In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Seniors and Associate Minister of Health

Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee

Supporting older people to live well longer

Proposal

1 This paper seeks agreement to publish an Action Plan to implement the Better Later Life Strategy.

2 It complements the paper titled 'Establishing a work programme to improve health outcomes for older people' which was considered by the Cabinet Social Outcomes Committee on 17 September 2025. Together, the proposals in these papers support a coordinated response to improve outcomes for older people.

Relation to government priorities

3 The Better Later Life Action Plan delivers on this Government's priorities of easing the cost-of-living and delivering better public services by taking an all-of-government approach to supporting people to live well longer. We know that when older people are well, they can contribute fully and all of New Zealand benefits.

4 The New Zealand National and New Zealand First Coalition Agreement also commits to improving the lives of seniors. Several commitments have been set out to achieve this, including keeping the age of New Zealand Superannuation at 65, making it easier to build subsidiary dwellings, and upgrading the SuperGold Card to maximise benefits for cardholders. The Action Plan I propose commits to a further ten objectives that will improve the lives of seniors.

Executive Summary

5 New Zealand is a good place for people to grow older. Our policy settings have enabled most older people to age in place, with good access to housing, healthcare and NZ Superannuation. As a result, older people tend to report higher levels of wellbeing than other age groups.

6 Government's Better Later Life Strategy and the previous Action Plan have driven improved outcomes for older people, including through digital literacy training, supporting employment outcomes and creating age-friendly communities.

7 Building on this, and our work to improve health outcomes for older people, there are opportunities to continue supporting older people to live well at home and in their communities through a new Better Later Life Action Plan. I

have appended a draft Action Plan and am seeking Cabinet approval to publish it later this year.

8 The Better Later Life Action Plan has been developed following a stocktake of government services for older people and a gaps analysis. One of the key findings emerging from this work was that the many services available to older people can be fragmented and difficult to navigate. The Action Plan includes actions focused on integrating services and ensuring older people can get the right support in the right place at the right time.

9 The Action Plan has ten objectives that sit under three priority areas; health and care services, cost-of-living and housing. It will drive change for older people by taking an all-of-government response and by supporting people to make good choices so that they can live well longer.

Background

10 Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019-2034 is Government's strategy for our ageing population. Its vision is for older New Zealanders to lead valued, connected and fulfilling lives.

11 The Better Later Life Strategy and Action Plan is one of the key ways I deliver for the 900,000 older New Zealanders I represent in my Seniors portfolio. This is not about packaging up work that is already underway, it is about how we work together to deliver improved outcomes for older New Zealanders.

12 Currently, we have some good services but they can be ad hoc and we could do more to connect older people with the range of supports available to them. The Action Plan looks at how we can shift towards providing an all-of-government response for older people that allows people to get the right support in the right place at the right time.

13 For many older New Zealanders the Strategy's vision is already a reality. On average, people are living for longer and are healthier than in the past. Older people contribute significantly to society, communities, the economy and their families. They do this through paid and unpaid work, volunteering, as carers and through tax contributions and consumer spending.

14 Some of our communities and government services are well set up and adapting to their ageing population, and many older people are getting the support they need. However, some older people need more support, including with the cost-of-living, housing or even just finding the services and supports available to them. Improving the ways we support older people will ensure they can continue contributing fully to their families and communities. We know that when older people are at their best, the whole country can benefit from their contributions, and we can embrace the opportunities afforded by an ageing population.

15 On 17 September 2025 the Minister of Health and I presented a paper titled 'Establishing a work programme to improve health outcomes for older people' to this committee. That paper outlined the following strategic objectives:

- Older people are supported to live well at home and in their communities.
- Older people receive care that is timely, integrated, and meets their health needs.
- The aged care system is sustainable and responsive, and meets demand.

16 These strategic objectives align with the five key areas for action identified in the Better Later Life Strategy.[1] I am proposing a new Action Plan to further deliver on these strategic objectives and areas for action. Doing this will help to support older people to live well longer.

This Government has already taken steps to improve the lives of older New Zealanders

17 One of our priorities this term is improving the lives of seniors. The New Zealand National Party and New Zealand First Coalition Agreement made several commitments to older people and we have made good progress towards some of those commitments.

Better Later Life has delivered positive change for older people

18 To date, the Better Later Life Strategy and first Action Plan have delivered targeted programmes for older New Zealanders. This includes the implementation of a Senior Enterprise programme to support potential business owners and Digital Literacy Training to improve essential digital skills for more than 5,000 older people.

19 Better Later Life has also delivered better information about older people and their wellbeing, to inform future action. This includes analysis conducted by the Ministries of Social Development, Health and the Social Investment Agency on older people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage in later life. The analysis looked at how disadvantage can accumulate across the life course and can result in poor outcomes for individuals and pressure on government services.

