspects of wellbeing at once. They must determine priorities and make choices, using the best available data and research evidence to do so. In 2004, social priorities were identified in *Opportunity for All New Zealanders*, a high-level social strategy that drew heavily on findings in the social report.

***Opportunity for All New Zealanders* is a high-level social strategy that identifies critical social issues**

When governments enter office, they determine their social priorities. The Ministry of Social Development has the expertise and capability to provide advice on priority issues and support the priority-setting process. The Ministry supports governments in this role by:

- providing advice on social issues arising from changing national and global social and economic conditions
- assisting with the preparation of a statement of government's strategies and action plans to co-ordinate government interventions
- working with government to make real progress in improving critical social issues.

Making progress to improve critical issues across the whole social sector may, and usually will, require concerted effort from multiple government agencies. Impetus and political mandate are needed to make this happen. Once governments identify their priorities, the Ministry recommends they develop a statement of strategies to improve wellbeing, including the goals they want to achieve, and specific actions to achieve better social outcomes.

Opportunities for action to set priorities across the whole social sector

- Government should set its broad social priorities. Each priority should have clear goals and action plans. Government should identify a lead agency for each priority, and to ensure there are adequate incentives for other agencies to contribute.
- We recommend an inclusive process for the development of priorities, that involves other agencies, regions and local government. It could also be beneficial to engage citizens with the process, to increase buy-in. We need to consider how social priorities contribute to economic priorities and vice versa.

Enhance social reporting practices

We need to develop existing tools if we are going to improve in social outcomes into the future. We currently produce an annual social indicators report (*The Social Report*) and the government has issued a statement of

Communities, individuals, and local government could also be involved in setting social priorities

We need to promote regular social reporting and a statement of governments' social strategies

strategies for improving social wellbeing once in 2004 (*Opportunity for All New Zealanders*).

To improve decision making on social priorities and on programmes and services, we should continue to produce and develop:

- an annual social indicators report that reflects key indicators of social wellbeing (such as *The Social Report*)
- a statement following each general election of the Government's strategies for improving social wellbeing (such as *Opportunity for All New Zealanders*)
- a report at least every three years on actions taken to implement the Government's social strategies.

Regular reporting of this kind would contribute to co-ordinated and aligned strategies and activities across the social sector, and strengthen the ability of governments to take action to improve overall social wellbeing and address disadvantage.

Opportunities for action to enhance social reporting practices

- To inform the public on social outcomes, we need to continue to produce and develop a robust social indicators report (such as *The Social Report*) on an annual basis.
- To improve social reporting and social programmes and services generally, government should produce a statement of its social strategies at least once in each parliamentary term; and regular progress reports on the statement of strategies.

Strengthen social development leadership at a regional level

We need to co-ordinate regionally as well as nationally. When there are new issues or problems, people working at the local level are often the first to know.

To ensure the social priorities outlined by central government are achieved across New Zealand, we need to consider whether programmes and services need to be tailored to fit local needs. If this is the case, we need to make use of local knowledge in order to achieve effective delivery.

We need to tailor programmes and services to local need

Where implementation is devolved from the central to the regional level, it is critical to put in place robust accountability measures, to monitor and evaluate the impact of what we do, and to ensure good communication by strengthening information flows.

Opportunities for action to strengthen social development leadership at a regional level

- To make government agencies more effective, we need to have mechanisms at the regional level that promote action and two-way communication.
 - We need to learn from each other's success stories, and share them across the country and across agencies. Currently, some regions are excellent models for co-operation between agencies.
 - We need to find the right balance between regional autonomy and national rules. Effective devolution to the regions includes aligning regional and national outcome goals.
- To ensure government's social priorities are achieved across New Zealand, we need to ensure that people working in the regions have a clear understanding of the social directions central government is working to.

Implementing programmes and services requires clear accountability, good communication, and alignment between regional and national goals

Chapter 6: Priority issues for the whole of the social sector

Introduction

Based on current information, the five priorities discussed in this chapter are significant and enduring, and require focus over the medium-to-long term. They are included in the statement summary of government social strategies, *Opportunity for All New Zealanders*.

