



Social Service
Providers
Aotearoa

**Submission to Te Kōmihana Whai Hua
o Aotearoa Productivity Commission
on its interim report:
*A fair chance for all – Breaking the
cycle of persistent disadvantage***

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Contact person for anything relating to this Submission:
Fiona Bawden, Policy & Information Advisor | policy@sspa.org.nz

Introduction & Background

1. Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute feedback on the findings and recommendations in the interim report *A fair chance for all - breaking the cycle of persistent disadvantage*. We have appreciated the opportunities since the Inquiry was launched to engage with Te Kōmihana Whai Hua o Aotearoa The Productivity Commission on this kaupapa of significance for Aotearoa New Zealand's children, rangatahi, whānau, communities and society-at-large.
2. SSPA advocates for better and more equitable socio-economic outcomes for children, rangatahi, and their families and whānau. We champion our members who are community-based social service organisations and their kaimahi, working alongside children, rangatahi, families and whānau every day and over the long-term, through the complexity of multiple and often persistent challenges, and to prevent these from occurring in the first place.
3. SSPA's submission is informed by SSPA members, whose perspectives on the interim report were gathered through an online hui facilitated by SSPA on 20 October 2022. During this hui, a range of SSPA's members discussed the findings and recommendations in the interim report focusing on the nature of persistent disadvantage in Aotearoa New Zealand and the systems that do not meet the needs of people and communities facing persistent disadvantage. SSPA members are, in the course of their daily mahi, focused on efforts to ensure that persistent disadvantage does not continue to be the daily reality for such a significant number of our children, rangatahi, families and whānau. Therefore this focus comes through in the thinking presented in this submission. SSPA's submission sits alongside and complementary to any written submissions/other input that individual SSPA members make through the engagement process.
4. The substantive sections of this submission are found at paragraph 12 onwards. Part 1 sets out what we welcome about the interim report. Part 2 then identifies the areas we would like to see strengthened in the Commission's final report.

About Social Service Providers Aotearoa

5. Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) is a membership-based national peak body, comprised of over 200 community-based social service organisations from around Aotearoa, based in both rural and urban locations.¹ Among our members are kaupapa Māori and Iwi social service organisations, Pacific providers, region-specific and national social service providers. SSPA members work across the full spectrum of community-based social services with a central focus on supporting the positive outcomes of children, rangatahi, families and whānau.
6. SSPA full members are funded by government to deliver social services in our communities every day, with a predominant focus on children, rangatahi, families and whānau. Our affiliate members are organisations that deliver social services for these people, and organisations and individuals who work in areas aligned to the interests of children, rangatahi, whānau or communities.

¹ Find out more about SSPA at www.sspa.org.nz Our strategic plan 2021-23 can be found at https://www.sspa.org.nz/images/SSPA_Strategic_Plan_2021-23_Final_version_for_web.pdf

7. SSPA's vision is that Aotearoa's community-based social services are sustainable, able to make a positive impact every day in our communities, supporting children, rangatahi and whānau to thrive now and into the future. SSPA works to strengthen Aotearoa's social sector through advocacy and engagement, learning and development, relationships and sector leadership.

SSPA's position on this kaupapa

8. SSPA welcomes and supports this Inquiry, and acknowledges the mahi and review of existing research to inform the preliminary findings and recommendations within the interim report on this wide-ranging and complex topic.
9. There is much included in the interim report that SSPA is encouraged by, and we especially welcome that it is up front about the realities of life in Aotearoa New Zealand, as reflected for example in this statement:

*"While many of us are thriving, there are too many in New Zealand who are not. Young people, families and whānau can face multiple disadvantages that hold them back, which can turn into a cycle of persistent or intergenerational disadvantage. People and families face impossible choices every day, just trying to get by."*²

10. This reality is seen first-hand by community-based social services in their mahi alongside children, rangatahi, families and whānau every day across the motu. Placing a concerted and coordinated focus on addressing the underlying drivers that cause and reinforce persistent disadvantage in Aotearoa is particularly important when it comes to tamariki and children. In this case because the state of the wellbeing of tamariki and children affects their lives both now and into the future, and therefore our collective wellbeing. It is also of such importance given the current reality that a significant proportion of Aotearoa's tamariki and children's population are growing up in families and whānau experiencing poverty today.³
11. We are of the view that there is a great deal of value within the interim report. Alongside this, we also believe that the final report needs to reflect a revised and strengthened approach, to present clear and actionable recommendations on the way forward if we are to effectively and urgently address persistent disadvantage in our country. The following sections address the strengths we see in the interim report, and then the areas we call on the Commission to strengthen in its final report.

