Child Support Pass-On evaluation:
Interim Insights Client Experience

December 2025

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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Contents

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Disclaimer

The views and interpretations in this report are those of the authors and are not the official position of the Ministry of Social Development.

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Introduction

Purpose

This report provides interim insights from the ongoing Child Support Pass-on (CSPO) evaluation. The report highlights themes on client experience of the impacts of CSPO about 1-2 years after implementation from a range of data methods including client interviews, a client survey and monitoring data.

Background

Introduction and intended benefits of the Child Support Pass-on policy

Child Support Pass-on was an initiative announced in Budget 2022 and implemented in July 2023. Prior to 1 July 2023, sole parents on benefit who had child support paid for children in their care did not receive these payments; the payments were collected by Inland Revenue and held to recoup the costs of paying the sole parent benefit. However, sole parents receiving non-beneficiary income support and couples on benefit did receive child support payments made for their children and these payments were treated as income for determining income support.

The changes implemented as part of CSPO were:

- sole parents receiving a main benefit have child support payments made by the other parent passed on to them
- child support payments are treated as income for the purposes of benefit entitlement for receiving parents
- child support administered by Inland Revenue is automatically charged forward as income for benefit entitlement purposes
- the obligation to apply for child support through Inland Revenue was removed
- child support payments are an allowable cost for Temporary Additional Support (TAS) for paying parents.

The intended benefits of CSPO were (CBC-22-SUB-0021):

- Increased incomes for many sole-parent families and a positive impact on reducing child poverty levels
- Improved equity and consistency between sole parent beneficiaries and re-partnered beneficiaries with the treatment of child support payments
- Improve liable parent engagement with their child as indicated by overseas evidence.

The Child Support Pass-on evaluation

The CSPO evaluation is examining the impacts of the CSPO policy. The evaluation focuses on the following key questions:

1. Did sole parents' experiences of the introduction of CSPO align with the Te Pae Tawhiti and Te Pae Tata key shift of Mana Manaaki - a positive experience every time?
2. How has CSPO impacted use of the child support system (through Inland Revenue)?
3. Has CSPO contributed to the Te Pae Tawhiti and Te Pae Tata key shift of Kia Takatū Tātou – supporting long-term social and economic development?
4. How has CSPO impacted support provided by liable parents?
5. How do the costs of CSPO compare to the benefits?

Information on Client Experience

This report integrates insights gathered from three sources of information: a client survey, client interviews and monitoring data.

CSPO Client Survey

The CSPO survey was designed as a non-representative survey to help understand experiences of CSPO from a wide range of MSD sole parent clients who experienced the introduction of the CSPO policy. A limited number of closed option responses were asked, followed by open-ended questions that asked for written responses to allow participants to elaborate on their response. The CSPO client survey was sent to 35,598 clients identified as receiving CSPO payments as at 26 November 2024. The survey was open between 2 December 2024 and 3 February 2025. The survey questions and approach were reviewed by the MSD Research Ethics Panel.

To screen respondents, the first question asked if they were a current MSD client who had a child support arrangement in July 2023. A total of 2,646 clients who answered yes to this screening question could then proceed to the survey and are counted as respondents. For this non-representative survey, achieving a representative sample was not pursued or required. Instead, at least 1,000 client responses were intended to provide a wider breadth of experiences to supplement the in-depth client interviews described below.

A reflexive thematic analysis of open text survey responses was conducted. The interim insights in the report focus on sole parent experience of income change and impact on financial stability, incentives to change or keep their current child support arrangements and impacts on family and whanau wellbeing.

In-depth Client Interviews

MSD contracted Te Paetawhiti Ltd to conduct in-depth interviews with sole parent beneficiaries impacted by CSPO. In total, nineteen parents were interviewed. Ten identified as Māori, nine as non-Māori, living across a range of regions. Collectively the interview participants were looking after 38 children, with ages ranging from two to sixteen years. The interview study design and questions were reviewed by the MSD Research Ethics Panel. Interviews were conducted between June and August 2025.

Sole parents were recruited for interviews through random selection from those who responded to the CSPO client survey and indicated interest in participating in future research. Thematic analysis was conducted using both inductive and deductive approaches, with the key evaluation questions as a broad framework within which themes were identified. Findings were discussed within the Te Paetawhiti research team, as well as with MSD and Inland Revenue staff within a sensemaking session.

Monitoring data

Administrative and modelling data are used in this report to provide further context to client experience themes identified within the survey and interviews.

MSD's microsimulation model (MSIM) was used to model the impacts of CSPO on sole parent beneficiaries eligible to receive child support after the changes. Results from MSIM are derived from MSD's administrative data, which contains information on all beneficiaries' circumstances. Results from the model are an estimate of the changes in clients' incomes as a result of CSPO, based on the main monthly data transfer from Inland Revenue to MSD of clients' child support payment information. Additional/arrear child support payments made throughout the month (e.g., if the liable parent pays late) are not captured in the modelling.

Modelled payments are more appropriate than using actual payment data to quantify the impact of the changes on sole parents because it is difficult to isolate the policy change from changes to clients' circumstances using actual payment data.

Data on liable parents receiving Temporary Additional Support for child support costs was drawn directly from MSD's administrative data.

Data on numbers of families with child support arrangements, child support applications and withdrawals, and liable parents paying child support on time was supplied by Inland Revenue.

MSD data in this report has been aggregated and randomly rounded to protect the privacy of participants.[1]

[1] Further information about how we keep data private can be found at: https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/tools/how-we-keep-data-private.html

Limitations

This report includes interim analysis of client experience information. Further refinement of analysis against key evaluation questions will be provided in final evaluation reporting, due in 2027. As such, this report does not make evaluative judgements or recommendations.

The response rate to the CSPO client survey was approximately 7.4%. It is possible that clients were more motivated to respond to the survey with either strongly positive or strongly negative perspectives on CSPO. Clients who participated in the interviews were recruited from those who had responded to the survey. Any bias in the survey responses may be replicated or strengthened within the interview sample.

The data analysis does not include any additional/arrear child support payments made throughout the month (e.g., if the liable parent pays late).

