

Action Plan for Systemic Change in Child Welfare Practices: A Focus on Whānau Māori and Tamariki

Target Audience: Government and Policymakers

The Focus: This advocacy plan seeks to create systemic change in Aotearoa New Zealand's child welfare practices. The primary goal is to ensure whānau receive proactive, culturally grounded support before tamariki are removed from their care. The plan advocates for holistic, whānau- and te ao Māori-centered services, aiming to address the legacy of trauma and empower both whānau and tamariki.

The Kei roto tō tātou rongoā research project findings underpin the advocacy plan. It seeks to transform child welfare's cultural and systemic landscape to better support whānau Māori.

Kei roto tō
tātou rongoā



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Key Issues to Address:

1. Early Whānau Support:

Whānau require timely support before any consideration is given to removing tamariki from their care. Current systems tend to intervene too late once a situation has escalated.

2. Complexity and Punitive

Nature of the System:

The current child welfare system is complex and, too often, dehumanises and punishes whānau rather than supporting them to succeed. It fails to align with Māori values of collective care and whanaungatanga.

3. Access to Resources:

Many whānau lack access to essential services such as housing, mental health care, and financial support—all contributing factors to the uplift of tamariki Māori.

4. Holistic, Culturally Grounded Services:

Whānau need access to services that are not only trauma and violence-informed but also deeply embedded in te ao Māori. Programmes that focus on tāne Māori and Māori parenting practices are crucial in addressing the effects of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

5. Whānau Narratives and Aspirations:

The stories of whānau Māori must be told from their perspectives. Too often, external narratives devalue or misrepresent their experiences and aspirations.

6. Tamariki Voice and Agency:

Tamariki must be given a voice and agency in decisions that affect them. Their well-being and perspectives should be central to any interventions.

Intended Outcomes:

1. Reduction in Uplift of Tamariki Māori:

By ensuring that whānau have access to culturally appropriate and timely support services, the goal is to significantly reduce the number of tamariki being uplifted from Māori homes.

2. Systemic Reform:

A simplified, transparent, and compassionate child welfare system that actively supports whānau, ensuring they can navigate it with dignity and ease. Interactions with the system must be humanised, driven by support rather than punishment.

3. Empowered Whānau and Tamariki:

A system where the voices of both whānau and tamariki are heard and respected, with their aspirations shaping the outcomes of any interventions. Whānau autonomy and collective well-being are prioritised.

4. Increased Access to Resources:

Whānau will have greater access to essential resources, including housing, food security, mental health services, parenting support, and trauma and violence-informed recovery services. These resources will be integrated into a holistic support system addressing the array of underlying issues whānau face.

5. Culturally Appropriate Programmes for Tāne Māori and Parenting:

Development and expansion of programmes that centre te ao Māori perspectives, helping to heal the effects of colonisation, violence, and trauma. These programmes will foster positive relationships within whānau, encouraging whānau-led solutions and collective healing.



What You Can Do ?

1. Advocate for Policy Reform:

Support legislative changes prioritising early, whānau-centred interventions and reducing reliance on child removals.

Push for laws that mandate the provision of holistic, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services designed explicitly for whānau Māori.

2. Increase Access to Whānau Support:

Advocate for providing proactive, accessible support services for whānau, especially in areas such as housing, food security, mental health, addiction, and financial assistance.

Push for laws that mandate the provision of holistic, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services designed explicitly for whānau Māori.

3. Simplify and Humanise the Child Welfare System:

Call for systemic reforms to make the child welfare and legal systems more navigable and compassionate. This includes the introduction of whānau navigators to help families understand their rights and access necessary resources.

Decriminalise hardship, focusing on support and empowerment rather than punitive interventions.

4. Advocate for Resource Allocation:

Push for increased government funding and partnerships with Iwi and Māori organisations to develop and expand Māori-led services, including:

- Parenting programmes that incorporate te ao Māori perspectives.
- Tāne Māori programmes focused on healing trauma, supporting them as caregivers, and promoting positive fatherhood.
- Culturally responsive counselling and therapeutic services.

5. Empower Tamariki and Whānau Voices:

Advocate for the inclusion of tamariki in decision-making processes, ensuring they have a voice in shaping their future.

Support initiatives that centre whānau narratives, allowing whānau Māori to tell their own stories and advocate for their aspirations.

By taking these actions, policy makers and government stakeholders can help create a more equitable and supportive system that uplifts Māori whānau and tamariki, fostering long-term well-being and systemic change.