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MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action —Strategic Framework

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Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action—Strategic Framework

Introduction

Foreword from Minister

Tēnā koutou

I am excited to present the refreshed Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action.

In my role as Minister for Youth, I have experienced the power of young people leading change for themselves and their whānau, and in their schools, businesses, and communities.

Young people have consistently told government that they want their voices heard in the decisions that impact them and their future. As Minister for Youth, I want to see all young New Zealanders supported and encouraged to take on leadership opportunities, including in and across government.

Young people are often only heard at crisis points—the impacts of climate change, COVID-19, diminishing mental health and wellbeing, the cost-of-living crisis for students, and so on. But young people deserve to be heard in meaningful ways on an ongoing basis, not just at times of crisis.

We know that when young people share their voices, take on leadership, and help influence and impact change, their hauora and wellbeing are enhanced.

The Youth Plan provides a framework, supported with tools and resources, to help agencies, youth sector organisations, and beyond, realise this vision.

By designing and implementing actions in partnership with young people, whānau, and communities, we are collectively helping to create an Aotearoa New Zealand where our young people can thrive.

I want to mihi the many young people who contributed their whakaaro and expertise that helped craft this refreshed Youth Plan. Your voices and leadership are a taonga and we are grateful for your contributions.

Hon Willow-Jean Prime

Minister for Youth

Foreword from Youth Advisory Group (Co-Chairs)

Tēnā koutou

Being a young person is often an experience of feeling voiceless. As young people, we have limited ability to participate in formal methods of decision-making—many of us cannot vote and find traditional consultation processes unengaging and outdated. The **Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action** reimagines what effective consultation could look like when young people are

genuinely involved in decision-making, recognising that we will be the ones to inherit the outcomes of current decisions.

The refresh of this Youth Plan saw us chatting with young people from around the motu. We heard young people want more opportunities to be heard on the issues that affect them and matter most to them; they want their voices to be valued and treated as equal to that of adults; and they want to see concrete outcomes from their input. Our voices should not be harvested as a tick-box exercise; instead, we want to see transformation driven by our input and to be shown how our voices were incorporated in decision-making.

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, young people play vital roles in our communities as leaders and influencers. From organising protests, championing petitions, mentoring others, and mobilising to support our communities when disasters strike, we have repeatedly demonstrated our ability to make a positive difference and that we are already leaders. This Youth Plan aims to supercharge the status quo by empowering young people and embedding our leadership ability into government processes and beyond. While specific issues come and go, the presence of youth voice in decision-making should remain a constant.

We want to be heard and we want equitable access to leadership opportunities for all young people across Aotearoa New Zealand—we lay down this wero to

Ministers, members of Parliament, government agencies, and others to take up.

Piper and Chanay

On behalf of the Ministry of Youth Development—Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group

Purpose

The Youth Plan aims to amplify youth voice in government policy and decision-making and ensure processes are in place for young people to have meaningful input into decisions. It also aims to increase opportunities for young people to lead their own lives, have their identities seen, valued, and respected, and have increasing influence in their communities and across government policy.

The Youth Plan is for all young people in Aotearoa New Zealand aged 12 to 24 years. It provides a strategic framework that can be used by government agencies, youth sector organisations, and beyond. It sets out actions that government will take, in partnership with others, to help achieve the aims of the Youth Plan.

Background

The Youth Plan drives change as part of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (CYWS). The aspiration of the CYWS is for Aotearoa New Zealand "to be the best place in the world for children and young people." The Youth Plan directs actions under the CYWS outcome area:

"Children and young people are involved and empowered."
To realise this vision, the CYWS suggests young people should:

- be able to contribute positively at home, at school, and in their communities
- exercise kaitiakitanga: care of the land and connection to nature
- have their voices, perspectives, and opinions listened to and seriously considered
- be supported to exercise increasing autonomy as they age, and to be responsible citizens
- be supported, alongside their families, to make healthy choices around relationships, sexual health, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs

The Youth Plan sits alongside a range of other government actions facilitating improved outcomes for young people⁽¹⁾. The Youth Plan provides a unique focus by specifically promoting young people's voice and leadership

(1) A summary of government actions directed toward young people was collated in a mapping exercise which can be found on the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD)—Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi website:

<https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan.html>. This mapping can be used to ensure new actions avoid duplication of work already underway.

to inform, shape, and influence government policies that are important to young people. Youth voice and leadership are protective factors in young people's wellbeing, as well as a driver for transformative change. The Youth Plan should be incorporated across all CYWS work to embed effective youth participation in government action(2).