Trends in Inland Revenue administered child support arrangements

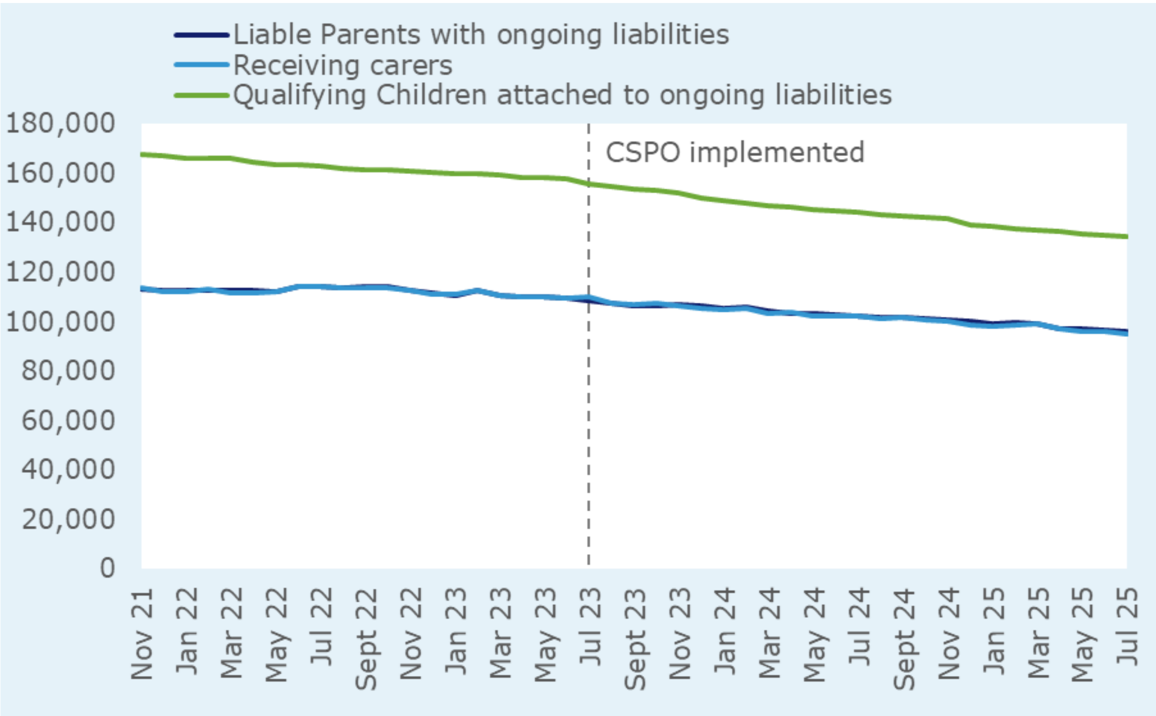
Numbers of families with child support arrangements through Inland Revenue have decreased over time

The numbers of receiving carers and liable parents with child support arrangements through Inland Revenue, and the number of children associated with child support arrangements, have been slowly decreasing over time as shown in Figure 1. These numbers represent all child support arrangements through Inland Revenue, not just those impacted by CSPO changes. From July 2023, the decreases were slightly steeper, perhaps reflecting the CSPO removal of the obligation for sole parents on benefit to apply for child support through Inland Revenue.

The number of all receiving carers with child support arrangements through Inland Revenue has decreased from 109,935 in July 2023 to 95,007 in July 2025. Similarly, the number of liable parents with child support arrangements through Inland Revenue has decreased from 108,399 in July 2023 to 96,033 in July 2025. Some liable parents may also be receiving child support and vice versa, so may be counted twice, as a liable parent and as a receiving carer.

Consistent with the decline in parents with child support arrangements, the number of children child support is paid for through Inland Revenue has also decreased, from 155,721 in July 2023 to 134,457 in July 2025.

Figure 1: Numbers of liable parents, receiving carers, and children with child support arrangements through Inland Revenue.



In line with the overall trend of decreasing number of parents and children with child support arrangements, there has been a decrease of 2,577 MSD clients impacted by CSPO between August 2023 and July 2025. In July 2025, 33,132 clients were impacted by CSPO.[2]

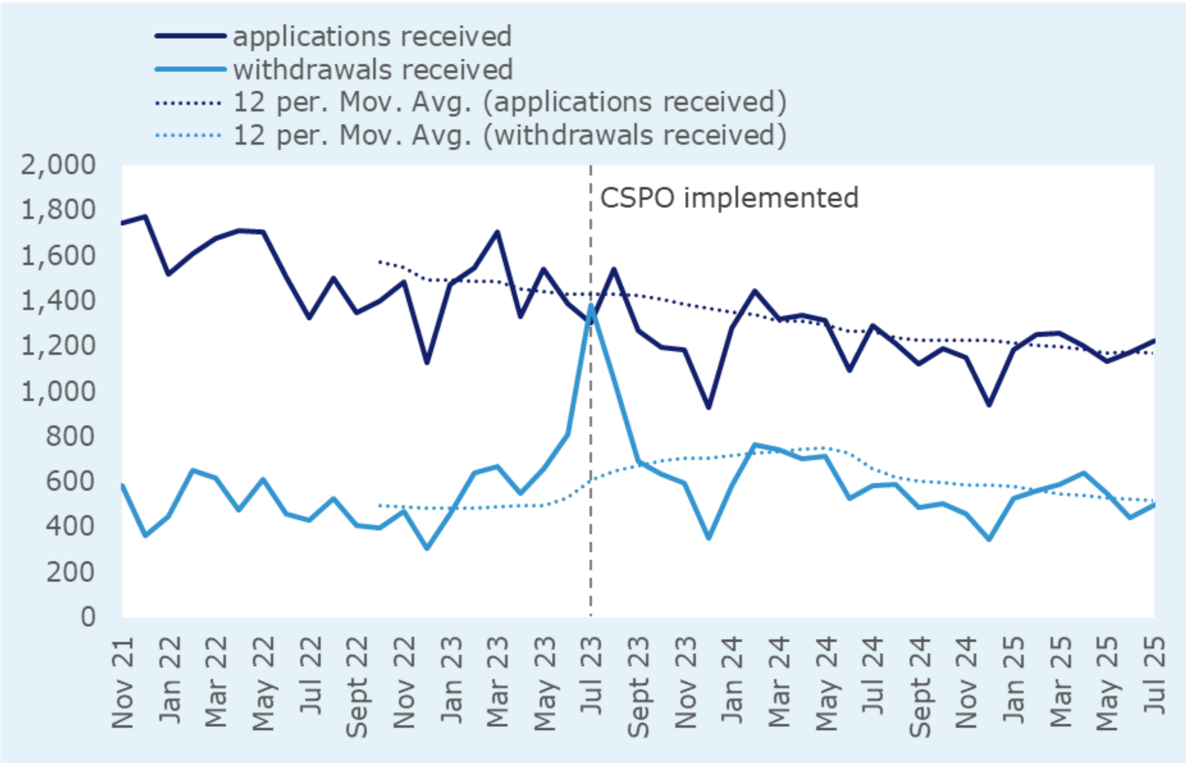
There are no clear impacts of CSPO on child support applications, and an initial increase in withdrawals has now stabilised.

The numbers of child support applications and withdrawals received by Inland Revenue fluctuate from month to month and generally follow similar trends, as shown in Figure 2.

There was no clear impact of CSPO on the number of child support applications received by Inland Revenue. There is a slow decline in applications over time that started before CSPO. Application numbers in July 2023 were 1,305, compared to July 2024 at 1,290 and July 2025 at 1,221.

Child support withdrawals began to increase in the months before CSPO was implemented, peaking at 1,380 in July 2023. This coincided with sole parents on benefit being able to opt-out of their child support arrangements from 1 July 2023 due to the CSPO changes. Withdrawals have gradually returned to levels similar to before CSPO, with 495 withdrawals received in July 2025.

Figure 2: Number of child support applications and withdrawals received by Inland Revenue.