Part 1: What SSPA welcomes in the interim report

Framing of wellbeing and persistent disadvantage in the interim report

12. SSPA is encouraged by the holistic approach taken by the report (Chapter 2) to disadvantage by not just focusing on one aspect of disadvantage, but considering it as three interrelated domains aligned with the four dimensions of mauri ora. Related to this, SSPA welcomes the framing of the report under He Ara Waiora and in

² Pg 7 of the Productivity Commission interim report – *A fair chance for all*
<https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/InquiryDocs/EISM-Interim/Productivity-Commission-A-fair-chance-for-all-Interim-Report.pdf>

³ See Child Poverty Statistics: Year ended June 2021
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/child-poverty-statistics-year-ended-june-2021/>

particular, the Mauri Ora approach. Taking such a strengths-based approach to wellbeing is consistent with community-based social service approaches that currently seek to address disadvantage and are also grounded in working to build on the inherent strengths that all people and communities have.

Whānau at the centre

13. SSPA welcomes that the interim report clearly calls for reorientation of our systems around the needs of whānau – that whānau aspirations and needs are valued and given primacy, so that their aspirations and needs can be supported and fulfilled. Connected to this, we welcome the focus given in the interim report to highlighting that whānau need to be able to play a key role in community-led framing of monitoring and evaluation of initiatives to support flourishing and address persistent disadvantage, so that identification of what works and/or what doesn't is informed by their perspectives.

Intergenerational lens

14. Another aspect of the interim report that resonates with SSPA is the intergenerational lens on disadvantage and thriving that is included in the report (Chapter 2). This recognises that in some instances, disadvantage or persistent disadvantage is passed from one generation to the next, due to the absence of one or more of the four mana domains of Mauri Ora. Intergenerational wellbeing illustrated through a Te Ao Māori worldview recognises the interconnection of children, rangatahi, whānau and families and their environment to achieving transformation of outcomes, and crucially reflects the sentiments expressed in findings and recommendations such as the report of the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board *Hipokingia ki te Kahu Aroha Hipokingia ki te Katoa*.⁴ As noted by the Ministerial Advisory Board:

“Be watchful, be alert. Watch over this generation of children, watch over that generation of grandchildren. Tend and care for them well, ensure their protection, so they stand as proud individuals, so they stand strong, so they, in time, pass on these skills to their own. They all flourish and prosper, we all flourish and prosper, and so too the world.”⁵

Focus on the causes of persistent disadvantage

15. SSPA welcomes the discussion of the causes of persistent disadvantage (Chapter 4) and that the report highlights the interconnected factors that can compound in people's and whānau lives, resulting in a person or family or whānau group becoming persistently disadvantaged. The list of situations, life experiences and circumstances included in this regard in the interim report (page 20) shows intersectionality at play for many children, rangatahi, families and whānau where persistent disadvantage is part of their reality, and how different aspects of their identity or situation lead to them experiencing overlapping forms of discrimination and/or marginalisation. There is a need to understand and highlight more often the intersectional nature of disadvantage in mahi to address it and support flourishing – and we encourage the

⁴ Report of the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board *Hipokingia ki te Kahu Aroha Hipokingia ki te Katoa* <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-09/SWRB082-OT-Report-FA-ENG-WEB.PDF>

⁵ Pg 5 of Report of the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board *Hipokingia ki te Kahu Aroha Hipokingia ki te Katoa* <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-09/SWRB082-OT-Report-FA-ENG-WEB.PDF>

Commission to emphasise this further in its final report. The interim report evidences data showing this intersectionality: those living with a disability are more likely to experience family poverty, and face barriers to inclusion; Māori and Pacific children more likely to live in poverty, children in rented houses more likely to be in material hardship or low income households. Problems are never in isolation and there is the need to understand and highlight that more often than not, the intersectional nature of disadvantage is present.

Discussion of protective factors

16. Equally valued by SSPA is the discussion presented in the interim report around what can constitute protective factors against persistent disadvantage. As noted in the interim report, these factors include: adequate income, wealth; and housing; health and social connection; knowledge and skills; access to employment; stable families and whānau; and government policies and supports. SSPA would also add to that - access to community-based social services and supports that are available when whānau need them, in ways that work for them.