20 I acknowledge what the previous Action Plan has achieved. However, I have identified areas for improvement. The previous Action Plan had a long list of actions, with some not achieving change at the desired scale. The actions were also narrowly focused and did not take a wider system view. Many of the actions were small, targeted, and led out of the Office for Seniors. For this next Action Plan, I have prioritised a shorter set of actions that will achieve greater impact by delivering an all-of-government, system response.

[1] The key areas for action are acheiving financial security and economic participation, promoting healthy ageing and improving access to services, creating diverse housing choices and options, enhancing opportunities for participation and social connection and making environments accessible.

A stocktake of services for older people and gaps analysis has informed the development of the next Action Plan

21 I commissioned a stocktake and a gaps analysis of existing government services for older people. This identified government supports available to older people at a point in time, as well as the gaps and pressures on services. The work was completed in late 2024 and has informed development of my priorities under the new Better Later Life Action Plan. The stocktake is included as Appendix 2.

22 The stocktake and gaps analysis highlighted the following:

- There is growing demand on government's services for older people. We can see this in the income support, housing and health systems. Demand is expected to continue increasing in line with population ageing. In addition, more people are presenting with complex needs. For example, at least 15 percent of older people are experiencing multiple disadvantage across the areas of income, health, housing, social connection and access.

- There is a need to develop preventative supports and to address the social determinants of health to enable older people to live well. Development of preventative supports may reduce costs on downstream services and prevent later support needs from deepening.

- Overall, services need to be better integrated and coordinated, with more efficient referral pathways and information sharing arrangements across both central and regional providers.

- Services can be inaccessible to older people as well as those who support them, and not all older people know what they can access. This was supported by a recent Retirement Commission report, which found barriers for older people accessing income support. The barriers included low awareness, people believing they were ineligible and being uncomfortable dealing with Work and Income or receiving additional government assistance.[2]

- Agencies and service providers themselves are not always aware of the full range of services available to the older people they support. Integrating and coordinating service provision can enable older people to live well by providing opportunities for early intervention. This could also better support older people with high or complex needs which overlap multiple services.

23 The stocktake and gaps analysis have informed the development of priorities, objectives and actions in the Action Plan.

[2] Older People's Voice 2024. Part 2: Income, expenditure and decumulation. Te Ara Ahunga Ora, Retirement Commission.

The Action Plan prioritises activity across three priorities

24 My three priorities are health and care services, cost-of-living and housing.

Health and care services

25 When older people are in good health, both physically and mentally, they can choose how they lead their lives. For most, this means ageing in place for as long as possible and actively participating in their communities.

26 Overall, older New Zealanders are healthier than ever before. Older people tend to report higher levels of subjective wellbeing than other age groups and 96 percent of older people are enrolled with a general practice. This shows that many of our existing systems are delivering well for older people.

27 I have already set out our strategic objectives for improving health outcomes for older people which I am seeking to achieve in the context of the health system.

28 However, as noted in that paper, we also need to address the social determinants of health, such as financial security, social participation and driving people to make good choices. Beyond this, there are opportunities to enable older people to live well through improving preventative care and better integrating and coordinating existing services. This will ensure that older people are able to seamlessly navigate support services.

Cost-of-living

29 Financial security as people age depends on several factors, including participation in paid work, sufficiency of income and levels of savings. We want New Zealanders to be financially prepared for later life. To do this, people need the right settings, as well as the knowledge and skills to manage finances.

30 KiwiSaver is a success story in how government has supported people to prepare for their retirement. Those retiring in 2050 will have had KiwiSaver for almost all their working lives, enabling those who have consistently contributed to build up larger balances and afford a higher standard of living in retirement.

31 We are also seeing increasing numbers of older people working past the age of eligibility for NZ Superannuation. In many ways this is also positive news, with 68 percent working because they want to, according to a Retirement Commission survey.[3] Older workers have valuable skills and can help to address workforce shortages.

32 On top of this, Government is delivering cost-of-living relief for older New Zealanders. As a recent example, through Budget 25 we extended eligibility for the Rates Rebate Scheme, meaning that an additional 66,000 SuperGold

[3] Asset drawdown (decumulation) and paid work profile of Pre- and Post-Retirees, December 2021, He Ara Ahunga Ora, Retirement Commission.

Cardholders can access the scheme. We also changed abatement thresholds and lifted the maximum rebate.

33 Better Later Life aims to help older people make their money go further, by providing tools on the use of KiwiSaver after turning 65, considering upgrades to the SuperGold Card and supporting older people's employment.

Housing

34 Having a secure place to live is fundamental to achieving wellbeing. Most older people prefer to live independently, in a place of their choice that is safe, and connected to families and communities.

35 To enable this, we need a range of housing options for older people. These should be functional, accessible, affordable, dry and warm. We also need to consider the make-up of our housing stock, as more people enter later life renting and needing social housing.