The first Youth Plan (2020-2022) has undergone a review and refresh process

The focus of the first Youth Plan (2020-2022) was adjusted in response to the emergence of COVID-19 during its development. Selected age groups and priority cohorts(3)

(2) Based on findings from the CYWS review in 2022, the next phase of CYWS implementation is focused under four priority policy areas: reducing child poverty and addressing the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage; enhancing child and whānau wellbeing in the first 1,000 days; addressing racism, discrimination, and stigma; and supporting the mental wellbeing of children and young people. The Youth Plan can be used across the four priority areas and their respective work programmes to ensure the voices and leadership of young people help inform and drive action.

(3) The priority cohorts in the first Youth Plan (2020-2022) were: rangatahi Māori aged 17-24 years, Pacific young people aged 17-24 years, rainbow young people aged 17-24 years, and disabled young people aged 17-24 years.

were chosen based on marginalisation prior to COVID-19 and anticipated impacts during the pandemic.

A review of the first Youth Plan was conducted from June 2022 to March 2023, intended to assess its effectiveness for young people, particularly its priority cohorts, and to provide guidance for a refreshed plan.

The review identified the many strengths of the first Youth Plan. It established cross-agency collaboration across government, increased the visibility of work focused on young people, and highlighted the needs of priority cohorts. However, findings from the review also indicated a need for the Youth Plan to have a refined focus on voice and leadership given this is an area that is not specifically prioritised in any other youth-related action plans or strategies across government. This finding was supported by young people themselves and further reinforced by a literature review on the current threats to wellbeing most often reported by young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, and a mapping exercise of government strategies and action plans that focus on young people(4). Findings from the review found that voice and leadership serve as protective factors for wellbeing, giving young people a sense of agency and empowerment.

(4) Literature review and mapping exercise can be found on the MYD website: <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan.html>

Findings from the review also supported expanding the priority cohorts of the Youth Plan to address groups of young people who experience higher rates of marginalisation and inequity: rangatahi Māori, Pacific young people, rainbow young people, disabled young people, young women, young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants), and young people living in the regions⁽⁵⁾.

The refreshed Youth Plan embraces additional opportunities in an environment less directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing existing and emerging challenges impacting young people. A sharper focus on voice and leadership provides clarified purpose. The refreshed Youth Plan will build on cross-agency collaboration and government connections with the wider community youth sector. In addition, the development and introduction of a refreshed measurement framework will strengthen government's ability to monitor and assess the effectiveness of future actions.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi Commitment

During the review of the first Youth Plan, young people and the youth sector indicated that the refreshed Youth Plan needed to reflect Te Ao Māori and a commitment to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Rangatahi Māori told us that

(5) Regions refers to non-urban, rural and often isolated regions across Aotearoa New Zealand.

integration of supported concepts of wellbeing such as Te Whare Tapa Whā and Hauora as a basis of bi-cultural understanding of wellbeing was essential. Mana motuhake, rangatiratanga, and models of collective leadership better encapsulate how many rangatahi Māori and other young people take up leadership roles in their communities. The refreshed Youth Plan endeavours to better reflect these ideas in the refined focus areas.

The Māori-Crown relationship is foundational to improving the wellbeing of rangatahi Māori and government agencies should work with iwi, hapū, and whānau when implementing the Youth Plan. Equity for rangatahi Māori and commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi are intertwined. The former will not be achieved unless kaupapa Māori approaches are valued and effectively integrated within the Youth Plan and its actions.

The Youth Plan advocates for the utilisation of Mana Taiohi, a youth development framework that is informed by Te Ao Māori, is consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles, and focuses on positive youth development. The aim of referencing Mana Taiohi as a kete tool and weaving the principles within the Youth Plan is to encourage and enable agencies and others to utilise its framework and concepts to:

- improve the quality of support received by rangatahi Māori and young people across Aotearoa New Zealand, and

- advance the uptake and implementation of Te Ao Māori and mātauranga Māori concepts into all youth-focused mahi.

Implementation

The Youth Plan has evolved to form three interconnected documents. The first is this overarching strategic framework, while the second is a tangible set of rolling actions that will be updated on an ongoing basis. The third is a measurement framework that provides an intervention logic for monitoring and assessing how the rolling suite of actions contributes towards the key outcomes of the Youth Plan.

The Youth Plan is a collaborative plan working across government and the wider sector

Although the work to review and refresh the Youth Plan was led by MYD and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD)—Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora, the plan is a cross-government, collaborative plan. Youth participation, voice, and leadership are relevant across a huge range of issues and for many agencies. Moreover, much of the work to uplift the mana and enable the whai wāhitanga of young people happens within whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, and with community or youth sector providers. Therefore, the Youth Plan should have the greatest impact when

enabled by government and supported and actioned by tangata whenua, the wider sector, and in community.