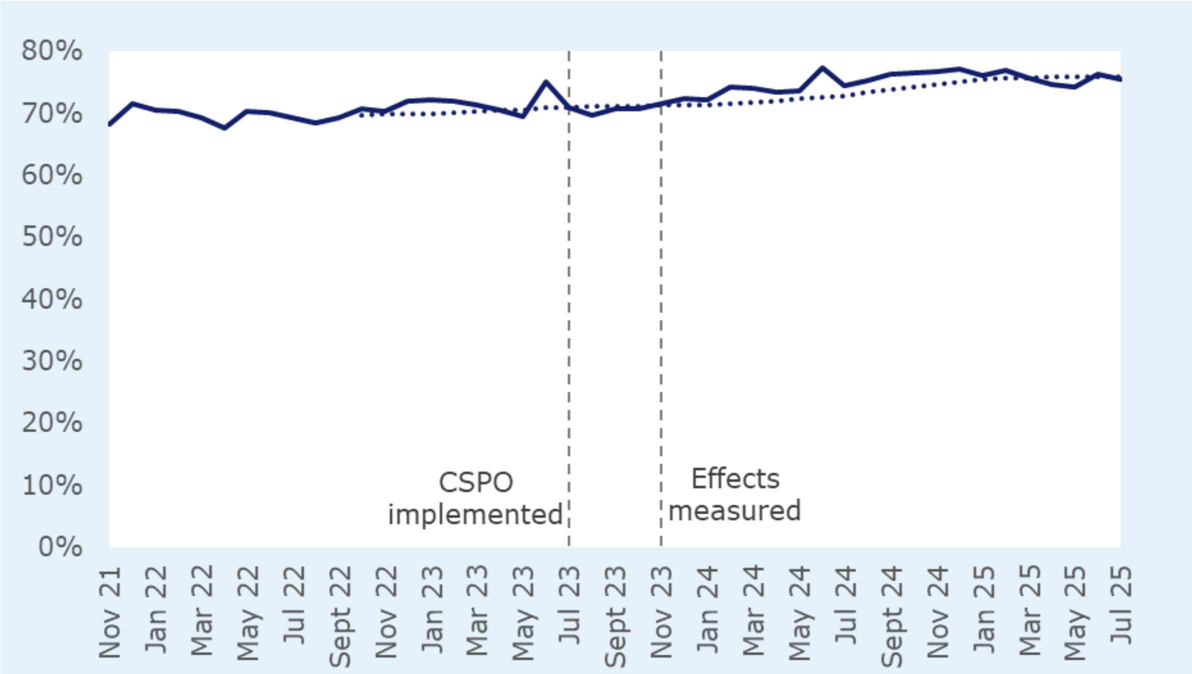
[2] Clients impacted by CSPO in a month are MSD sole parent clients receiving passed-on monthly child support payments for that month.

The percentage of liable parents paying on time started increasing before CSPO changes and continues to increase.

CSPO was not expected to make a large difference in the percentage of liable parents paying on time because child support is able to be paid by automatic deduction from salary and wage income for liable parents new to the child support scheme (implemented in October 2021), or by a redirection of the liable parents' benefit.

There has been a steady increase in percentage of liable parents paying child support on time. In July 2023, 70.96% of liable parents paid child support to Inland Revenue on time, rising to 74.33% in July 2024 and 75.40% in July 2025.

Figure 3 Percentage of liable parents making child support payments through Inland Revenue on time.



Use of Temporary Additional Support for child support costs

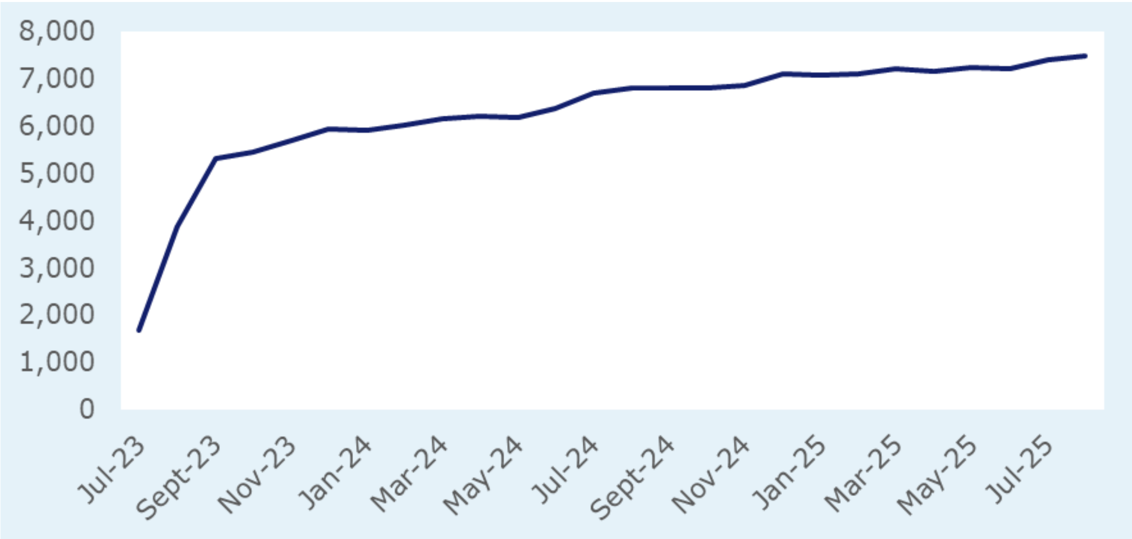
Temporary Additional Support (TAS) continues to be accessed by liable parents in making child support payments.

Part of the CSPO changes was to include child support payments as allowable costs for TAS purposes. This change is to support liable parents paying child support on time.

As expected, there was a sharp increase in liable parents receiving TAS to pay child support from the policy introduction in July 2023. However, from 2024 the increase in liable parents receiving TAS for child support costs has been more gradual.

Figure 4 shows the number of people receiving a TAS amount specifically for child support costs as at the end of each month.

Figure 4: Number of people receiving TAS for child support costs.[3]



As at August 2025, most liable parents claiming TAS for child support costs were European or Māori (53.43% and 51.27% respectively)[4], male (67.71%), receiving a main benefit (97.65%), and did not have a health condition or disability that MSD was aware of (58.28%)[5].

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[3] Methodology used for reporting has been updated since REP/24/7/602 so numbers may differ.
[4] MSD uses total response ethnicity which means clients can select multiple ethnicities and counts of clients by ethnicity can add to greater than 100%.
[5] This only includes clients who have declared a health condition or disability to MSD because they are receiving a health condition or disability related payment. Therefore, this may be an undercount of the proportion of clients with a health condition or disability.