36 We can help to meet older people's demand for housing by exploring a range solutions. The review of social housing will likely form part of the solution, but we also need to explore other options such as the development of co-housing and affordable rent.

I seek Cabinet agreement to publish the appended Action Plan

37 The Action Plan implements Government's Better Later Life Strategy [CAB-19-MIN-0487]. I am seeking Cabinet agreement to publish this Action Plan in November, to further our commitment to older New Zealanders.

38 The Action Plan sets out ten objectives:

- Older people maintain independence and social connection through improved driver licence systems
- Older people have the skills to stay digitally connected
- Older people can access and navigate the services they need, when they need them
- Protect older people from abuse
- Older people are supported to put legal protections in place to protect themselves and their assets
- Older people are supported to make their money go further
- Employment outcomes for older workers are improved
- Banking services and cash are accessible to older people
- Older people gain further benefits from the SuperGold Card

- Older people can access the right housing in the right place.

39 I expect this Action Plan to improve long-term outcomes for older people, and in turn reduce demand on the health system and other services.

40 Work to support seniors spans multiple portfolios. The Action Plan brings together work from across agencies, demonstrating our shared commitment to improving the lives of seniors.

Cost-of-living Implications

41 The updated Action Plan is expected to have a positive impact on the cost-of-living conditions of older New Zealanders, with this being one of three stated priorities.

Financial Implications

42 s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]

Population Implications

43 The older population is diverse, and the experience of later life is not uniform. This can result from systemic disadvantages across the life course or that are specific to later life. The roles and expectations associated with later life can also vary significantly in different communities. Examples of variation within the older population include:

- Older women (especially those who are single) and Māori and Pacific peoples have lower KiwiSaver assets and home-ownership rates on average, and are therefore more likely to rely on NZ Superannuation as their sole or major source of income. Men have, on average, 25 percent more in their KiwiSaver than women, despite men and women contributing at the same rate. Women live for longer than men and on average spend more years living with a health condition or disability;

- Some cultural groups, including many Pacific and Asian communities, have strong preferences for intergenerational living and caring for older family members in the home;

- Although the gap is slowly closing, life expectancy for Māori and Pacific remains significantly lower than other ethnicities, with higher rates of chronic diseases (heart disease, stroke and diabetes), higher rates of hospitalisation and lower rates of accessing healthcare. Māori and Pacific people are more likely to be disabled than other ethnic groups;

- According to the 2023 Household Disability Survey, 35 percent of people aged 65+ are disabled. Almost half of disabled people experienced difficulty in multiple domains and 62 percent reported having at least one unmet care or support need. Disabled people can experience the impacts of ageing earlier and more severely and can have lower life expectancy. In addition, disabled people are financially worse off when reaching later life and therefore less resilient to cost-of-living pressures;

- Older people are increasingly expressing a broader range of gender and sexual identities. This can present challenges in environments that default towards heterosexual, cisgender older people, such as retirement villages and aged care facilities.

Human Rights

44 The proposed Action Plan looks to improve the rights of older people by improving economic and social rights. This is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

Consultation

45 Consultation has been undertaken with the Ministries of Social Development (MSD), Business, Innovation and Employment, Health (MOH), Housing and Urban Development, Transport (MOT), Justice, Pacific People's, Women, Ethnic Communities, the Departments of Internal Affairs and Prime Minister and Cabinet, as well as Health New Zealand, Treasury, Inland Revenue (IR), the New Zealand Transport Agency, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Te Ara Ahunga Ora - Retirement Commission, Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, Te Puni Kōkiri, Kāinga Ora and the Accident Compensation Corporation.

46 Agencies are supportive of the Action Plan. Some agencies, including MSD and MOH, noted that the scale at which actions can be delivered will depend on resource allocation and prioritisation.

Proactive Release

47 I intend to proactively release this paper following the release of the Action Plan. At this stage, the Action Plan will be published in November, which falls outside the 30-day period for proactive release.

Recommendations

1 **note** that the recommendations in this paper complement those in the paper, titled 'Establishing a work programme to improve health outcomes for older people', presented by myself and the Minister of Health to this committee on 17 September 2025

2 **note** that Government has a Better Later Life Strategy, focused on meeting the needs of an ageing population

3 **note** that Government is already delivering for older people as part of our Coalition Agreement Commitments

4 **note** that to date Better Later Life has had positive outcomes for older people, but there is room for improvement

5 **note** that the next Better Later Life Action Plan will deliver ten objectives under three priority areas; health and care services, cost-of-living and housing

6 **agree** to the release of the attached Better Later Life Action Plan 2025-2028, in late November or early December 2025

7 **authorise** the Minister for Seniors to make minor editorial, design and formatting changes to the Action Plan as required prior to its public release

Hon Casey Costello

Minister for Seniors, Associate Minister of Health