Future actions to give effect to the Youth Plan should be led by a diverse mix of agencies, community, and youth sector partners. The Youth Plan Cross-Agency Working Group will be the main mechanism through which agency-led actions are developed, tested, and collaborated on, with final decisions being made by relevant Ministers and agencies. Opportunities for agencies to connect and collaborate with sector partners will continue to be explored to support the aims of the Youth Plan and to realise improved outcomes for young people.

Governance and accountability

MYD, with support from MSD, will provide monitoring and oversight of implementation of the Youth Plan actions, reporting back to the Minister for Youth, and CYWS Ministers.

A Measurement Framework will enable ongoing monitoring and the future review of the Youth Plan

This strategic framework of the Youth Plan will be reviewed and refreshed in no more than five years to ensure it continues to respond to the emerging needs of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. A measurement framework will examine the effectiveness of actions in achieving the key intended outcomes of the Youth Plan.

The measurement framework is intended to enable self-reporting and agencies are expected to build on its broad focus to create fit-for-purpose measures specific to individual actions. Progress on actions will be reported annually to the Minister for Youth and relevant Ministers within the CYWS Ministerial Group.

Vision

Te piko o te māhuri, tērā te tupu o te rākau

(The way in which the young sapling is nurtured (bent), determines how the tree will grow)

Embedded in the whakataukī are notions of manaakitanga (nurturing) and guidance in the early stages of a young person's life. Similar to a tree, how a young person develops and what they can achieve throughout their life will depend on how they are nurtured, guided, and supported.

The metaphor of a young tree, or māhuri, can be extended to describe the vision of the Youth Plan. The strong roots of the tree represent the hauora or wellbeing of a young person. Coming from the strong roots, we see voice and leadership grow and produce positive outcomes which in turn can feed back into the soil and nourish the roots of the tree.

It is important to recognise that young people do not stand alone, tīpuna, whānau, communities, peers, teachers, and youth workers all play important roles in supporting the

hauora of young people and the growth of voice and leadership.

Voice and Leadership will develop differently for every young person. Following the whakataukī, the way the tree develops will be influenced by the environment it grows in as well as the support it receives.

Broad societal contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and the cost-of-living crisis, will impact the growth of voice and leadership. Individual factors also have significant influence, including family, school, work, and community. Much like the weather, these environments can change rapidly. We must be mindful of how wider contexts either help or hinder young people.

When the tree flourishes, or when the voice and leadership of young people flourish, young people are enabled to lead their own lives, have their identities seen, valued, and respected, and have increasing influence in their communities and over government policy. Young people are also listened to, valued, and embedded in decision-making at all levels.

Aims of the Youth Plan

The voices and perspectives of young people are listened to, valued, and embedded in decision-making at all levels.

The mana of young people is uplifted. Young people are enabled to lead their own lives, have their identities seen, valued and respected, and have increasing influence in their communities and over government policy.

Focus Areas

The two focus areas of the Youth Plan are: voice and leadership. Voice and leadership are forms of whai wāhitanga**(6)**. Young people should be seen as valued contributors and be given space to participate and assume agency.

It is important to understand that participation of young people does not and cannot happen in isolation.

Recognising and uplifting the mana**(7)** of young people and applying Mana Taiohi principles of whanaungatanga**(8)**, manaakitanga**(9)**, and mātauranga**(10)** alongside whai wāhitanga is essential to ensuring young people can participate fully and safely.

Young people should be supported to choose their level of engagement in decisions that affect them. This means

(6) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/whai-wahitanga/>

(7) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/mana/>

(8) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/whanaungatanga/>

(9) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/manaakitanga/>

(10) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/matauranga/>

young people should be given a range of opportunities to share their voice and take on leadership.

Voice

Voice is about opportunities for young people to speak and be heard. This can come in many forms: a young person voting, signing a petition, vocalising their views at a protest, or asking questions of a member of Parliament. It can be through formal engagement opportunities or through more informal channels, sharing their views on social media, or advocating for an issue among peers.

Important elements of supporting youth voice include making opportunities accessible, youth-friendly, and meaningful. Seeking out and creating opportunities for diverse cohorts of young people is necessary so voices heard are representative of the whole and not just the few.

Decision-makers listening is essential to young people sharing their voice. Listening includes paying attention to non-formal methods of hearing youth voice and going to where young people already are, both physically and digitally. The impact of youth voice is determined by the quality of listening that happens as part of the process. Quality listening includes information sharing, closing feedback loops, and taking action after decision-makers hear from young people.

Leadership

Leadership looks different for every young person. For some, leadership is about self-determination. For others, it

is about having influence in their communities and in decision-making processes. For many, it's about supporting and caring for others through collective action.

