

Hon Anne Tolley
Minister for Social Development



**Social Service Providers Aotearoa conference
Speech**

28 October 2016

Speaking points

E nga mana, e nga reo, e te iwi o te motu, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

Can I acknowledge:

- Shane Murdock, SSPA Chair and Brenda Pilott, National Manager, SSPA
- Paul Nixon, Chief Social Worker MSD,
- Murray Edridge, Deputy Chief Executive, Community Investment and Child, Youth and Family
- Sue Mackwell, National Children's Director
- My parliamentary colleagues, Poto Williams and Jacinda Ardern

It looks like you've got an impressive line-up of speakers, from Sean McKinley at the Social Workers' Registration Board, Helen Leahy, who was a member of the Expert Panel who advised me on the overhaul of care and protection, and Len Cook from SUPERU.

Today, I want to give you an overview of what has happened since I spoke at your conference last year. At the time, we had just released the Expert Panel's interim report.

Well, I must say, we've made a lot of progress since then – but there is still a lot of work to do.

At the beginning of April, I released the Expert Panel's final report, and three Cabinet papers which outlined the Government's response. Since then, I have released eight more Cabinet papers as I've made announcements.

I'm sure that many of you will have seen a number of these announcements. I have tried to be as transparent as possible and I recommend you do take the opportunity to read through the material we release with every announcement.

I've also asked MSD to make this information easier to find on their website so that you can go in and find what you're looking for straight away.

You will know as well as I, that the long term outcomes for children and young people in our care system are atrocious.

The Expert Panel found that of a cohort born in the 12 months to June 1991, by age 21 those who had a care placement:

- Almost 90 per cent ended up on a benefit
- Around 25 per cent ended up on a benefit with a child
- Almost 80 per cent do not have NCEA Level 2
- More than 30 per cent had a Youth Justice referral by age 18
- Almost 20 per cent had a custodial sentence
- Almost 40 per cent had a community sentence

The work government has undertaken since then, is about trying to turn these figures around, so that the young people in our care, have the support they need to lead successful lives.

So from April next year we will have a new Ministry and a completely new operating model, no longer simply providing short-term crisis management, but providing a single point of accountability all the way through a young person's life into adulthood and beyond.

The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, will be squarely focused on children and young people in care or at risk of entering care, and will include prevention, intensive intervention, care support services, transition support and a youth justice service aimed at preventing offending and reoffending.

It will also have the ability to directly purchase vital services such as trauma counselling as soon as they are needed by children.

And given that 6 out of ten children in care are Maori, the new Ministry will have a strong focus on improving the lives of Maori children and their families – and indeed all children.

A dedicated work stream will bring together qualified academics, social service providers, iwi and Whanau Ora to enhance existing knowledge and

supports, and to develop new ways of working effectively alongside building strategic partnerships with iwi groups.

Significant legislative changes are currently going through Parliament which will raise the age of state care and protection to a young person's 18th birthday, ensure that children's voices are heard in decisions which affect them, and which will establish an independent youth advocacy service.

The voice of young people is vital if we are to have a system that is truly child-centred. A youth advisory panel, made up of young people with experience of state care, advised me and was integral to the development of the long-term business plan, and will continue to have input as we transform the system.

I've also announced some of the detail of the second piece of legislation that will support this overhaul.

The first part of this is new and amended principles to the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, which will underpin the intensive intervention and care support core services of the new model.

It includes:

- Early intervention to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and address any risk of future harm, to include the voice of the young person in the process and where possible assist parents or guardians to provide a safe, stable home.
- Where a child is removed and cannot be returned to immediate family, they must be placed with a safe, stable and loving family at the earliest opportunity, and the young person's views and needs must be included in the planning process. Stability and continuity is important in the placement decisions and where practicable the young people should be placed with siblings, and consideration given to their links to the community.
- Young people should be placed where they can develop a sense of belonging and attachment, while maintaining personal and cultural identity.
- A set of National Care Standards which set out the rights and needs of children in care, the standard of care they can expect, and standards for caregiver training, monitoring and support, and
- Financial support for caregivers is responsive to the changing needs of children.

I know that you have a number of sessions as part of your conference on the overhaul of New Zealand's care and protection system, including the opportunity to provide input and feedback into New Zealand's first National Care Standards.

It is absolutely vital that we get these care standards right. That means the feedback you provide is invaluable. Many of you will know what good care looks like, and will have an understanding of what works in caregiving homes, and what doesn't.

We're also making sure that young people are involved in this work, and that their voice is central in the development of National Care Standards, as it is with all parts of the new system design.

When we design systems and processes we need to engage with young people about how they want things to work, about what is important to them and how we can help them feel that they're not only included, but central to what we are trying to achieve.

The transformation team will be working with my Youth Advisory Panel, and with other young people in workshops and small group sessions to ensure that our National Care Standards meet their needs and work for them.

We're also creating a right to remain or return to care for young people, up to age 21, with some support provided up to age 25.

As the guardian of young people in care, we can't turn our backs on them when they "age out" of care.

No responsible parent does that. Our children always have a place to come home to and someone to call when they're feeling down or need some advice. I'm still storing furniture for my children, and they're in their 40s – and I'm sure I'm not the only one in this room doing so.

Raising the age of care and support to 21 will provide the stability and security of a loving home as young people take on the challenges of becoming a young adult. It also removes the barriers they currently face to completing their education, going on to further study and moving into the workforce.

This ongoing care will also be monitored against the National Care Standards we are currently designing.

Financial Assistance will be provided to the caregiver with whom the young person is living. The caregiver will provide pastoral care to support the young person to become gradually more independent. It may also include a contribution from the young person, based on any income they may have.

I will be reporting back to Cabinet on the shape of this financial assistance, and how we might phase it in.

Minister Adams and I are also doing some work on the youth justice age, and whether or not we also raise that to include young people up to their 18th birthday. Cabinet is still to make a decision on this, and we will make an announcement once that process is complete.

You will know that this is not a quick fix. It is going to take four to five years of hard work to implement the new model.

But there are some things we can do early that will make a tangible difference for young people in care. National Care Standards, better supporting children and young people at family group conferences and better support and information for caregivers, and increasing the pool of caregivers are some of ways we can do this, and officials are working on the details so we can introduce these early enhancements.

We must keep the needs of children and young people at the centre of everything we do. We can't let their best interest be pushed aside for anything.

This is going to take time, and I appreciate that can be frustrating. There's a huge amount of support for what we are doing and understandably everyone is keen to see it in effect as soon as possible.

But if we are going to get this right for these kids, we have to do it right, and not rush into making changes.

This is the largest overhaul our care and protect system has seen – and we want it to be the last. That means we have to be careful and methodical and make sure each piece of the puzzle is right.

Thank you – I hope that this has been helpful for you. As I said earlier, I recommend you go and read through the material online, and get in touch if you have any questions or feedback.

I understand we have time for some questions now.