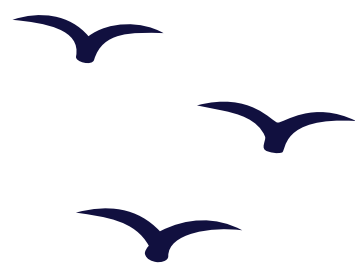


2050

A Generational Plan *for children*

Building the Aotearoa
New Zealand our
children deserve





2050

A Generational Plan for children

A Generational Plan: starting the conversation

We believe Aotearoa New Zealand needs a Generational Plan: a long-term commitment to build a country, by 2050, where every child thrives.

This reflects a simple belief: the challenges children face are complex, interconnected and often intergenerational. If we want different outcomes, we need a different way of thinking, one that looks beyond election cycles and aligns Aotearoa New Zealand around a shared, long-term commitment to children.

This Generational Plan would ultimately have to emerge from a national conversation. For the moment, and as a basis for discussion, this document offers a sketch of what that plan could look like: the proverbial 'Starter for 10'.



The country our children deserve

The children born today will be adults in 2050. The decisions we make now will shape the childhoods they experience, the lives they lead, the families they raise, and the country they pass on to the next generation.

The world-leading Dunedin Study confirms the importance of early childhood (first 2,000 days) for shaping a person's health and wellbeing for their entire life. So we should ensure every child grows up safe, healthy, loved and connected, with the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their start in life.

Yet too many children grow up carrying burdens they should never have to bear. In 2025, UNICEF ranked New Zealand 32nd out of 36 wealthy nations when it comes to young people's wellbeing. One in seven children experiences material hardship, more young people die by suicide than in almost any other developed country, and their school results have fallen for 20 years.

Children experience family violence, poor housing, mental distress, worsened health and disconnection from culture and community. The whole country is poorer as a result.

These challenges are deeply connected and often passed on from generation to generation. Yet our responses as a country are too often siloed and constrained by short-term political cycles. We are trying to solve generational challenges on three-year timeframes.

The need for a plan that delivers

The issue is not a lack of knowledge, expertise or effort. What's missing is a long-term, coordinated approach that brings these efforts together around a shared vision for children.

A Generational Plan would set that shared direction to 2050, aligning the systems that shape children's lives and embedding accountability that endures. It would ensure every key decision is seen through this lens: how will this affect children? That is how, ultimately, we can create the conditions for every young person to thrive and, in doing so, build the Aotearoa New Zealand our children deserve.

The need for a plan that delivers long-term fiscal responsibility

Right now, a child who receives the right support in their early years is far less likely to require costly interventions later through the health system, the justice system, or income support. The evidence is clear: early investment changes lives and reduces future public spending. Yet New Zealand does not measure or record the savings created when early support succeeds, nor the future costs that arise when support comes too late. Those savings are real. Those costs are real. Neither appears in the Government’s financial accounts.

We already have a model for recognising future liabilities. When someone is injured, ACC does not wait for costs to emerge year by year. It estimates the lifetime cost of care from the outset and records that liability on its balance sheet, allowing it to be monitored and managed over time. A Generational Plan for Children could apply the same discipline. Each year, an audited estimate of the future social and fiscal costs associated with children who are not receiving the support they need today could be published. When those costs are made visible, early intervention is seen for what it truly is: not simply a social investment, but a fiscally responsible one.

The ‘Starter for 10’

This ‘Starter for 10’ sets out what such an approach could look like. It is not a finished Generational Plan. Rather, it is a starting point, a suggested framework, a prompt for a national conversation about what that plan should include. Its creation has been informed by children, young people, families and whānau, kaimahi, Māori leaders, businesses, social service providers, government agencies, Pacific communities, educational institutions and philanthropists.

For now, the Starter for 10 focusses on government policies, because we can all as citizens make demands of politicians. A complete Generational Plan would have actions for many groups, but those would have to be agreed by the groups themselves.

Where next?