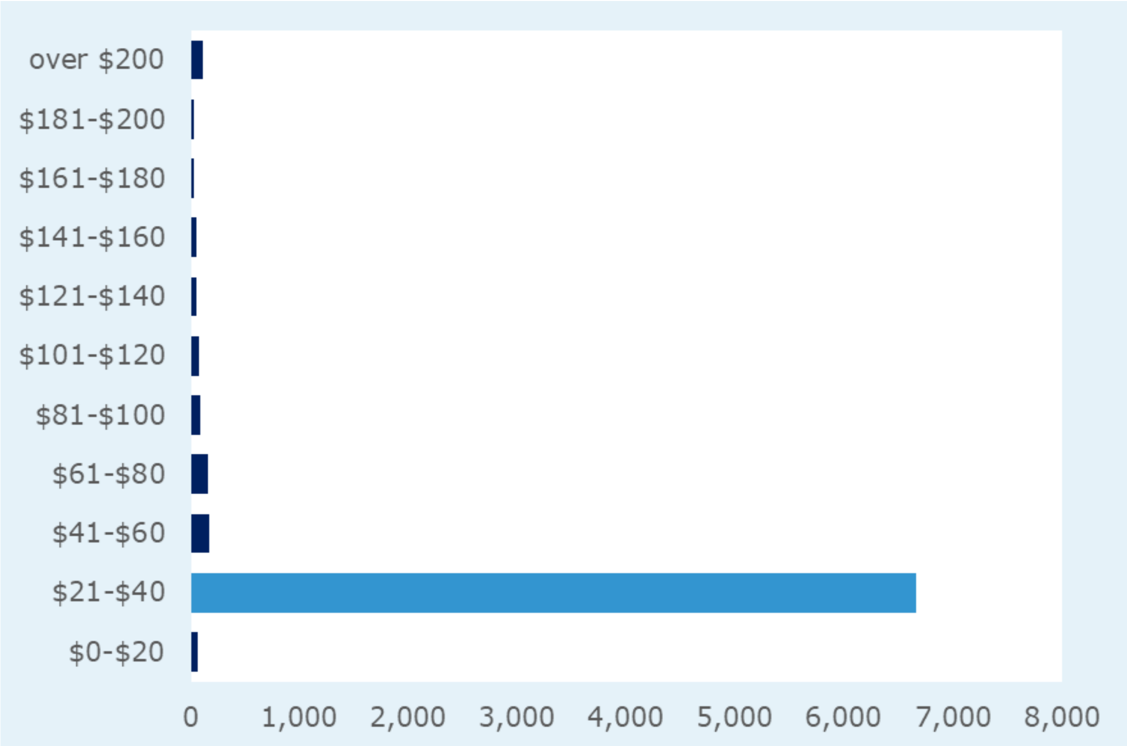
Table 1: Weekly child support costs for liable parents receiving TAS as at August 2025, by ethnicity, gender, health condition or disability, and benefit receipt.

	n	%	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Mean
Ethnicity						
Māori	3,786	51.3%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$30.71
European	3,945	53.4%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$30.65
Pacific Peoples	702	9.5%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$33.97
Asian	174	2.4%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$33.18
MELAA	63	0.8%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$29.11
Other	126	1.7%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$32.32
Gender						
Female	2,391	32.1%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$27.42
Male	5,067	67.7%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$33.33
Gender diverse	15	0.2%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$25.77
Disability						
Has disability	3,105	41.7%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$28.26
No disability	4,365	58.3%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$33.68
Benefit receipt						
On benefit	7,305	97.7%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$30.60
Non-beneficiary	150	2.1%	$22.61	$38.05	$93.90	$70.25
Superannuitant	18	0.3%	$22.57	$22.59	$22.59	$34.14
Total	7,473	100.0%	$22.59	$22.59	$22.61	$31.42

The median weekly child support cost for liable parents receiving TAS was $22.59 as at August 2025. This median was consistent across all sub-groups except for non-beneficiaries, who had a higher median of $38.05 (Table 1). Non-beneficiaries may have higher incomes than those on benefit or Superannuitants, which would increase their child support liability if formula assessed through Inland Revenue.

Figure 5 shows that, as at August 2025, most (6,657 or 89.1%) liable parents receiving TAS for child support had costs that were between $20 and $40 a week. There was a wide range of child support costs, with a small number of liable parents (108 or 1.4%) receiving TAS for child support costs over $200 a week.

Figure 5: Distribution of weekly Child Support costs for parents claiming TAS, as at August 2025.



How have sole parents experienced CSPO?

Sole parent experience appears to depend on interaction between the amount and consistency of child support payments and quality of relationship with liable parent.

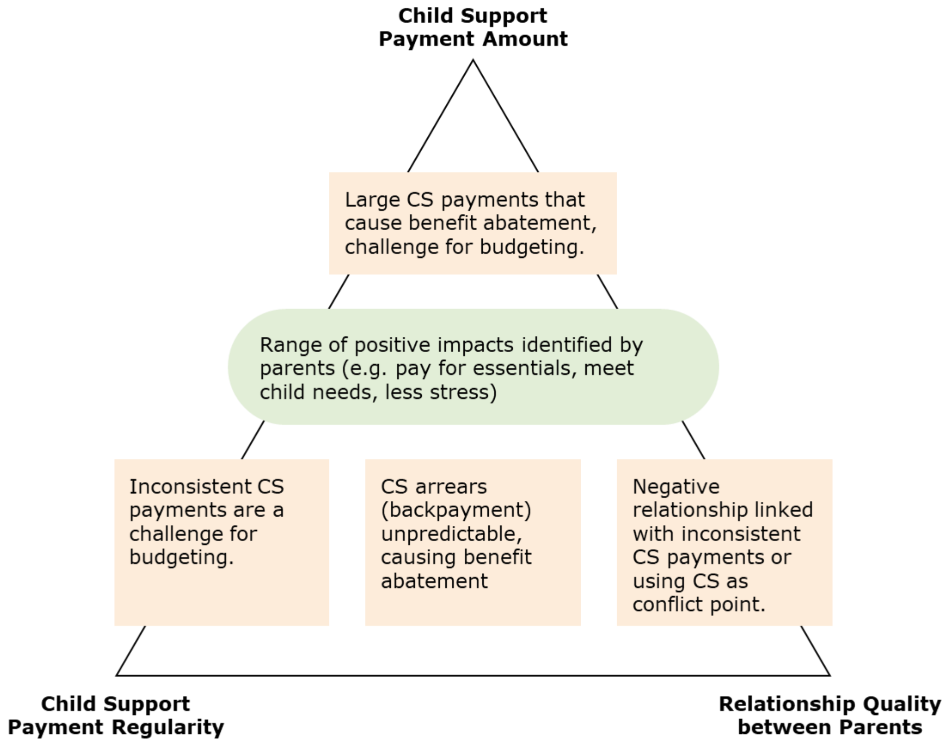
Across the information provided by sole parents in the CSPO survey and in-depth interviews, the interaction of the three factors below appears to be important for how CSPO has been experienced.

Payment amount: the most positive experiences involved child support payments that are high enough to be useful for the sole parent, but below an amount that would cause abatement of main or supplementary benefits.

Consistency of child support: When child support payments were consistent, sole parents described being able to include the child support in their budget and rely on it. If child support was inconsistent, at best sole parents described child support as a bonus when paid. At worst, inconsistent child support and associated arrear child support payments caused major difficulties managing income and outgoings.

Relationship quality with liable parent: When there was an amicable relationship between parents, sole parents were more likely to know payment timing and amount. When the relationship was negative or abusive, child support payments being passed on was described as an avenue for continued conflict or abuse.

The following diagram summarises interaction of these three factors.



Four situations appear to summarise sole parent experiences of CSPO, and sole parents may move between these situations over time.

Four types of situations are identified as a summary of the information provided by sole parents within the survey and interviews. These situation types are related to the three factors of child support amount, child support consistency and quality of relationship with liable parent.

