

Dame Karen Poutasi Response – Strengthening the Safety Nets to Identify and Respond to Children at Risk of Harm

Initiative Sponsors: Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Health

Description: This initiative provides funding to support the delivery and implementation of recommendations made in the Dame Karen Poutasi review to improve the system of safety nets for preventing harm in the children's system.

Financial Impact: Total operating spend of \$90.312 million over the forecast period. This is offset by \$13.178 million total, which is a combination of previous tagged contingency funding, and reprioritisation from Vote Social Development.

Total capital spend of \$0.126 million, which is also funded from previous tagged contingency funding.

Cross-vote Opex:

(\$m)	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
Social Development	(5.450)	-	-	-	-	(5.450)
Education	-	4.167	3.561	-	-	7.728
Education (contingency)	-	4.390	3.815	-	-	8.205
Oranga Tamariki	-	9.176	18.504	-	-	27.680
Oranga Tamariki (contingency)	-	-	-	18.504	18.504	37.008
Health	-	2.027	2.510	2.555	2.599	9.691

Capex

(\$m)	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
Education	-	0.126	-	-	-	0.126

What is the funding for?

In September 2025 the Government accepted all 14 of Dame Karen Poutasi's recommendations for improving the children's system and committed to an

approach focused on the safety of children. Budget 2026 allocates a total of \$90.312 million across multiple agencies including Health, Education, and Oranga Tamariki, which will help deliver on those recommendations and provide the improved safety net for our children that Dame Karen envisioned.

This Budget 2026 initiative will:

- support a sequenced rollout of mandatory training for 20,000 core children's workers over two years to increase the capability of children's workers to identify and respond to children at risk of harm
- ensure the child protection system has the capacity to respond safely and effectively to expected higher volumes of reports of concern arising from both training and the recently established multi-agency hub, and
- support Health NZ to increase participation in the Child Protection Protocol, working alongside NZ Police and Oranga Tamariki to assess and respond to the most serious cases of abuse.

Funding has also been set aside in contingency to support core children's workers to attend training and respond to increased reports of concern for Oranga Tamariki in the future.

Why is there only two years of funding appropriated for training and for Oranga Tamariki? Why is some of the funding being held in contingency?

Due to the scale of complex change and the need to manage impact on different parts of the system and workforces, the Government is continuing to take a phased approach to implementation.

The initial two years of funding will also allow the Government to build a clearer picture of system impacts, informing future resourcing decisions as implementation progresses. We will seek agreement to draw down contingency funding once robust evidence of resourcing need arising from the training and hub is available.

The impact of training on reports of concern volumes and flow-through impacts on the system has been forecast based on international evidence. Funding the next two years while training is rolled out will enable a New Zealand evidence base to be built to inform resourcing need beyond this. The tagged contingency for Oranga Tamariki will be able to be drawn down once this evidence is available.

Who will need to complete training and by when? What is it aiming to achieve?

Since January 2026 we have developed and tested foundational child protection training involving 500 core children's workers from a range of agencies and the NGO sector.

Budget 26 builds on the testing phase of this training. Child protection training will now shift to a phased rollout of both foundational and in-depth training, delivered to a target cohort of children's workers over the next two years to ensure implementation is manageable.

We will invite and keep core children's workers informed about when they can complete the training.

Child protection training will ensure participants have consistent, quality training that equips them with the knowledge and capabilities to identify and respond to children at risk of harm.