Having had strong initial support for the concept, Barnardos is seeking the government’s commitment to do four things;

- 1. **Back the vision:** Commit to building an Aotearoa New Zealand where, by 2050, every child can thrive, regardless of where they start in life.
- 2. **Commit your support to the development of a Generational Plan:** Commit to a whole-of-government approach and provide an in-principle commitment to formally mandate the likes of Barnardos Aotearoa to work with children and young people, families and whānau, iwi, communities, business, philanthropy, NGOs and government to develop a Generational Plan for children.
- 3. **Unite us:** In 2027, agree the newly developed Generational Plan and bind future governments to deliver on it.
- 4. **Make it happen:** Progress the Generational Plan actions to create the Aotearoa New Zealand our children deserve.

The plan would be owned by New Zealanders, with a board of stakeholders overseeing its development, raising public awareness, and maintaining long-term accountability among those responsible for delivering it.

Aotearoa New Zealand already possesses passionate communities, courageous leaders, and people who care deeply about children. What we need now is the commitment to work together, and the discipline to keep children at the heart of our decisions for generations.

2050 starts with the children of today. Together, we can make a promise to them: that we will build the Aotearoa New Zealand all children deserve.

The ‘Starter for 10’

Building the Aotearoa New Zealand our children deserve

Our vision

Imagine an Aotearoa New Zealand where all children thrive because we’ve built a country that puts children first.

By 2050:

- ◆ **Every child is safe, loved, and valued**
with their basic needs met and their potential fully supported, no matter where they start in life.
- ◆ **Every child has a strong sense of belonging,**
connected to whānau, culture and whenua, with their identity celebrated, their voice heard and their mana upheld.
- ◆ **Every child grows up with whānau and communities**
who have the agency, resources, and support to shape the decisions and systems that affect them.
- ◆ **Every child can be happy, have fun, and feel connected**
with friends they trust, opportunities to learn, play and explore their interests, and support for their mental health and wellbeing.
- ◆ **Every child is surrounded by systems that work together,**
investing early, preventing harm, and thinking long-term, so today’s children and the children they raise can flourish.
- ◆ **Every child is treasured as taonga**
by whānau, by communities who share the joy and responsibility of raising them, and by a nation that takes collective pride and responsibility for their wellbeing and future.

**This is the Aotearoa New Zealand we’re building with our children.
For our children. For their children. For all of us.**

A shared responsibility

Children do not grow up in isolation. Their lives are shaped by their whānau, their communities, their culture, and the decisions made across every part of their society.

Creating the Aotearoa New Zealand all children deserve is therefore a shared responsibility. Parents and whānau are at the heart of children’s lives, but government, iwi, local councils, businesses, community organisations, educators, health providers and indeed every New Zealander will have a role to play.

The Generational Plan is built on the belief that lasting change happens when we work together, with a shared vision, shared responsibility and shared accountability for the wellbeing of current and future generations.

What success looks like

Our vision is that every child should be safe, loved and valued, with a strong sense of belonging and connection to others. They should have all their material needs met and their health looked after. And they should be learning and developing their full potential. That’s how we will know they’re being supported to thrive.

Based on that vision, we have identified seven key dimensions of thriving that could help describe what success in 2050 looks like for children. These dimensions also reflect an apparent consensus about the factors most important for children’s thriving. The same dimensions were endorsed by the Children’s Commissioner in 2015 and (in large part) by the 2019 Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. In the Generational Plan, each dimension would be supported by one key measure, to ensure focus. But those seven measures would be part of a much wider set of indicators that would allow us to track progress in greater detail, celebrate success, and identify where greater action is needed.

The first dimensions – children being safe, loved, and valued, having a deep sense of belonging and connection and remaining in the care of their own family, whānau or community – are all about young people being cherished and forming strong relationships. The next dimensions – children living in families with sufficient income and housing – track the fulfilment of essential material needs. The final dimension – children learning and developing – is about ensuring young people build up skills, confidence and resilience, and can reach their full potential. The dimensions are all interconnected: progress on one supports progress on the others.

