



# Report

**Date:** 17 February 2022

**Security Level:** IN CONFIDENCE

**To:** Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development and Employment

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## 2021 progress report for *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023*

### Purpose of the report

- 1 This report provides the 2021 annual progress update on *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023 (Mahi Aroha)* to inform your report back to Social Wellbeing Cabinet Committee (SWC) in March 2022. An appended A3 outlines progress on *Mahi Aroha* actions to support your report back. You may wish to table this A3 at SWC.

### Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** that agencies are making progress under the *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023* five-year action plan to improve support for carers
- 2 **note** that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed ongoing challenges for the implementation of *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023*
- 3 **agree** to forward copies of this report onto Ministers of portfolio areas where a commitment was made to support the actions in *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023*, outlined in paragraph 31 of this report.

**Agree / Disagree**

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Policy Manager, Social Sector Policy

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Date

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Hon Carmel Sepuloni  
Minister for Social Development and  
Employment

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Date

## Background

*Mahi Aroha is a five-year action plan being progressed by government agencies and in partnership with the New Zealand Carers Alliance*

- 2 *Mahi Aroha: Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023 (Mahi Aroha)* was launched in December 2019 and is the third five-year Action Plan under the New Zealand Carers Strategy.
- 3 The New Zealand Carers Strategy defines carers as individuals, family, whānau and āiga who provide care for someone close to them who needs help with everyday living due to a disability, health condition, illness or injury.
- 4 *Mahi Aroha* is a cross-agency action plan composed of 17 actions under four focus areas:
  - recognising carers and their contributions
  - navigating available supports and systems
  - supporting carers' wellbeing (including through improvements to financial support)
  - balancing paid work and study.

The Carers Alliance, a consortium of not-for-profit organisations involved in the carer space or supporting carers, is a partner to *Mahi Aroha* and also leads or co-leads seven actions.

- 5 Implementation of *Mahi Aroha* is supported by a cross-agency working group. The Working Group comprises of officials from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), the Ministry of Health (MoH), Te Puni Kokiri (TPK), the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), Oranga Tamariki (OT), and the Ministry of Education (MoE), as well as representation from the Carers' Alliance and Carers New Zealand.

## 2021 progress

*Progress was made towards the Carers Alliance's priorities to make a tangible difference for carers*

- 6 The Carers Alliance has four priority areas within *Mahi Aroha*: respite, continence, flexibility of funding, and financial support for carers. MoH took the following actions within these areas:
  - Working with the Carers Alliance, ACC and other agencies to improve understanding of the current state of respite including messaging for different population groups, especially during COVID-19. This includes the importance of respite; the range of respite services and agencies; and where possible, eligibility, access and flexibility.
  - Surveying district health boards (DHBs) to understand the status of continence services and prioritise issues.
  - Providing funding to support Continence New Zealand in their annual awareness campaign for 2022, which focused on carers.
  - Providing Carers NZ with data for its report on the impacts of continence management on carer stress.
  - Engaging in discussions with Carers NZ about potential models for flexible funding, Individualised Funding, and Carer Support for carers.
- 7 MSD and ACC also share some responsibility for financial support in *Mahi Aroha* and have made progress in this area:
  - ACC began an internal review of policy settings, including the policy settings for financial support for carers.

- MSD commenced initial policy work to consider a carer payment and/or other types of improved financial support for carers as a part of the broader Welfare Overhaul work programme.
- As part of the Budget 2021 package, the Supported Living Payment - Carers benefit increased by \$20 per week on 1 July 2021 and will receive a further increase on 1 April 2022, in addition to being indexed by increases to the net Average Wage growth.

*Other progress was made on Mahi Aroha in 2021*

- 8 Work was progressed across many of the actions within *Mahi Aroha*. Appendix 1 provides a summary of progress that has been made against all of the actions in *Mahi Aroha*. Some of the highlights from 2021 are listed below.
- 9 MSD provided funding of \$99k to Carers NZ to further progress its CareWise programme. This programme supports workplaces to become carer-friendly, giving them access to tools and resources to help them support and retain staff with caring responsibilities. Throughout 2021, Carers NZ engaged with over 3,000 organisations and associated decision-makers to promote CareWise and there are now over 150 employers participating at over 600 sites across Aotearoa.
- 10 Carers NZ has also focused on media, publicity, storytelling, and new development opportunities for CareWise. It has promoted employment vacancies available at participating workplaces for those interested in working at carer-friendly workplaces.
- 11 There has been a priority placed on supporting young carers and ensuring their voices are heard:
  - Carers NZ has re-established the Young Carers Leadership Group (YCLG), with eight members aged 13 to 22. YCLG will direct the work of Young Carers New Zealand, a network of children and young people in caring roles and elevate the voices of young carers so that government agencies can support them better. YCLG had intended to hold its first meeting in 2021, but this has been postponed due to COVID-19.
  - MSD has convened a working group, with representatives from relevant agencies (MoH, MoE, OT, TPK), Carers NZ, and a former young carer to progress policy work on young caring, and to identify what we can do to better support young carers.
- 12 The Office for Seniors leads a Digital Literacy Training for Seniors Programme that is available for older carers. In May 2021, this programme won an International Data Corporation Smart City Asia Pacific award under the Education category. The programme supports older people to navigate digital platforms and associated technology. To increase the programme's reach, and digital inclusion for older people, the Office is working with government agencies and organisations to improve the strategic oversight, coordination and alignment of investment of digital literacy and inclusion initiatives for older people.
- 13 MSD continued work that began in 2020 to understand how carers want to access information related to their caring role. It held two workshops with carers in Auckland and Whangarei, targeting Māori and Pacific carers. This work resulted in the development of an information provision model and a report, which will guide the next phase of this work.
- 14 As of 1 July 2021, the Training Incentive Allowance was reinstated for courses up to degree level. The Training Incentive Allowance helps to cover the costs of study for those on eligible benefits, including Supported Living Payment - Carers.

