



Social Service  
Providers  
Aotearoa

## **Submission to the Youth Parliament Health Select Committee**

**Inquiry topic: How can we support  
young people to participate in healthy  
and active lifestyles?**

**28 May 2022**

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## Introduction & Background

1. Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into how young people can be supported to participate in healthy and active lifestyles.
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.
3. Our submission contributes to this Inquiry by highlighting the importance of this kaupapa for children, young people, their whānau and communities. We emphasise the essential role that community-based social service organisations make around Aotearoa every day in their communities. There is innovative and transformative work happening within communities by social service providers working alongside families and whānau, and with children and young people to achieve equitable outcomes and holistic wellbeing in a sustainable manner.
4. We note that the issue of the health and wellbeing of Aotearoa's children and young people will soon be considered by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, when New Zealand undergoes its sixth periodic review under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The report prepared by the Children's Rights Alliance to provide a civil society view to inform the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of the situation in New Zealand provides helpful information on health and wellbeing of children and young people, which may be of helpful reference to the Health Select Committee as part of this Inquiry.<sup>1</sup>
5. We further highlight at the outset the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the health and wellbeing – including mental health – of young people around the world, including in Aotearoa.<sup>2</sup> This is an important aspect for the Health Select Committee to consider in its Inquiry, as we believe there will be many ongoing and emerging impacts on youth health and wellbeing in the years to come in Aotearoa. This makes it all the more important that equity is prioritised now in Aotearoa's health and wellbeing systems settings, to drive more equitable outcomes across our child and youth population now and into the future. Such an approach will also help in guarding against youth loneliness and marginalisation, to bolster a more inclusive society for children and rangatahi.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand, *Written input to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting*, 1 March 2022, available at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/608737f129c8f67c2c6932b2/t/6135c8d9ab7cdf3ad6d9a6f0/1630914782170/Childrens+Rights+Alliance+Aoteroa+New+Zealand+Written+Input+into+LOIPR+2020.pdf>. See in particular page 40 onwards.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. see: <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/impact-of-covid-19-on-rangatahi-youth-plan.html>

## Summary of SSPA's position on this kaupapa

6. The background paper for this Inquiry<sup>3</sup> emphasises a wide set of social determinants that need to be addressed to support all young people to live healthy and active lifestyles. SSPA supports the direction set by the background paper and the inclusion of a wide range of social, economic, and physical factors that shape people's health in positive or negative ways.
7. We tautoko the efforts of the 2022 Youth Parliament Health Select Committee in examining the inquiry from a lens of wellbeing, to ensure better lived outcomes can be experienced by Aotearoa's rangatahi and for Māori, Pasifika, rainbow and disabled young people experiencing persistent inequities. We emphasise that these inequities are experienced often as a result of underlying structural and systemic inequities, which are rooted in the ongoing effects of colonisation.
8. The Covid-19 pandemic has and is continuing to exacerbate pre-existing inequities within our communities, with economic and social impacts extending across all dimensions of wellbeing. SSPA believes there is much to learn from the approach Aotearoa New Zealand has taken in the fight against COVID-19 that can be applied to addressing current inequities in youth health and wellbeing, but it will take all of us engaging in a collective effort with collective ownership. This needs to start in communities, iwi, hapū, whānau, with a community-led development approach that sees local solutions being developed, which are enabled and supported by Government, NGOs, private businesses and organisations, including through adequate and sustainable provision of financial and other resources.
9. SSPA's submission also advocates for the Inquiry to be connected into and take account of existing relevant government responses, strategies, obligations and frameworks. We believe that this will help to ensure the inquiry can make recommendations to Government that influence a coordinated and collaborative approach within government, and between government and non-government community-based partners. This includes Aotearoa's duties and obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup> and guided by the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy,<sup>5</sup> given its focus on addressing poverty and a range of critical, system-level challenges for tamariki and rangatahi in Aotearoa.