Barriers contributing to persistent disadvantage

17. SSPA values that the ongoing impacts of the underlying drivers of persistent disadvantage (Chapter 5) - colonisation, structural and institutional racism, power dynamics – are discussed in a report such as this. We see this as one example of work happening across the wider State Sector evidencing that the dialogue has begun to shift when it comes to recognising the systemic issues that must be contended with if we are to meaningfully end kaupapa such as persistent disadvantage in Aotearoa. The acknowledgement of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, structural and institutional racism, power dynamics among other things in this report is important, because it gives us a start point from which to make progress. It is also important, given that these factors and breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi underpin and drive many of the inequities experienced by some of our whānau Māori today, and the stratification of our society. Acknowledging these underlying drivers is part of what enables action to get to a better place as a nation and within our communities. Given the importance of this aspect of the report, in Part 2 below, we call on the Productivity Commission to give this aspect greater prominence in its final report.

Part Two: What SSPA suggests for the final report - Factors to overcome the barriers identified in the interim report, and the system shifts required to achieve an equitable future

18. Much like the causes of persistent disadvantage and the identified barriers limiting mauri ora, the key points SSPA raises for strengthening in the final report are interrelated within the current wider social, economic and political system in preventing and responding to persistent disadvantage. What we outline below have come through strongly as key considerations raised by our members, and based on SSPA's wider insights. On their own each could never be the whole solution, but taken together, we suggest will bring a stronger strengths-based approach and focus regarding the reorientation of current systems around what whānau determine they need to thrive. SSPA calls on the Productivity Commission to incorporate and strengthen the areas we have identified below in its final report.

Strengthen the grounding of the report within Te Tiriti o Waitangi and what this means for tangata whenua and tauwi

19. SSPA would like to see the Productivity Commission strengthen the grounding of the report within Te Tiriti o Waitangi and what this means in the context of bicultural partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand, where Aotearoa New Zealand is a place where tangata whenua and tangata tauwi experience flourishing wellbeing. SSPA calls for the content in the report about colonisation, systemic and institutional racism, discrimination and power dynamics to move to the front of the report. This will make this more accessible as it is currently somewhat buried in the depths of the report, sitting in chapter 5. SSPA sees this content as essential framing for the report and the kaupapa moving forward. These are the factors that have caused and that perpetuate persistent disadvantage for too many tangata whenua involving loss of assets, dispossession, suppression of culture, tikanga, and te reo Māori. SSPA believes that making the start point different is important, so that we understand and address the systemic processes that have led to this point and the structurally perpetuated drivers of inequity.

Stronger focus on tamariki and children

20. For a small, relatively rich nation, a significant proportion of our children's population in Aotearoa are, as part of their families and whānau, living in poverty. Given that this group is not experiencing the basic human rights to which they are entitled, it is much harder for these tamariki and children to experience mauri ora and the full flourishing of a state of wellbeing. The interim reports highlights evidence that children in families and whānau who experience disadvantage during their childhood are more likely to experience persistent disadvantage in adulthood. A child's development and wellbeing is shaped by the environment and the people around them, however, there are factors beyond the control of parents and guardians that lead to inequitable access to the things children need to thrive. A child with disability and tamariki whaikaha is more likely to experience family poverty, and face barriers to inclusion; Māori and Pacific children are more likely to live in poverty based on the most recent official child poverty statistics published by Stats NZ, which are now out-of-date (available for the year ended June 2021).
21. Given the intergenerational lens on disadvantage across the report, it is imperative that there is a stronger focus on tamariki and children. This is something that has come through strongly from SSPA members. The interim report touches on the evidence of the realities of intergenerational disadvantage, the importance of getting a good start in life and the first 1000 days for children. The report briefly explains why children under five are excluded from its analysis (page 34, due to data limitations). However, to address persistent disadvantage in Aotearoa New Zealand and remain true to the values of the Mauri Ora approach to wellbeing as defined within the report, there has to be a stronger focus on tamariki and children in the final report. As part of this, we urge the Commission to include greater consideration of how to approach and measure persistent disadvantage in the childhood landscape, in order to meaningfully effect and track progress amongst this critical part of our country's population.
22. SSPA also suggests that the direct perspectives and voices of children and whānau need to come through more strongly in the final report. Weaving in discussion of the factors that children and rangatahi identify as impacting their wellbeing and ability to

chart their own course and thrive, as well as their hopes and aspirations, would strengthen the report. In this regard, the What Makes a Good Life? consultation with children and rangatahi undertaken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner to inform the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy could provide a helpful basis (both the main report and additional sub-group reports).⁶