	No abatement	**Abatement**
Consistent Child Support Payments	**Consistent Child Support Payments – no abatement** › Ability to budget using additional income › Low stress, positive impact	**Consistent Child Support Payments – abatement** › Ability to budget using additional income, challenge of manage monthly vs weekly income › Higher stress, mixed impact
Inconsistent Child Support Payments	**Inconsistent Child Support Payments – no abatement** › Can't budget to use additional income › Higher stress, mixed impact	**Inconsistent Child Support Payments – abatement** › Can't budget to use additional income, challenge to manage monthly vs weekly income › Highest stress, Negative impact

Future work will determine number of sole parents impacted by child support inconsistency or fluctuating incomes.

Most sole parents are receiving a modest increase in monthly income due to CSPO[6].

In July 2025, income changes from passed-on child support payments after benefit abatement averaged $62.14 per week, although the median change was $24.50 per week (Table 2). The median was largely similar across sub-groups and has been largely consistent over time.

Of all sole parent clients impacted by CSPO in July 2025, 32.3% received an additional $20 to $40 a week after accounting for any abatement from child support, followed by 21.1% of clients receiving between $0 to $20. 38.7% of sole parent clients received over $40 a week. There were no changes in income for 7.8% of clients, while 0.1% experienced a loss in income from abatement caused by child support payments (Figure 6).

[6] The data in the section includes the impact of monthly child support payments but does not include the impact of any arrear child support payments.

Of the 33 clients who made up the 0.1% experiencing a loss in income in July 2025, the median change was -$0.19 a week. The median monthly amount of child support paid by the respective liable parents for sole parents experiencing a loss in income was the same as that for all sole parents ($98.00).

Table 2: Weekly income increases because of CSPO after abatement as at July 2025, by ethnicity, gender, and health condition/disability.

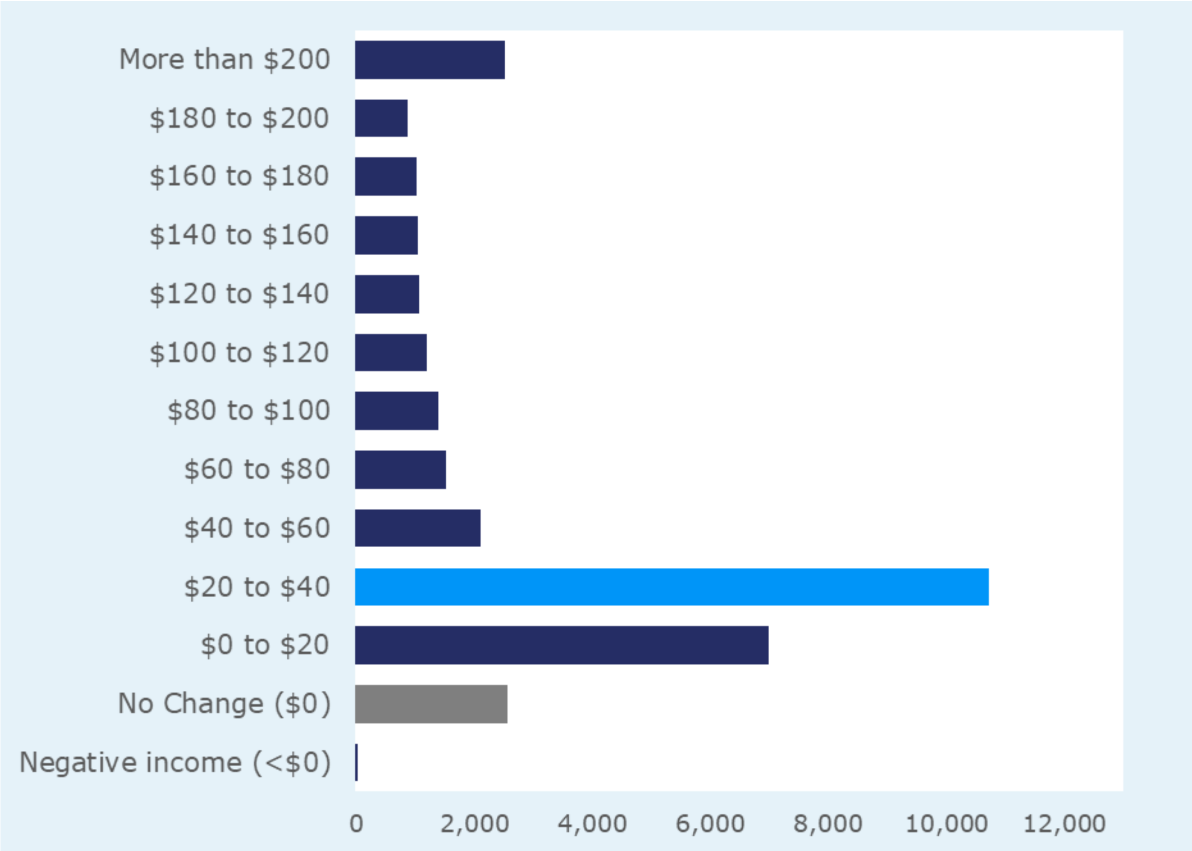
	n	%	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Mean
Ethnicity						
Māori	15,510	46.81%	$13.91	$24.47	$65.72	$53.03
European	16,209	48.92%	$15.24	$24.50	$104.90	$67.07
Pacific Peoples	3690	11.14%	$22.90	$24.50	$109.22	$68.41
Asian	1158	3.49%	$17.15	$24.50	$112.35	$70.87
MELAA	402	1.21%	$23.14	$24.50	$102.45	$65.23
Other	534	1.61%	$18.84	$24.50	$102.03	$68.02
Gender						
Female	29,358	88.60%	$16.30	$24.50	$101.92	$65.76
Male	3,756	11.34%	$12.25	$24.47	$24.50	$33.86
Gender diverse	21	0.06%	$7.34	$12.53	$80.60	$56.78
Health condition / Disability						
Has health condition/disability	5,922	17.87%	$16.95	$24.50	$104.06	$66.76
No health condition/disability	27,213	82.13%	$15.54	$24.50	$90.13	$61.13
Total	**33,135**	**100.00%**	**$16.16**	**$24.50**	**$93.05**	**$62.14**

Sole parents on a main benefit can earn up to $160 a week before their benefits start to abate. Their benefit is reduced by 30 cents for each $1.00 of weekly income between $160 and $250, and by 70 cents for each $1.00 of weekly income over $250.

For clients impacted by CSPO in July 2025, 82.6% were receiving weekly child support payments less than the $160 abatement threshold, 10.0% received weekly payments between the $160 and $250 thresholds, and 7.3% received weekly payments of more than the $250 abatement threshold.

The average abatement experienced by clients due to child support payments was $16.84 a week when averaged over August 2023 to July 2025. On average, 37.5% of clients impacted by CSPO had their income support payments (including supplementary payments with different abatement rules) abated due to child support payments each month, while 62.5% did not experience any abatement.

Figure 6: Number of clients experiencing income changes because of CSPO after abatement as at July 2025.



Increased income is being used on household essentials and bills, to reduce hardship and debt, and support social engagement and school activities.

Sole parents receiving an increase in income from child support payments described a range of uses of this income. Many sole parents mentioned purchasing essential items, including food, rent and electricity.