## About Social Service Providers Aotearoa

10. 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.<sup>6</sup> Among our members are kaupapa Māori and Iwi 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Youth Parliament 2022 Health Committee background paper <https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/youth-parliament-2022/make-a-submission-to-a-youth-parliament-select-committee/inquiry-topic-how-can-we-support-young-people-to-participate-in-healthy-and-active-lifestyles/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>5</sup> <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

<sup>6</sup> Find out more about SSPA at [www.sspa.org.nz](http://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](https://www.sspa.org.nz/images/SSPA_Strategic_Plan_2021-23_Final_version_for_web.pdf)

11. 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.
12. 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 views on how we can support young people to participate in healthy and active lifestyles**

### **Grounding the Inquiry in Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

13. SSPA's view is that this Inquiry needs to meaningfully embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi at the heart of its kaupapa and be grounded in Te Ao Māori approaches.
14. Māori models of health and wellbeing such as Pae Ora, Te Whare Tapa Whā and He Ara Waiora have relevance to the wellbeing of all people in Aotearoa. These concepts don't solve the challenge of achieving wellbeing, but by focussing on shared objectives and by taking a holistic view of health and wellbeing, provide us with powerful tools to ensure wellbeing can be experienced in practice, on all dimensions. SSPA encourages the Select Committee to centre its Inquiry in Te Ao Māori approaches and ensure Te Tiriti o Waitangi will be given practical implementation through its recommendations. Taking such an approach is critical if we are to achieve sustainable change and equitable outcomes for children, rangatahi and their whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

### **Tamariki, rangatahi and whānau centred approach**

15. SSPA advocates for the Inquiry to be child, rangatahi and whānau-centred, to ensure that its provisions will serve children, rangatahi and whānau, and children's rights and wellbeing to the best extent possible. We note here that under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all people below the age of 18 have the rights established in the Convention, to which New Zealand is a States Party.<sup>8</sup> This includes the right to the highest attainable standard of health.<sup>9</sup>
16. In addition to the latest reporting in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Annual Report,<sup>10</sup> we note the Cabinet paper "Delivering on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy: Update on implementation and next steps"<sup>11</sup> which observes that many children and young people are not experiencing a good life, with the paper noting that New Zealand performs poorly in areas such as child poverty, child safety, bullying,

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. see King, P., Cormack, D. & Kōpua, M., Oranga Mokopuna: a tāngata whenua rights-based approach to health and wellbeing, 2017, available at:

[http://www.journal.mai.ac.nz/sites/default/files/MAIJrnl\\_7\\_2\\_King\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.journal.mai.ac.nz/sites/default/files/MAIJrnl_7_2_King_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Article 1, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

<sup>9</sup> Article 24, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy-annual-report-20202021>

<sup>11</sup> Delivering on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy: Update on implementation and next steps

<https://dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-05/delivering-cywb-strategy-update.pdf>

youth suicide and a sense of belonging for rangatahi. The paper again emphasises the significant inequities being experienced by tamariki and rangatahi, and Pasifika children and young people, in relation to their wellbeing. The paper highlights that while progress is being made in areas of disadvantage relating to children and young people, significant system shifts are still needed, so that every child grows up able to thrive.

17. Children and rangatahi themselves have also already been clear that belonging and inclusion, and living in a society free of discrimination, violence and racism is essential to their ability to experience lives where they can enjoy all of their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for tamariki and rangatahi to experience their rights as tangata whenua under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to experience holistic wellbeing and hauora.<sup>12</sup> Children are taonga, and whānau-centred policy and delivery is the way forward for progress on child and whānau wellbeing in Aotearoa, on an intergenerational basis.<sup>13</sup>

### **Building in a strengths-based approach**

18. Social and economic conditions such as a lack of financial wellbeing often permeate into all areas of a person's, family and whānau life, as does disadvantage and inequity when manifested in lived experiences such as: inadequate and unaffordable housing, food insecurity, inadequate benefits, poor mental health systems, lack of qualifications and/or access to stable employment that pays a living wage, access to schooling that meets needs. Experiencing multiple of these kinds of lived experiences reinforces disadvantage and marginalisation, disempowering children, rangatahi and whānau, and leading to circumstances which make it very difficult to experience thriving health and wellbeing.
19. All families and whānau, children and rangatahi start from a position of having strengths. To support children and rangatahi to chart their own course and thrive, whānau-centred support must be available. Holistic support and services that meet their needs are essential, and when necessary need to take trauma-informed approaches to working alongside families and whānau. This includes to deal with trauma from family violence and sexual violence, developmental or behavioural challenges, mental health needs, health needs resulting from the impact of drug and alcohol misuse, and support to strengthen child and parent relationship skills. Such holistic support and services should be driven by what the family and whānau themselves require. This includes ensuring that services and supports are accessible, culturally inclusive and responsive, and take a pro-equity approach.
20. Focussing on a strengths-based approach to understanding what currently works in addressing youth health and wellbeing will help inform recommendations for change, and to identify what mahi, supports and interventions already exist that may be scaled-up and built on in the future. Listening to what children and young people, and their families and whānau say works is essential to inform the strengthening of