Children should:

Dimension	Measure	2025 baseline	2030	2040	2050
 Be safe, loved and valued	Number of children with a substantiated finding of abuse	11,400	10,000	2,000	<100
 Feel a sense of belonging and connection	Number of children who feel a sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand	78%	80%	90%	100%
 Cared for by their own family, whānau or community	Number of children in the legal custody of the state – Oranga Tamariki	5,500	<4,000	<1,500	<300
 Have their basic material needs met	Number of children living in material hardship	14.3%	12%	6%	1–2%
 Be well-housed	Number of children living in severe housing deprivation	33,000	28,000	10,000	<100
 Be happy and healthy	Number of avoidable hospital admissions for children	75 per 1,000	70 per 1,000	40 per 1,000	10 per 1,000
 Have opportunities to learn	Number of children meeting key educational benchmarks (e.g. in literacy and numeracy but also other areas)	79%	83%	95%	98%

Core principles

The Generational Plan would not be simply a set of actions. It would represent a different way of thinking about how Aotearoa New Zealand delivers a better future for children. We have suggested seven core principles that could guide how we make decisions, invest resources, and work together for children now and for generations to come.

1. Children at the centre of every decision

Decision-makers should have to take into account their impact on children today and on future generations. Children’s wellbeing should be a central measure of how we assess our progress as a nation. A child-centred approach means asking: how will this decision affect children, especially those experiencing the greatest barriers to thriving? This lens should apply across all areas of decision-making, including housing, health, education, the economy, infrastructure and the environment.

2. Long-term thinking beyond electoral cycles

Children’s futures require commitment beyond the three-year political term. The challenges facing children have developed over generations and will take sustained effort to change. A Generational Plan requires a shared national direction, long-term goals, and accountability mechanisms that maintain focus regardless of changes in government.

3. Children and young people’s voices shape the future

Children are not only the future; they are also part of the present. Children and young people have the right to be heard on decisions that affect their lives. Their experiences, ideas and aspirations must meaningfully influence the design, delivery and evaluation of policies, services and systems.

4. Prevention and early investment

The greatest impact comes from supporting whānau before challenges become crises. A Generational Plan prioritises prevention, early support, and timely intervention. It recognises the importance of investing in the first 2,000 days of life (from gestation to age five), as a way to set the right path for children’s later development.

5. Whānau, iwi and community-led solutions

Those closest to children must help shape the solutions. Children thrive when they are connected to strong families, culture and communities. A Generational Plan must uphold tino rangatiratanga by ensuring whānau, iwi, Pacific communities and local leaders have the voice, authority and resources to shape the decisions and approaches that affect children.

6. Support that responds to need

Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive, with support matched to their circumstances. Some children and whānau need universal support, while others face greater barriers and require additional assistance, including those in need of care and protection, those living in material hardship, and those with health and disability vulnerabilities. A Generational Plan recognises that every child should receive what they need to thrive.

7. Kotahitanga: a shared investment

Creating better outcomes for children is everyone’s responsibility. No single organisation, sector or government can create the Aotearoa New Zealand that children deserve. A Generational Plan requires collective action from government, iwi, whānau, communities, business, philanthropy, civil society and individuals.

Together, we must invest in what works, learn from evidence and lived experience, and measure success by what changes for children.

Potential actions and initiatives

Below are some potential actions, initiatives and policies that, following a national conversation, might be included in a Generational Plan. Again, these are just starters for 10 (a set of suggestions), not a blueprint.

Our proposal is for the right coalition of leaders, including young people, to gather in 2027 to develop the Generational Plan (the national conversation) and to present back to Parliament in the same year. Parliament will then debate it, strengthen it, agree a final plan and bind future governments to deliver on it.

Stage 1: Establish the foundations for change (2028–2029)

Purpose: Create the commitment, accountability and early investments needed to shift the system.

1. Put children at the centre of decision-making

- ◆ Introduce child impact assessments for Cabinet papers, Budgets and major laws.
- ◆ Establish a child wellbeing dashboard with measures, targets and annual reporting.
- ◆ Embed meaningful child and youth participation in decisions that affect their lives.