These priorities were agreed by a broad base of government social sector and central agencies who contributed to *Opportunity for All New Zealanders* in 2004. Issues were identified against the following criteria:

- the issue affects a large number of people, or a small number of people is severely affected
- the issue impacts on negative outcomes, now or in the future
- the issue increases inequalities within and between populations
- the issue will still, without government intervention, be important in five to 10 years' time
- there is evidence that governments can do something that works with regard to the issue
- the issue relates to the work of a number of government agencies, and requires their collaboration to deal with it effectively
- the issue is perceived to be of general public concern.

As noted earlier, while governments need to identify priorities and issues, they also need to identify clear goals for each priority. These goals should be developed in consultation with the key agencies involved. It is also critical to develop action plans to ensure the goals are reached, and to measure, monitor and track progress.

The Ministry of Social Development's advice on priorities for the whole social sector will necessarily be subject to change depending on variations in social conditions.

Government may choose to focus on a different group of priorities, to add new priorities to this list, or to agree to the following priorities as a focus for the broad social sector. Making progress to improve critical issues across the whole social sector will require concerted effort from multiple government agencies, at the national, regional and local levels.

Progress on critical social issues requires extensive effort from many government agencies

Priority One : Improve educational achievement among low socio-economic groups

We need to improve educational achievement among low socio-economic groups for the following reasons:

- it will improve outcomes throughout people's lives
- low educational achievement contributes to long-term benefit receipt
- the tail of poor performances makes us less competitive internationally.

There is strong evidence to indicate that positive social benefits, including a reduction in crime, result from improving low achievers' secondary school outcomes.³⁷

In 2003, 33% of school leavers left school without higher qualifications.³⁸ While this proportion has improved markedly since the mid-1980s, since 1990 it has fluctuated between 33% and 37%.³⁹ Those who leave school early with few qualifications are at much greater risk of unemployment or vulnerability in the labour force and of having low incomes.⁴⁰

Relatively low levels of Māori and Pacific peoples leave school with higher qualifications. Despite these levels improving over the 1990s, 55% of Māori and 41% of Pacific peoples left school without achieving higher school qualifications in 2003, compared to the population average of 33%. These traditionally low educational outcomes have contributed to higher unemployment rates for Māori and Pacific peoples, and higher proportions of Māori and Pacific peoples on low incomes.

Evidence suggests a number of strategies are effective in improving educational achievement, including: teachers having higher expectations of pupils from diverse backgrounds; schools providing better and more accessible information to parents on how children are faring at school;

We need to improve educational achievement among low socio-economic groups

Improving educational achievement requires better access to early childhood education

parental participation in their children's education; and teachers using testing as a diagnostic tool (rather than just end-of-year assessments).

Opportunities for action to improve educational achievement among low socio-economic groups

- Improving educational achievement for children from low socio-economic groups needs to be a top priority for spending in the wider education sector, which includes early childhood education, schools and tertiary education. We need to:
 - Put a strong emphasis on objectively and comparably assessing student performance, and on ensuring parents are well informed so they can make good choices on behalf of their children.
 - Ensure all children are as ready as possible to take up compulsory education, by encouraging them to access quality early childhood education. This includes providing intensive early intervention services for very disadvantaged children.

Priority Two : Increase opportunities for people to participate in sustainable employment

We need to increase opportunities for people to participate in sustainable employment. Good and sustainable jobs bring income, self-reliance and social connectedness.

Increasing sustainable employment opportunities is most crucial for disadvantaged groups, especially people with disabilities and sole parents, but also for Māori, Pacific peoples and young people. Unemployment rates for all of these groups are significantly higher than for the rest of the population, although those for Māori and Pacific peoples have improved in the last few years.⁴¹

Lack of employment and insufficient incomes have a direct effect on outcomes for children. Many of those children who live in households with persistent low incomes have compromised long term outcomes.⁴² The longer a person is unemployed, the harder it can be for that person to return to the workforce, and this can have serious negative impacts on dependent children. Rates of employment among New Zealand sole parents are among the lowest in the OECD. This could be significantly improved

Sole parents, people with disabilities, Māori and Pacific peoples, and youth have significantly higher unemployment rates

(especially for part-time employment) by helping to address the key barriers to employment. One of the most significant barriers for sole parents is lack of access to affordable childcare.