23. Equally, for those families and whānau who have experienced persistent disadvantage but who are now thriving or are living in less insecure situations, understanding what worked/enabled the shift will be important. This could be an area for the Productivity Commission to explore in further work on this kaupapa, or that it could recommend the government focus on undertaking to inform the shaping of more effective approaches to supporting mauri ora in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Consistency with New Zealand's international human rights law obligations

24. All children in Aotearoa New Zealand have specific human rights given their status as children, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to which New Zealand is a States Party. Therefore, SSPA recommends that the final report can be strengthened by building in discussion of and reference to the States' obligations under international human rights law and standards, as well as domestic human rights law. In particular, from an international law perspective we suggest the final report reflects and is grounded in:

- a) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- b) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- c) the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

25. Article 25 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷ establishes that everyone has a right to an adequate standard of living to support their health and wellbeing and that of their family. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁸ reinforces this right for everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. We suggest that these particular human rights obligations can provide a helpful framing lens for the final report, to encourage tangible progress towards the realisation of these rights in New Zealand in the outcomes the report drives towards.

26. We further highlight the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁹ as another key international human rights framework that is of relevance to the inquiry and which can be drawn on within the final report. The New Zealand Government has committed to fulfilling the SDGs by 2030, meaning fulfilling the 17 goals which each have specific targets. The final report would be strengthened by looking at specific

⁶ See <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

⁷ See Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁸ See Article 11, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/>

goals such as Goal 1 - no poverty¹⁰ and Goal 10 - reduced inequalities¹¹ and how targets (such as 1.2, 1.B, 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4) relevant to the persistent disadvantage kaupapa could be implemented in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The public management system is one part of a bigger picture of shifts needed

27. SSPA agrees that reforms are needed to the public management system to address persistent disadvantage. However, we see these as only part of the change needed so that all people in Aotearoa New Zealand experience mauri ora. If we are to make significant change that sticks in the long-term, SSPA recognises that there needs to be some fundamental policy shifts that drive this. Again, this is something that has come through strongly from our members, and which we share more on in these next paragraphs.

a) Deeper exploration of the potential of the social sector commissioning work

28. The recently released Social Sector Commissioning Action Plan¹² is a significant development for everyone working across the social sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. It provides a platform to change for the better how social services are commissioned. The Action Plan (endorsed by a Cabinet directive) requires that social sector commissioning now be grounded in a relational approach, and a range of key principles and commitment expectations are set out in the Plan.

29. It is SSPA's view that getting social sector commissioning right is essential, because ultimately it is about the human rights, dignity and flourishing of our children, rangatahi, whānau and communities. It must be about wrapping around and enabling their aspirations now and intergenerationally. Among other things, this needs to include services being genuinely shaped by those who access them, government social sector agencies working better together, more transparent and easy to navigate contracting and procurement processes, equitable and sustainable funding for community-based social services, and compliance systems that add-value for all.

30. The Social Sector Commissioning Action Plan and associated mahi directly reflects and reinforces the values and approach shared in the interim report. Therefore, SSPA asks the Productivity Commission to make a strong statement on the importance of aligning and implementing this work across government social sector agencies as quickly as possible, and reinforce the necessity of a commitment from all social sector government agencies to the Action Plan's implementation. Alongside this, we would be interested if the Productivity Commission would look into the challenges in the current system that may affect how the Social Sector Commissioning Action Plan is implemented, including the public management system accountability settings that are explored in-depth within the report. This would be a useful tool to helping to build understanding of some of the values and assumptions that are inhibiting the public sector's response to eliminating and preventing persistent disadvantage.

¹⁰ SDG Goal 1 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>

¹¹ SDG Goal 10 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>

¹² <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/planning-strategy/social-sector-commissioning/ssc-action-plan-2022.pdf>