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. see: Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>, What Makes a Good Life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing <https://www.childrenandyoungpeople.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>, Our kind of school <https://www.childrenandyoungpeople.org.nz/publications/reports/our-kind-of-school/>

<sup>13</sup> View the SSPA Agenda for change which sets out the transformational change SSPA is advocating for in relation to Aotearoa's social service sector and for children, rangatahi, families and whānau outcomes: [https://www.sspa.org.nz/images/A3\\_Big\\_Ideas\\_final\\_July\\_2020.pdf](https://www.sspa.org.nz/images/A3_Big_Ideas_final_July_2020.pdf)

approaches to supporting thriving health and wellbeing for Aotearoa's youngest generations. Equally, meaningfully taking action on what they identify as the gaps in service provision and what they say would help, is crucial. Local and national systems need to be responsive and flexible to meeting these needs and to continuously improve so that rangatahi health and wellbeing can be appropriately nourished and supported over time.

21. SSPA encourages the Inquiry to include a focus on understanding the influence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children's experiences of disparities and inequitable outcomes in health and wellbeing. Such a focus can helpfully be grounded in the comprehensive body of international research into ACEs, as well as New Zealand-specific emerging evidence about the long-term detrimental impact of ACEs in children's lives.<sup>14</sup>

### **A more interconnected, united approach across government**

22. We urge the Select Committee to make recommendations to Government to take a more joined-up and consistent approach across government agencies to ensure formal measures, definitions, data and analysis relating to youth health and wellbeing is more aligned and joined-up. This should underpin a more coherent government response to youth health and wellbeing, that will in turn support community-based social service organisations who work within their communities assisting children and rangatahi to access resources and support, and to build enduring capabilities to enable thriving lives.

### **Connecting up frameworks and work programmes**

23. It will be mutually reinforcing if the Inquiry's approach to addressing disadvantages and inequities within the kaupapa of youth health and wellbeing aligns with and is connected to existing strategies, priorities, strategic planning and funding decisions across government agencies. This work needs to align with and is not limited to: the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy; Te Aorerekura National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence;<sup>15</sup> The Youth Plan;<sup>16</sup> and the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) legislative reform<sup>17</sup> and health system transformation.

### **Lived experience and views of children and rangatahi**

24. The views of children, rangatahi, families and whānau must be central to this mahi and the approach to growing youth health and wellbeing in our country. It is important to learn directly from children and rangatahi what factors they identify as impacting on their health and wellbeing, and ability to chart their own course and thrive. This includes on all aspects of their health and wellbeing – the complete

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. see the recent research on the prevalence of ACEs in New Zealand, published based on the 2019 NZ Family Violence Study: Fanslow, Janet L, L. Hashemi, P. Gulliver and T. McIntosh, *Adverse childhood experiences in New Zealand and subsequent victimization in adulthood : findings from a population-based study*, Child Abuse & Neglect, 2021, 117: 105067 (<https://library.nzfvc.org.nz/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=7129>) Also see: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *Three principles to improve outcomes for children and families*, 2021, available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/>

<sup>15</sup> Te Aorerekura <https://violencefree.govt.nz/national-strategy/>

<sup>16</sup> The Youth Plan 2020-2022 <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.futureofhealth.govt.nz/publications/the-pae-ora-healthy-futures-bill-factsheet/>

dimensions of Te Whare Tapa Wha, for example. Equally, for those who have experienced challenges but who are now thriving or are living in less insecure situations, understanding what worked/enabled this shift towards a better life experience and future will be important as part of the Inquiry.

25. Self-determination over health outcomes is required for whānau Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and we note that the current health system transformation that is underway is looking to shift the system to be more responsive for Māori, for example through the establishment of the Māori Health Authority. Direct engagement of Māori and with Iwi and hapū is vital so that whānau can chart their own course of aspiration for hauora and oranga. This is also essential to successfully develop policies and programmes of work in youth health and wellbeing that will truly meet the aspirations and equitable outcomes for rangatahi.
26. Working together with and as communities in a collective, community-driven approach is, in SSPA's view essential to making significant progress to achieving youth health and wellbeing now and into the future. Through a national focus, the opportunity exists to make some systemic shifts that result in tangible positive differences in the lives of young people, their families and communities. An overarching aim should be for our communities to have equal opportunity to access the resources, services and capabilities they require in order to thrive, grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and where children and young people feel a true sense of belonging, no matter their identity. All children and young people in Aotearoa have the right to grow up loved, safe, healthy and well, and with hope for a bright future ahead.