Opportunities for action to increase opportunities for people to participate in sustainable employment

- Now that the unemployment rate is very low, we need to provide active labour market programmes to the broader group of people not in paid employment. This includes increasing our efforts to help more people who have experienced ill health or disability to move into employment. We need to continue to pursue innovative ideas and to evaluate these ideas.
- We need to work co-operatively with employers and firms – both meeting their needs and being more responsive to people disadvantaged in the labour market, such as people with disabilities, immigrants and older people.
- We need to modernise the benefit system, placing capacity, opportunity and work-focused services at the centre, backed by appropriate obligations for those who can work and protection for those who cannot.

Addressing the issue of sustainable employment will involve providing active work programmes ...

...working with employers and businesses ...

... and modernising the benefit system

Priority Three : Promote healthy eating and healthy activity

Around 11,000 deaths each year (39.5% of total deaths) in New Zealand are attributed to nutrition and inactivity-related risk factors.⁴³ Promoting healthy eating and healthy activity will help save lives, reduce health costs and tackle the increasing problem of obesity, reducing its negative impacts and increasing productivity in the workplace.

Obesity is associated with many chronic, debilitating and life-threatening conditions, including type two diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Obesity impacts negatively on self-esteem, the ability to learn, social participation and employment outcomes⁴⁴, and is associated with depression.⁴⁵ Diet and physical activity influence health and other outcomes, both together and separately.⁴⁶

Over half the New Zealand adult population is overweight – but there is scope for action

Over half of the adult New Zealand population is overweight or obese, and nearly a third of children.⁴⁷ These figures have been increasing over the last

20 years⁴⁸, making New Zealand part of a global trend. Unless we act now, New Zealand rates are likely to continue to rise.

Obesity is subject to ethnic, socio-economic and age differences. Obesity is highest among Pacific peoples. Māori have higher rates of obesity than New Zealand European and other ethnic groups. Obesity is far more common among people who experience low living standards.⁴⁹

Obesity is influenced by biology, behaviour and the environment.⁵⁰ Although some people are more susceptible to weight gain than others, the rapid increase in the average Body Mass Index (BMI) over the last two decades suggests our environment promotes a sedentary lifestyle and over-consumption of energy-rich foods.⁵¹ The rapid global rise in obesity rates is attributable to the profound and rapid changes to the environment and society in large parts of the world.⁵² This means there is a wide scope for action.

Opportunities for action to promote healthy eating and healthy activity

- To effectively reduce the long-term effects of obesity, we need to focus on children by:
 - promoting healthy food and physical activity in schools and early childhood education, including seeking to influence boards of trustees to develop healthy school food and physical activity policies
 - working with the food industry to modify the preparation/manufacture and marketing of food, including labelling
 - encouraging more physical activity by all age groups, but especially children.
- To reduce obesity, we need to achieve behavioural change by:
 - promoting healthy workplace food and physical activity, especially in big workplaces
 - developing and implementing a range of strategies to facilitate behavioural change, including a communications plan to deliver clear messages about nutrition, physical activity and healthy weight.

The economic costs of obesity

Around 11,000 New Zealanders a year die from nutrition and inactivity-related health problems. The World Health Organisation has estimated the cost of obesity for a country is 2% to 7% of the annual health budget.⁵³

The Ministry of Health's *Healthy Eating – Healthy Action: A Background 2003* summarises the economic costs of obesity as follows:⁵⁴

- *Direct cost*: the cost to the community through the diversion of resources to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases related to obesity. Obesity treatments, such as drug therapy, are costly.
- *Intangible cost*: the cost to the individual because of the impact of obesity on the quality of life generally, and on health specifically.
- *Indirect cost*: the impact of the reduced quality of life on the productive potential available to the rest of society. Usually these costs are measured as lost production due to time off work and premature death.

Priority Four : Reduce tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug abuse

Tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug abuse negatively affect the lives of many New Zealanders, including abusers and those around them. Alcohol and drug abuse affect people's ability to achieve sustainable employment, and negatively impact on families and communities.

Tobacco smoking, including second-hand cigarette smoke, is responsible for approximately 5,000 deaths (or 18% of all deaths) in New Zealand each year. It is a leading risk factor for cardiovascular disease, many cancers and other conditions.⁵⁵ When abused, alcohol can cause great damage, particularly through its association with family and other violence, injury and accident. Drug or substance abuse was the most common reason for student suspensions from school in 2003.⁵⁶ Drug abuse is also linked to problems with entering and sustaining employment.