Sole parents also described using child support payments in various ways focused on their children. These included buying clothes, shoes, toys, school uniforms and stationery. Some sole parents used child support payments to support children's engagement and inclusion within social and extracurricular activities such as sports and school trips. One survey participant noted:

> *'The pass on is great I am able to use the money to pay for things that I have had to put on hold such as warrant, rego, kids clothes, shoes, sports fees, overdue power accounts, buy bulk food to restore the cupboards.'*

For older children, some sole parents described the importance of being able to provide some pocket money, allowing children to engage with friends in ways they previously might not have been able to. As one sole parent within an interview said:

> *'It's been amazing for my daughter's mental health just feeling part of social life again as a young teenager … before I really couldn't have afforded to give her $10 …but now I can put $20 aside once a month or fortnight so she can go out with friends.'*

Increased resilience to unexpected or infrequent expenses was also noted. Examples include using small savings for dentist bills or start of school year expenses. Increased financial resilience also meant reduced need for sole parents to seek hardship assistance from MSD, credit services (e.g. payday lenders, Afterpay) or food banks.

A survey participant described the multiple ways additional income was beneficial, including on wellbeing and relationship with liable parent:

> *'The increase in income has made an enormous difference to me and my children. I feel much less financially stretched and stressed. I am able to do things like buy my children's school uniforms, pay for their extracurricular activities, and hold birthday celebrations for them without having to save for months in advance and cutting down on basics like food. I used to skip meals myself when I knew I had some big expenses coming up, such as having to buy school stationery and uniforms at the beginning of the year. I don't have to do that now. I have not needed to use Just Zilch, a free food charity, or get free bread from the Salvation Army since receiving the payments. I still have to budget carefully but I am now able to put aside a little money each week for emergency expenses such as an unexpected dental bill. I feel relaxed in general and also less resentful that my children's father appeared to pay for nothing even though he is on a much higher income than me, while I pay for all the children's expenses. Now that I get his child support payments I feel that he is at least contributing to their care.'*

Some sole parents mentioned using child support payments for transportation or vehicle expenses such as petrol and paying for car insurance. One survey participant said:

> *'It has also empowered us to afford gas to visit our marae for wānanga for the first time ever which has increased our sense of identity and belonging'.*

Sole parents reporting consistent increased income from child support were more likely to also report increased wellbeing for themselves and children.

Sole parents described improvement to their own and their children's wellbeing from increased income through child support payments. Many sole parents felt the increased income had allowed them to better manage day-to-day expenses, reduce their financial stress and improve their overall quality of life. As one survey respondent stated:

> *'I'm better able to provide the necessities for my tamariki. The stress has reduced when I need to pay for bigger things that are needed in my household.'*

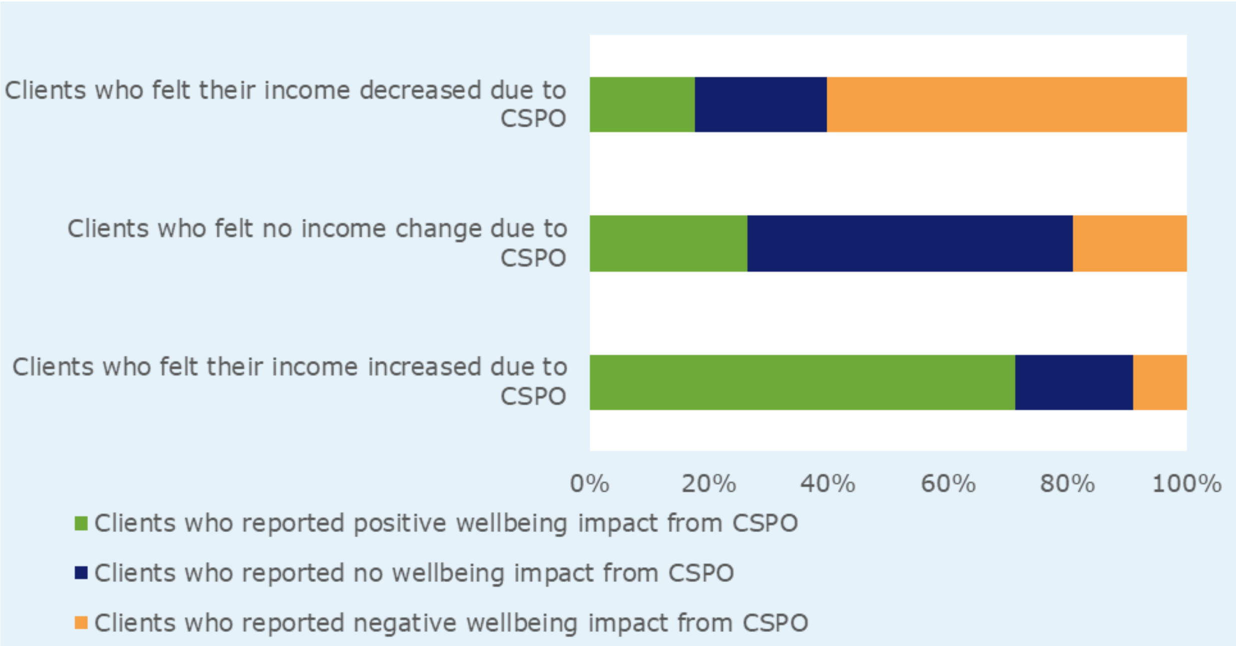
Many sole parents mentioned buying more and better quality food, as well as increased ability to pay for medical appointments and costs. Some sole parents described a renewed sense of freedom, dignity and hope for the future, linked with increased financial resilience. The impact on wellbeing was summarised by one survey participant as:

> *'Child support being passed on has raised the quality of life for me and my children to a huge degree. Not only are we better physically but I feel much more emotionally positive.'*

Some sole parents also noticed positive changes in their children's wellbeing, including greater confidence, inclusion, and participation in social, recreational, and school activities. These improvements were particularly meaningful for sole parents caring for disabled children, who often face additional expenses.

Survey respondents who reported increased income from child support were also more likely to report a positive impact on wellbeing.

Figure 7: CSPO survey responses showing effect of CSPO on increased income and whānau wellbeing.



However, some sole parents reported receiving smaller amounts of child support and described this as effectively no change in income.

Quite a few sole parents within both the survey and interviews also described having a reduction in income. For some, this might be a change in timing of income receipt over a month once child support payments began to be passed on. This effect may feel like a reduction in total income even if across the month overall income is not reduced. This is expanded on in the next section.

Sole parents also report negative impacts on financial stability and wellbeing from benefit abatement and inconsistent child support payments.

Through both the survey and interviews, it was clear that the degree to which positive impacts were experienced by sole parents depended on both the amount of additional income received and, importantly, the consistency of income from child support.

For some sole parents, child support payments cause **abatement of benefit** over the next four or five weeks. This happens when the child support payment causes the sole parent's income to be higher than the abatement threshold for their benefit. This may be due to larger child support payments or even smaller ones if the sole parent's income was already close to the abatement threshold.

When abatement occurs, sole parents describe mixed impacts of the child support. Overall, there is an increase in income over the month from the child support payment. However, the sole parent needs to budget the larger monthly child support payment to cover the subsequent reduction in weekly benefit payments. This can be difficult to manage, especially when the fluctuation is large, i.e. higher child support amounts causing larger abatement over the next weeks. For some parents, this fluctuation in weekly income over the month feels like an income reduction.