## **COVID-19 continues to pose challenges for carers, as well as for the implementation of *Mahi Aroha***

### *The resurgence of COVID-19 in 2021 had significant impacts for carers*

- 15 Carers' routines were affected by the resurgence of COVID-19 and subsequent national and regional lockdowns. This included access to respite, travel, mask exemptions, closure of programmes, vaccine mandates and access to food.
- 16 Initially, there were concerns from carers about what kind of travel was permitted. Some carers needed to travel to visit the person they care for. Others used car trips as a way to relax and calm the person they cared for and were worried about being stopped by officials.
- 17 There were also concerns for those with mask exemptions, as carers were worried about the people they cared for being harassed by members of the public when they were out and not wearing a mask. Carers sought assurance that they could prove their mask exemption status and that it would be accepted.
- 18 As the vaccination rollout continued, carers expressed concerns about what it would mean for them, including whether they could refuse unvaccinated support workers access to their house, and if this would affect any government assistance they received.
- 19 Many carers had questions about or difficulties accessing food. They were unsure who to approach for assistance, particularly when they needed food but were unable to obtain a contactless delivery. This could be because they were unable to travel to a supermarket or did not want to go out and potentially expose the person they cared for to COVID-19.

### *During the national lockdown the Mahi Aroha Working Group met weekly to discuss and respond to carers' needs*

- 20 The Carers' Alliance shared the most pressing issues and queries they had heard from carers that week. Often these issues resulted from a lack of or confusing information in the public sphere (e.g., about travel permission) or were matters government had not yet reached consensus on. In between meetings, agencies could follow up on issues raised.
- 21 This led to tangible responses for carers, including the following:
  - Updated information on government websites about travel, and support for Carers NZ providing carers with a letter explaining their need to travel as part of providing care.
  - Communications from government asking the public to be kind and remember that some people legitimately cannot wear face masks.
  - Updated information on government websites about how to access food. This information was also provided directly to Carers NZ to enable it to respond to queries it was receiving.

### *The resource demand on Government agencies' during the COVID-19 response has impacted the implementation of some Mahi Aroha activity*

- 22 While responding to carers' needs during lockdown, the Working Group had to pause the progression of regular *Mahi Aroha* activity. In some instances, individual agency officials were also working on COVID-19 response work so could not progress work on their individual actions. MoH, in particular, has been heavily impacted by work associated with COVID-19.
- 23 Lockdowns and restrictions have affected the delivery of some actions, including data collection for MSD's Youth Health and Wellbeing survey "*Whataboutme*".
- 24 The Office for Seniors had to extend the contract end date for its digital literacy training to accommodate the disruption caused by COVID-19.

## **We will continue to make progress in 2022, but are mindful that COVID-19 may continue to pose challenges**

- 25 Appendix 1 outlines what agencies plan to focus on in 2022 to build on the progress already made.
- 26 In 2022, we will have more data about carers' experiences, and the incidence of young caring. We will have results from *Whataboutme?*, which asks participants how often they miss school to look after others. We have early raw data from the Carers Alliance's State of Caring survey, and a report is currently being drafted. Data will also be available from Carers NZ's Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities young carers analysis. These data sets will inform ongoing work of *Mahi Aroha* and enable us to better respond to and support carers.
- 27 In addition to continuing its lead and co-lead actions, the Ministry of Health will engage with the Health and Disability Review Transition Unit to ensure that *Mahi Aroha* and carer recognition and support are promoted for the new system entities.
- 28 Any COVID-19 restrictions in 2022, or the need for agencies to prioritise the COVID-19 response, may affect progress on *Mahi Aroha*.

### **Next Steps**

- 29 Subject to your agreement, please forward a copy of this report to the following Ministers of portfolio areas where a commitment was made to support the actions in *Mahi Aroha*:
  - 29.1 Hon Kelvin Davis Minister for Children
  - 29.2 Hon Chris Hipkins Minister of Education
  - 29.3 Hon Andrew Little Minister of Health
  - 29.4 Hon Peeni Henare Minister for Whānau Ora
  - 29.5 Hon Willie Jackson Minister for Māori Development
  - 29.6 Hon Jan Tinetti Minister for Women
  - 29.7 Hon Michael Wood Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety
  - 29.8 Hon Dr Ayesha Verall Minister for Seniors
  - 29.9 Hon Aupito William Sio Minister for Pacific Peoples
  - 29.10 Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan Minister for Youth
- 30 The attached A3 in Appendix One: Summary of Progress on *Mahi Aroha* 2021 includes a summary of the work schedule for *Mahi Aroha* over the next six months. This will support your oral update to Social Wellbeing Cabinet Committee (SWC).
- 31 Officials will continue to work with your office to find an appropriate date for your oral update to SWC.

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