b) Call for cross-party consensus on children’s rights and wellbeing

31. Children’s rights and wellbeing should be top of Aotearoa New Zealand’s agenda no matter the elected Government of the day. SSPA welcomes further analysis by the Productivity Commission on an Aotearoa New Zealand-specific wellbeing approach and how it could be embedded across different political ideologies, regardless of the Government of the day, to ensure long-term intergenerational wellbeing for children, rangatahi, families and whānau. Again, this is something that has come through strongly from our members as a priority, and which members have identified could help to address issues such as the short-term approaches that impact their mahi within their communities. Short-termism is not conducive to solving long-term complex issues such as persistent disadvantage, and does not serve the aspirations and outcomes of tamariki and children well, both in the present and for them into the future.
32. As mentioned above in paragraph 28 in relation to social sector commissioning, SSPA cannot stress enough the importance of advancing and upholding the human rights, dignity and flourishing of our children, rangatahi, whānau and communities. This must be about wrapping a collective korowai around them and enabling their aspirations now and intergenerationally. For our Parliament to collectively commit to these issues being above party politics – for example through a cross-party accord committing to prioritising the rights and wellbeing of tamariki and children – would send a strong message about the valuing of tamariki and children as the taonga that they are. It would, SSPA thinks, contribute to driving more concerted and rapid progress for and with tamariki, children and their families and whānau.
33. SSPA calls for cross-party consensus to ensure a long-term approach for children’s rights and wellbeing to eliminate persistent disadvantage. It would be powerful if this idea is put forward by the Productivity Commission as a recommendation in its final report, as a call to action for successive parliaments.

c) Strengthen the wellbeing approach

34. The interim report observes that there remains unfulfilled potential in the wellbeing budget approach. SSPA agrees with this assessment. The interim report also identifies some of the key aspects built into the current wellbeing budget approach which are preventing its full potential. We agree with the Commission that these aspects built into the current budget system are not conducive to solving long term complex issues.
35. In the context of the wellbeing budget and how public money is invested to support flourishing and address disadvantage, we support the statement from Hilary Cottam included in the interim report, drawn from her book *Radical Help: post WWII – systems – holistic reimagining of public services and support systems*: “Our social systems need to be repositioned from being considered as short-term costs to a long-term investment in intergenerational wellbeing and move from the established narrative of “burden” to thinking about this investment as the foundation for

flourishing. We should view support as grounded in human rights, not who “deserves” it, and we should see that addressing inequities ultimately benefits all of us.”¹³

36. We also agree with the observation from Hughes (2022)¹⁴ included in the interim report, who says in relation to Aotearoa New Zealand that “there is an opportunity to consider developing a bi-partisan hybrid approach to wellbeing, by combining the current government’s Wellbeing Budgets with the relevant or strongest parts of the previous government’s social investment approach. More work is needed to develop this idea.”
37. SSPA would like to see the final report reflect a strong recommendation around how the public finance system can be strengthened to be more transparent, enable equitable outcomes for tangata whenua consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, drive investment over the long-term to address persistent disadvantage, and prevent siloed vote appropriations from being a barrier to mauri ora.
38. In the context of addressing persistent disadvantage, the nexus with advancing and upholding the rights of children, so that they can experience wellbeing, also merits greater focus within the public finance system. While an intergenerational lens is key to driving change in this regard, building on our earlier feedback above, we also suggest that the Commission looks into how a children’s rights budgeting approach can provide a key component to strengthen how Aotearoa New Zealand publicly budgets for mauri ora. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment 19 on public budgeting for the realisation of children’s rights (Art.4)¹⁵ sets out a helpful framework in this regard, and we call on the Commission to incorporate this into its final report.

In summary

39. As we continue to work collectively on the kaupapa of addressing persistent disadvantage, SSPA thinks that it is important that we retain hope in the face of such significant challenges in our country. Hope is a key ingredient in making progress and in creating collective change. The mahi being done by community-based social services kaimahi alongside children, rangatahi and whānau in communities and hāpori every day gives SSPA hope for the future. It shows the power of change and what is possible when we work from a strengths-based start point.
40. SSPA sees that a future in which all children, rangatahi, families and whānau experiencing flourishing wellbeing – mauri ora – is possible. Reaching a place where persistent disadvantage no longer exists in Aotearoa New Zealand is achievable, if we engage in some major shifts in policy, systems and culture. This needs to put children and their whānau at the centre. All children, rangatahi and families in Aotearoa New Zealand should be able to chart their own course, and all Iwi, hapu and whānau should be able to experience lives where they can exercise tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake over their own mauri ora.

¹³ Pg 83, Hilary Cottam, Radical Help: post WWII – systems – holistic reimagining of public services and support systems

¹⁴Tim Hughes, Social Investment (in Wellbeing?), Vol.18 No.3 (2022): Policy Quarterly
<https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/article/view/7709/6860>

¹⁵ See <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/838730?ln=en>

41. SSPA values the work of the Productivity Commission in producing this report and we look forward to the findings and recommendations of the final report.