As described by one survey respondent:

> *The positive thing is that the lump sum makes it possible for me to pay the big bills once a month, rather than scraping them together. It is harder for me to manage the weekly expenses though - rent is eighty five percent of my … payment … I am left in deficit each week.*

One sole parent interviewed described the impacts of weekly reduction in benefit payments:

> *I definitely have to buy cheaper less healthier meals from the supermarket to stretch the money further…my car goes right down to empty, just trying to get the kids to school and stuff like that. I am not running the heater as much as we'd like to keep warm at home and yeah, just not really being able to give my kids the childhood that they deserve because of financial restriction. Like going to the swimming pool or birthday parties, they might seem like small things but they take money… So I can't say that I'm not getting child support or there's no support there, but it is hard to budget a monthly amount…all of that pressure on me is hard.*

Besides budgeting challenges when child support payments cause abatement, negative impacts seem particularly related to **inconsistent child support payments**.

In instances of inconsistent child support payment, debt is generated for liable parents who do not pay the full child support amount by the due date. Sole parents do not receive the full payment on the expected date and also receive **arrear payments** at some point. The arrear payments come through whenever the liable parent makes a payment or Inland Revenue makes an automatic deduction towards paying off the debt.

Sole parents do not know when these payments may come through or how much they might be. When faced with inconsistent child support payments, sole parents cannot budget for any child support that will be received at the end of the month, nor can they budget for when arrear payments may be received during the month.

For sole parents receiving smaller child support amounts monthly as well as through arrears, the inconsistency in child support is manageable as the overall financial impact is low. Sole parents described not budgeting for receiving child support payments given their unreliability and viewing them as a bonus if paid.

For sole parents expecting child support payments of bigger and more useful amounts, not receiving that payment in a month can have larger impacts. Any outgoing payments that rely on the child support being paid are affected – these could include utility bills, children’s activity fees, grocery budgets, etc. Negative impacts might include going into debt or bill arrears, needing to access hardship support or going without essential items.

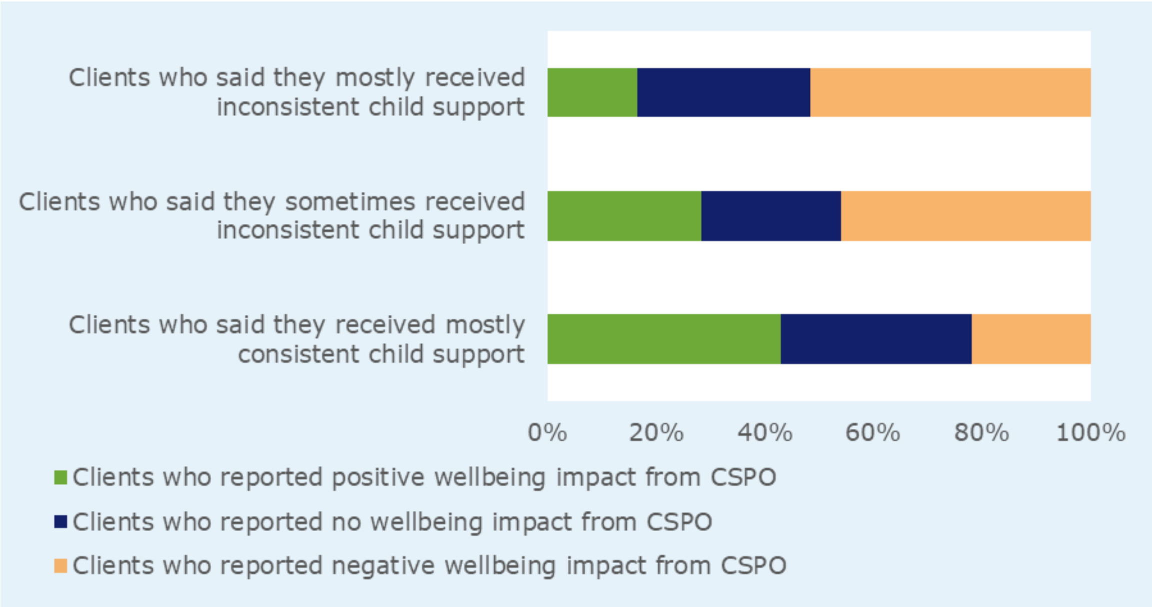
Further, if child support arrears are paid in larger lump sums, this may cause abatement of subsequent weekly benefit payments. As arrears are unexpected, this abatement can be harder to manage than abatement caused by the expected monthly child support payment. The bigger child support lump sums can also cause much larger abatement or even cessation of benefit for the following 4-5 weeks. Sole parents describe high levels of stress in these situations.

> *'I know now as I had to endure the pain off ex-partner not paying for a long time then paying which my benefit got cut right down so struggled for five weeks each time as all my bills that were overdue had to be paid. I went without so the kids would eat properly' (survey response).*

> *'Very hard because he can go a long time not paying the full amount then all of a sudden I get a big lump some payment and all my benefit and working for families get cut as it looks like I earn a lot of income' (survey response).*

Figure 8 illustrates the interaction with consistency of child support income with impacts on wellbeing, showing a strong interaction. Survey respondents who said their child support was inconsistent also reported negative whanau wellbeing impact more often than respondents who said their child support was more consistent. Those who said their child support was more consistent also reported positive wellbeing more often.

Figure 8: CSPO Survey Responses showing effect of child support payment consistency with impact on whānau wellbeing.



Negative impacts of inconsistent child support and related arrears with resulting benefit abatement are described as almost opposites of the positive impacts of increased income. Sole parents described needing to go without essential items, getting into debt and needing to access hardship assistance. Impacts on stress, anxiety, relationships with children and liable parents and wellbeing of children were all described as impacts of fluctuating and inadequate income.

Survey responses indicated that some sole parents had at least considered cancelling child support to reduce uncertainty and related stress and to have the surety of consistent benefit payments.

> *'I needed the money but having constant fluctuations and different payment dates made it hard to pay bills on time especially when costs are already high. I chose not to cancel it because I really needed it but it's caused a lot of stress.'*

As noted previously, most (62.5%) sole parents do not experience abatement from monthly child support payments on average. Data on number of sole parents that experience inconsistent payments and arrears is not available at this time.

Consistency of child support is related in part to relationship between parents, with most having limited contact although some sole parents experienced strained or controlling relationships.

As described in the previous section, inconsistency of child support payments can reduce the positive impact of increased income from child support, and at times caused negative impacts. Quite often, sole parents described the relationship with the liable parent as part of the issue with child support inconsistency.

When there is no contact between parents, there is no warning for sole parents that a child support payment will not be made. Related to this, there is no warning that an arrears payment will be made, which may cause weekly benefit payment abatement.

Some sole parents described CSPO as a vehicle for the liable parent to carry on coercive and abusive behaviour. Because the liable parent knew that child support payment or non-payment would now impact the caregiver parent, child support payments can be used as a lever of control even if there is no other form of contact. Some sole parents described cancelling child support to cut any influence from abusive liable parents.