2. Set up accountability mechanisms

- ◆ Ensure the Minister for Children always sits in Cabinet, with responsibility for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand (not only those in state care).
- ◆ Give the Children’s Commissioner enhanced strategic and fiscal powers.
- ◆ Expand the Child Poverty Reduction Act into a Thriving Children Act that requires governments and Parliament to meet targets for lifting young people’s outcomes.
- ◆ Present in the government’s accounts both the ‘liability’ and the ‘savings’.

3. Accelerate progress

- ◆ Start to establish a network of family hubs in the highest-priority communities.
- ◆ Speed up the response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care and fully implement its recommendations.
- ◆ Rapidly escalate the social investment approach (potentially via a Children’s Investment Fund) so as to prioritise prevention and early support.
- ◆ Establish longer term and sustainable funding arrangements and contracts for proven services that are making a difference.

Stage 2: Transform how systems work around children (2030–2040)

Purpose: Move from commitment to transformation by embedding joined-up, preventative, and whānau-centred approaches across Aotearoa.

1. Create the conditions for children to thrive

- ◆ Deliver a First 2,000 Days Guarantee that ensures all parents get high-quality services (such as pre- and post-natal care, equitable access to early learning, and parenting programmes).
- ◆ Create and deliver a plan for ensuring every child has access to core supports (such as secure housing, affordable healthcare and quality learning opportunities).
- ◆ Protect the most vulnerable children by providing a guaranteed response to every Report of Concern, strengthening iwi and community-led responses, and providing housing security to age 25 for care-experienced young people.

2. Transform how systems work together

- ◆ Introduce navigator services and expand the reach of Whānau Ora, to help families access support more readily and in a more tailored way.
- ◆ Expand community-led commissioning of services and local decision-making.
- ◆ Give service providers long-term contracts, with annual CPI adjustments, and implement a workforce development strategy aligned to the Generational Plan.

3. Align wider government decision-making around children

- ◆ Ensure economic policies (including welfare-to-work supports, minimum wage rates and flexible working initiatives) are tailored to the needs of whānau and children.
- ◆ Ensure schools and local councils are funded to provide children with experiences that immerse them in nature, and high-quality parks, sportsgrounds and playgrounds.
- ◆ Strengthen opportunities for children to maintain and celebrate their language, culture and whakapapa.

Stage 3: Realise the vision (2040–2050)

Purpose: Ensure that every child experiences the benefits of long-term change and that Aotearoa sustains its commitment to children for generations to come.

1. Ensure every child facing adversity is supported

- ◆ Continue to deliver on the Generational Plan’s promise for those families experiencing the most complex and multigenerational disadvantage.

2. Realise long-term investments

- ◆ Complete programmes like the building of sufficient private and social housing, which will require investment over multiple decades.

3. Protect the promise for future generations

- ◆ Evaluate progress against the Generational Plan and refresh targets and initiatives to maintain momentum towards the 2050 goals.



Conclusion

The children who will inherit Aotearoa New Zealand in 2050 are already here, and the future they experience will be shaped by the choices we make today.

This Starter for 10 is a call to make a bold generational promise that every child will have the opportunity to thrive. We are calling on the government to back the vision, commit to develop the Generational Plan, unite us and bind future governments to deliver on it, and make it happen.

Building the country our children deserve will require vision, courage, and collective action. But together we can create an Aotearoa where today’s children, and their own children, can thrive.

Glossary of te reo Māori words and phrases

The following te reo Māori words and phrases are used in this document.

Te reo Māori term or phrase	English translation / meaning
Aotearoa	New Zealand; often translated as “land of the long white cloud”.
whānau	Family or extended family; a wider network of close relationships.
kaimahi	Worker, staff member or employee.
iwi	Tribe; a large kinship group.
whenua	Land; also associated with place, identity and belonging.
mana	Authority, dignity, prestige or spiritual power.
taonga	Treasure; something highly valued and cared for.
tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty or the right to make decisions for oneself.
kotahitanga	Unity, togetherness or collective action.
Whānau Ora	Family wellbeing; a whānau-centred approach to supporting families to achieve their aspirations.
whakapapa	Genealogy, lineage and the connections between people, place and identity.



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