Regulation, taxation, and support services are all ways to control the use of, and mitigate the harm caused by, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs

Tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug abuse are well-developed areas of government intervention. Harm minimisation involves action at three levels: supply control, demand reduction and problem limitation. Taxation, regulation, behavioural change approaches and support service mechanisms have all been used as a means to control the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and to mitigate the harms relating to that use.

Opportunities for action to reduce tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug abuse

- *Regulation*: we need to enforce and improve regulation affecting tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and to identify new and enhanced drug law enforcement techniques.
- *Taxation*: we need to consider new pricing and tax initiatives around tobacco and alcohol.
- *Behavioural approaches*: we need to capitalise on successful social marketing approaches. Social marketing and mass education campaigns can raise awareness of and reduce drug harm and change behaviours.
- *Support services*: we need to improve the early identification and management of alcohol and other drug problems in the community. Government agencies need to work with service providers – they are the first to know about new trends and problems. We need to expand effective programmes that comprehensively target illicit drug abuse.

Priority Five : Prevent family violence, and abuse and neglect of children and older people

We need to prevent family violence, and the abuse and neglect of children and older persons, and to change our culture to one where all people are given respect.

Family violence includes physical, sexual and psychological assault. It typically involves fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation. Children who experience violence in families are more likely than other children to:

- develop severe cognitive and behavioural problems: poor general health; poor sleeping habits; excessive screaming (infants); distorted

Family violence includes physical, sexual, and psychological assault and abuse

emotional development including attachment disorders; and altered development of the central nervous system⁵⁷

- exhibit externalising effects such as aggression, disobedience and destructiveness⁵⁸
- become violent themselves as adolescents, adults and parents.⁵⁹

Prevention of family violence leads to a wide range of improved outcomes for children in both the short and long terms. Research indicates that an effective approach to family violence prevention includes:

- greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention
- raising public awareness through education
- strengthening community action and responsiveness
- providing appropriate crisis intervention and treatment services.⁶⁰

Opportunities for action to prevent family violence, and abuse and neglect of children and older people

- We need to plan and carry out a systematic programme of actions, including public education, to change the attitudes and behaviours that cause violence within families.
- It is critical that we work with communities, non-government organisations and government agencies to set up community-driven, safe families programmes of action that:
 - increase awareness of violence within families
 - set objectives about families being safe
 - engage community leaders and organisations in responses to violence, which prevent the occurrence and re-occurrence of violence
 - increase the capacity and effectiveness of services working to prevent violence within families to address the impact of violence on children and young people, and to prevent the re-occurrence of violence.

Collaborative projects will help change attitudes and behaviours

We also need to strengthen prevention services, and support services for family violence victims

Conclusion

In Part four, we recommended that government use good evidence and data, such as that contained in the social report, to set cross-sectoral priorities and act on these priorities. We also recommended that government consider our advice on the most important five cross-sectoral priorities:

1. improve educational achievement among low socio-economic groups
2. increase opportunities for people to participate in sustainable employment
3. promote healthy eating and healthy activity
4. reduce tobacco use, and alcohol and other drug abuse
5. prevent family violence, and abuse and neglect of children and older persons.

We recommend that government:

- confirms its commitment to the above list of priorities as a focus for the broad social sector, or
- considers other priorities in relation to this list.

Making progress on these priorities will require concerted, long-term collaboration among central and regional government agencies, local authorities, and the community and voluntary sector.

The Ministry of Social Development has the expertise and capability to provide further advice on priority issues and to support you in setting priorities – this is part of our cross-sectoral role.

Working together

New Zealand is currently enjoying the benefits of a strong economy and a buoyant labour market. As a country, we are doing well on most social indicators that we measure. This puts us in a strong position to create a new impetus for better social outcomes in areas and for groups where we are not doing so well. We also need to capitalise on current successes, including our ranking as the country with the lowest unemployment in the OECD.

There are many areas where we can do better. Because social outcomes in one sphere will often improve outcomes in others, including economic outcomes, we need to take a broad view of the social sector. Quality education, employment assistance, health promotion and good housing are all important factors that improve short-term and long-term wellbeing.

This briefing began with a rationale for a broad whole-of-social-sector approach by government. The Ministry of Social Development has developed this approach since the establishment of our strategic social policy function five years ago. It is paying dividends, in terms of improved information and improved co-ordination between government departments, as they set priorities and work together to improve the lives of New Zealanders.