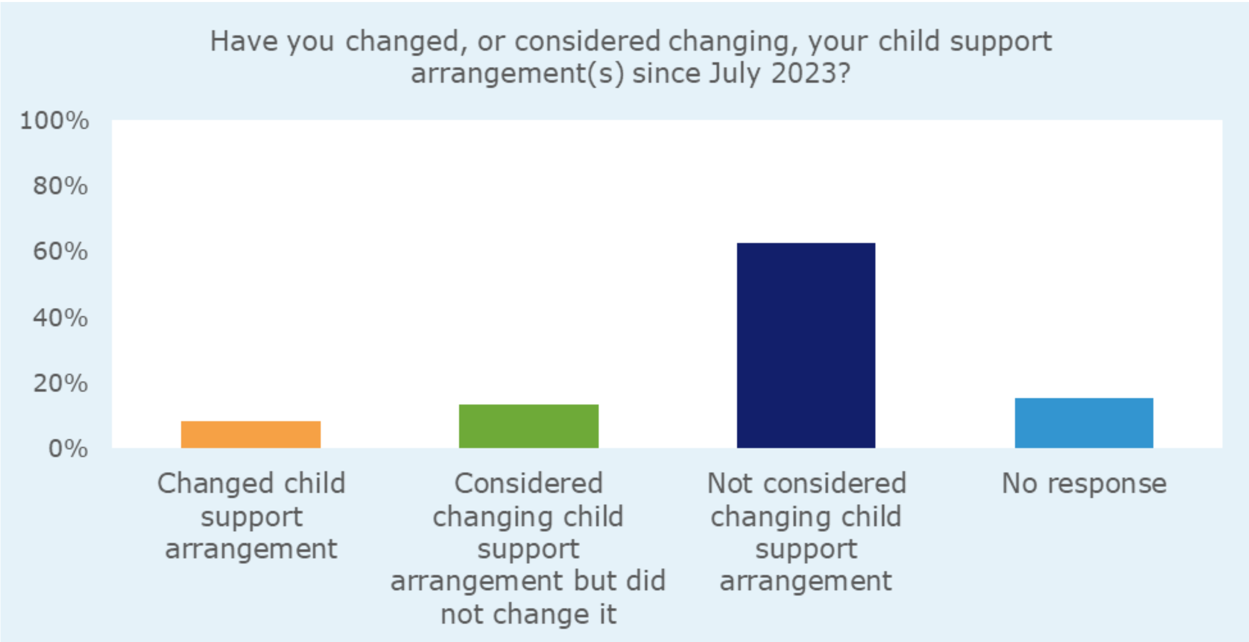
Sole parent experiences of CSPO regarding child support arrangements

Part of the CSPO policy changes were to widen the child support arrangements available to sole parent beneficiaries. The insights below identify themes within sole parents' responses to the CSPO survey and interviews about decisions to change or not change child support arrangements.

Most sole parents have not considered changing child support from formula assessed arrangements through Inland Revenue.

Within the interviews, none of the sole parents had considered changing from formula assessed child support arrangement to a private arrangement. Across the CSPO survey more than half of the respondents had not considered changing child support arrangements. A smaller group of respondents reported having changed their arrangement, while others had considered changing their arrangement but had not done so (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Percentage of CSPO survey respondents who have changed, considered changing or not considered changing child support arrangement since July 2023.



The most common response in the CSPO client survey was that sole parents were not considering changing child support arrangements, noting that the Inland Revenue administered child support worked well for them, and they felt no need to change. There were quite a few comments that sole parents thought liable parents were more likely to pay when followed up by Inland Revenue.

As one survey participant said:

> *'Having IRD collecting it [child support] is the only reason he is paying.'*

The increased options for child support arrangements have allowed some sole parents to move from Inland Revenue administered arrangements. The quality of relationship between parents appears to be a key motivator in that decision.

Quality of relationship between parents is a key factor in deciding which child support arrangement is put in place.

When there is a positive, or at least amicable, relationship some sole parents talked about moving to a private arrangement that suits the circumstances of both parents better. For instance, a few sole parents described reducing the amount of child support paid to recognise in-kind supports provided or financial circumstances of liable parent.

Some sole parents felt that a private arrangement allowed for less stress in the relationship, by putting in place arrangements that the liable parent was better able, or at least willing, to pay. For some this increased the consistency of child support received. For others, this might even involve cancelling child support altogether for the benefit of relationships. As described by one survey participants:

> *'My ex-husband is much more agreeable and seems happier now he doesn't have to pay child support … makes coparenting way easier for both of us and the kids don't suffer.'*

When the relationship between parents is non-existent, or doesn't allow for agreement between parents, some survey respondents described cancelling child support altogether, so as to avoid having to think about liable parent contribution. A more common response, however, was to stay with Inland Revenue administered formula-assessed child support, so that Inland Revenue are the ones determining the amount to be paid and following up with the liable parent.

> *'I have no contact with the father of my son so easiest for IRD to work it out and deal with it' (survey participant).*

Where an abusive relationship was described, most sole parents opted for formula assessed child support through Inland Revenue. However, some sole parents talked about cancelling child support because payments were seen as a form of indirect communication or relationship that was unwanted.

A few sole parents also described pressure from liable parents to cancel child support now this was an option, for the benefit of the liable parent.

> *'I received threats from the paying parent because he never wanted to contribute. So I cancelled it' (survey participant).*

Conclusion

Child Support Pass on was implemented from July 2022, with the objectives of treating sole parents more fairly and minimise the creation of new inequities, increase the adequacy of financial resources for sole parents to support children, reduce the number of children in poverty, and reduce barriers for liable parents to pay child support.

This report provides interim insights on the experiences described by sole parents receiving passed on child support.

The interim insights presented in this report suggest that the policy objectives and intended benefits of CSPO are being met, in line with expectations described in Cabinet papers related to the policy (CBC-22-SUB-0021). In line with initial modelling of potential impacts of CSPO, most sole parents are receiving an increased income from child support payments with associated positive impacts. There is also a wide range of experiences, positive and negative, described by sole parents across the CSPO client survey and in-depth interviews.

Implementation of CSPO sees the policy interact with wide range of circumstances experienced by sole parents and their children. For example, the number of children in a household, the number of different child support arrangements that may be in place within a household, the involvement of the liable parent and the liable parent situation such as re-partnered, moved overseas or in prison. Some sole parents described both receiving child support and paying child support. Given such a range of circumstances, it makes sense that there are a wide range of experiences of CSPO described by sole parents.

Overall, three factors have been identified that appear to shape the experience sole parents describe of CSPO.

- **Payment amount:** receiving child support payments that are high enough to be useful for the sole parent, but below an amount that would cause abatement of main or supplementary benefits.
- **Consistency of payment:** when payments were consistent, sole parents described being able to include the child support in their budget and rely on it. If child support was inconsistent, at best sole parents described child support as a bonus when they were paid. At worst, inconsistent payments and associated arrears payments caused major difficulties managing income and outgoings.
- **Relationship quality with liable parent:** When there was an amicable relationship between parents, sole parents were more likely to know payment timing and amount. When the relationship was negative or abusive, child support payments being passed on was described as an avenue for continued conflict or abuse.

Having identified factors that contribute to types of experience of CSPO for sole parents, future evaluation activity may look to quantify how many sole parents impacted by CSPO experience the types of impacts identified. A final evaluation report is expected in 2027.