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Tēnā koe Arran

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 November 2023, sharing your review and findings on the experiences of children and young people in care accessing primary health services and dental care.

The Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora appreciate work done by the Independent Children's Monitor (Aroturuki Tamariki) on the report. This letter outlines some points in response to the findings made in the review.

We acknowledge the challenges outlined in the review, including high demand on specialist and hospital services and primary care, the lack of information enabling health professionals to identify when children are in the care of Oranga Tamariki (so they can adjust their practice accordingly), workforce shortages, gaps in cultural competency among practitioners, high rates of placement instability, and inadequate data collection and sharing of information between all parties involved.

A number of these challenges identified in your review are not things that can be solved quickly but will require an ongoing programme of work to drive sustained improvement, which health agencies are committed to.

Health agencies are committed to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki, as we know that these children are more likely to have poorer health outcomes and more complex needs than children and young people in the general population. We also recognise that the state has a higher level of responsibility for children in its care.

Health agencies have a key role in supporting these children and young people to access the health services and care that they need. Individual health outcomes also depend on a range of wider factors, such as the environments that children and young people live in, their connection to and relationships with whānau, and the health literacy of those who care for them. For this reason, it is essential that health agencies and

Oranga Tamariki work together to address barriers and improve health outcomes for these children and young people.

Over the past year, we have been working alongside Oranga Tamariki and other children's agencies to progress actions identified in the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan, with a focus on better understanding the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki, and the system performance improvements that are needed to improve primary care and overall health outcomes.

This work has included:

- building our evidence base through the completion of in-depth needs assessments on the primary health needs of children and young people in care, the health needs of young people transitioning from care and youth justice, and mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki – I believe these assessments have been shared with your organisation
- progressing work on designing a new integrated service model to support more responsive health care and timely access for children and young people in care – this approach will be strengths based, and consider the impacts of wider determinants of health, to promote wellbeing
- working to review the gateway assessment, which seeks to identify the health and education needs of children and young people coming into care – this review will identify opportunities to assess the needs of children and young people and create health plans more effectively. This will include opportunities to strengthen the connection between gateway assessments and primary care
- working with KidsHealth to improve health related information and guidance available for social workers and carers supporting children and young people
- working with Oranga Tamariki to explore opportunities to address operational, practical, communication or training impediments for parents or caregivers involved in discharge planning
- establishing a cross-agency group to improve systematic use of data, evidence, and insights between health and Oranga Tamariki – an early outcome of work in this space has been a data match between Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora and Oranga Tamariki to provide better data on the PHO enrolment status of children in care.

There are several further opportunities to address these challenges:

- creating health pathways that are strengths based, responsive to the needs of the care population, and that support integration between health and social supports
- improving identifiability and information sharing between the health system and the Oranga Tamariki system, to support effective health care and ensure that relevant people can access necessary information to meet the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people
- improving data collection to support effective monitoring and sharing of information between systems so that health practitioners, social workers, and caregivers have the right information at the right time

- improving placement stability to support continuity of health care through access to critical interventions for health and disability-related needs and ongoing primary health support
- working with Oranga Tamariki to explore options to improve health service coverage within Youth Justice facilities
- enhancing support for caregivers through improved information and health-related guidance.

Several of the issues you have raised touch on wider challenges in the health system that go beyond this group and will be addressed through broader work in the health system. Areas of change that over time are expected to support improved health outcomes of children and young people involved with Oranga Tamariki include:

- changes to the primary and community care system – acknowledging the current pressures on the system, with a view to ensuring that primary care is easier to access, more integrated, and flexible to meet diverse needs
- changes being made to improve early years and maternity services for children during the first 2,000 days (from conception to age five) – recognising the importance of this period for long-term health outcomes, and that current services often do not meet the needs of all groups or strengthen and support families as well as they could
- work to commence a National Oral Health Equity Programme to achieve equitable oral health outcomes for all children and young people up to 17 years of age
- a range of initiatives to address health workforce challenges, including those identified in the Health Workforce Plan 2023/24 (see <https://www.tewhātuora.govt.nz/publications/health-workforce-plan-202324/>).

We are committed to improving health outcomes for children and young people. The Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand welcome working with Aroturuki Tamariki on this important work.

Nāku noa, nā



Dr Diana Sarfati  
**Director-General of Health**  
**Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora**  
 Date: 23 January 2024



Fepulea'i Margie Apa  
**Chief Executive**  
**Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora**  
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