This briefing sets out opportunities for action to achieve better outcomes in a number of different areas, and to improve the ways in which government can lead social development across the sector. Taking advantage of these opportunities is critically important to achieving the best possible social outcomes for New Zealand, now and in the future.

We look forward to working with you.

The Ministry has established a whole of government approach to social development

We have increasing opportunities to get better outcomes in many areas

Endnotes

¹ State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (2004), *Benefit-Cost Studies of Four Longitudinal Early Childhood Programs: An Overview as Basis for a Working Knowledge* (<http://www.finebynine.org/pdf/BenefitCostStudies.pdf>).

² Total government expenditure in the 2004/2005 financial year was \$45.3 billion. Therefore social expenditure made up 78% of total government expenditure in that year. Figures from Cullen M (2005) *Budget 2005 Economic and Fiscal Update*.

³ Welfare benefit spending was made up of Domestic Purposes Benefit (12%); New Zealand Superannuation (45%); Unemployment Benefit (6%); Sickness, Invalids and Disability (13%); Family Support (7%) and other benefits (17%). Figures from Cullen M (2005) *Budget 2005 Economic and Fiscal Update*.

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⁶ Bassanini A and S Scarpetta (2001) *Does Human Capital Matter for Growth in OECD Countries?* OECD Economics Department Working Paper No. 282.

⁷ OECD (2005) *Extending Opportunities: How Active Social Policy Can Benefit Us All*, OECD, Paris.

⁸ Each outcome domain comprises a set of key indicators, or measures, that provide information about the outcome area. For instance, numbers of school leavers with qualifications is a key indicator of outcomes in the knowledge and skills domain. There are 42 indicators in total in the Ministry's *Social Report*, including life expectancy, market income per person, participation in sport and active leisure, and trust in others.

⁹ Market income per person refers to the real gross national disposable income per person. This is a measure of the total value of goods and services available to New Zealanders, expressed in inflation-adjusted dollars, per head of population. For international comparisons, GDP per capita in US dollars is used, with adjustments for purchasing power parity.

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¹¹ *The Social Report* uses three poverty lines or low-income thresholds, set at 40%, 50% and 60% of the 1998 median after-housing-costs income of economic family units. Thresholds are sensitive to family size and composition in terms of the number of adults, the number of children and the ages of the children. The thresholds are adjusted for inflation – they are constant-value thresholds or poverty lines.

¹² For the purpose of this diagram, regions are defined by regional council boundaries.

¹³ People who are neither Māori, Pacific nor Pākehā/European are often combined for statistical reasons into one group, which is referred to as Other Ethnicities.

¹⁴ Poverty rate calculation based on population age data and *Social Report* methodology.

¹⁵ OECD (2005) *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD, Paris, p 59, Table EQ4.2.

¹⁶ Dharmalingam A et al (2004) *Patterns of Family Formation and Change in New Zealand*, MSD, pp 87-88.

¹⁷ Statistics New Zealand (2005) *Household Labour Force Survey (June 2005 quarter)*.

¹⁸ OECD (2005) *OECD Employment Outlook 2005*, pp 178–179.

¹⁹ OECD (2005) *Extending Opportunities: How Active Social Policy can Benefit Us All*, OECD, Paris.

²⁰ Nolan P (2003) *New Zealand's Social Assistance System: Financial Incentives to Work*, Treasury Working Paper 03/18.

²¹ See also Ministries of Economic Development, Social Development, Labour and Environment (2003) *Population and Sustainable Development*.

²² OECD (2005) *OECD Employment Outlook 2005*, OECD, Paris, pp 178-179

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²⁹ Heckman J (2000) “Policies to Foster Human Capital” (with Discussion), *Research in Economics*, 54(1): 3–56.

³⁰ Jacobsen V, N Mays, R Crawford, B Annesley, P Christoffel, G Johnston and S Durbin (2002) *Investing in Well-being: An Analytical Framework*, Treasury Working Paper 02/23.

³¹ Ministry of Social Development (2005) *The Social Report 2005*, p 26.

³² Dharmalingam A et al (2004) *Patterns of Family Formation and Change in New Zealand*, MSD, pp 87-88.

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³⁴ Cook A (2004) “*Managing for Outcomes*” in the *New Zealand Public Management System*, Treasury Working Paper 04/15; State Services Commission (2004) *Managing for Shared Outcomes*.

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