Across the wide spectrum of ways to be a leader, young people described the importance of finding their tūrangawaewae, their place to stand. Connection to whakapapa, whānau, community, and whenua all contribute to a rooted understanding of self from which leadership naturally grows.

Young people should be supported in their individual journeys of finding their tūrangawaewae alongside opportunities to influence and take action.

Young people want to have more influence over issues that impact them. Decision-makers should invest in opportunities that foster the leadership of young people while also creating increasing space for young people to advise, influence, and collectively lead.

Outcomes for young people

- young people are supported to develop their identities and uplift their mana
- the mauri(11) of young people is fuelled so that young people are seen, recognised, and valued for who they are and who they want to be

(11) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-principle/mauri-taiohi/>

- the whai wāhitanga of young people is recognised and valued through opportunities for them to contribute their voices and leadership
- young people in the priority groups have opportunities to lead and implement change on their own terms
- young people are supported into education, employment, or training with support from their whānau, communities, and government
- young people are given increasing opportunities in formal leadership and decision-making roles, such as advisory and governance groups

Key enablers

- whai wāhitanga of young people is valued by all government agencies
- government agencies understand and follow Mana Taiohi when engaging with young people
- government agencies work innovatively and collaboratively with each other and community youth sector partners to support the voice and leadership of young people
- government agencies resource and support the youth sector and other community organisations who support young people through youth work and other youth services
- government agencies regularly share with each other what they have learnt during engagements, and

collaborate where possible to reduce consultation fatigue

- voices of young people are actively heard, captured, and acted on as part of government action
- the voices of the priority groups are amplified within government

Actions

To achieve the aims of the Youth Plan, actions will be designed and undertaken by government agencies, youth sector, and community sector partners. The design and delivery of actions will specifically involve young people from the priority cohorts. Emphasis will be placed on working alongside young people, and within whānau and communities.

This section sets out criteria for Youth Plan actions. Further details about specific actions can be found in the Youth Plan Rolling Suite of Actions document.

Youth Plan actions do not reflect all the work underway across government or the wider sector under the focus areas of voice and leadership. Rather, actions included in the Youth Plan are just one part of realising the overarching vision of the CYWS. All named actions are intended to be complemented by other work happening across government, the youth sector, and beyond.

Actions Criteria

Youth Plan actions should:

- include whai wāhitanga of young people in the design and/or delivery of actions
- follow Mana Taiohi when engaging with young people
- be delivered through collaboration between government agencies and/or with youth sector partners, communities, whānau, and young people themselves
- support the wider wellbeing aims of the CYWS.

Youth Plan actions can:

- set out their own timeframes, whether they are short (six to twelve months), medium (one to two years), or long term (three to five years)
- have a focus on one or more priority cohort (while acknowledging the intersectionality of young people's identities)
- be added into the suite of actions on an ongoing basis.

Youth Plan actions will:

- be reviewed and reported on annually.

Tools in our kete

Designing and implementing actions

The following section outlines four key tools that should be used when designing or implementing actions. Links to

further information and resources are available on the MYD website: <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan.html>.

Tool 1: Mana Taiohi(12)

Mana Taiohi is a principle-based framework that informs the way people who work with young people work in Aotearoa New Zealand with a Te Ao Māori worldview. Mana Taiohi is based on the overarching principle of mana, and a further eight interconnected and holistic principles:

- Mauri
- Whakapapa
- Hononga
- Te Ao
- Manaakitanga
- Whai Wāhitanga
- Mātauranga
- Whanaungatanga

The first four principles of mauri, whakapapa, hononga, and te ao are mana that young people have. The second four principles of manaakitanga, whai wāhitanga,

(12) <https://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi/>

mātauranga, and whanaungatanga represent how youth development can help uplift mana.

Mana Taiohi principles are holistic, exist in relation to one another, and are stronger when connected. Without any one of them, the others are weaker.

The principle of Mana is defined as "the authority we inherit at birth, and we accrue over our lifetime. It determines the right of a young person to have agency in their lives and the decisions that affect them. Young people are supported to have a voice, work to their strengths, and step into leadership".

These principles acknowledge the mana that young people have, and how we can work to uplift that mana through voice and leadership. From this flows Whai Wāhitanga, participation. Whai Wāhitanga determines the right of a young person to have agency in their lives and the decisions that affect them.

Within the context of the Youth Plan, engagement with young people should create safe spaces that enable young people to express their voice, have it heard, and influence decisions. Whai Wāhitanga is undoubtedly about involving young people in decision-making in all aspects of their lives. This approach recognises the role that active participation can play as a vehicle for positive youth development and highlights the opportunity to achieve a broader range of positive outcomes that contribute to youth wellbeing.

Tool 2: Priority Cohorts

Some groups of young people experience higher threats to wellbeing, based on factors such as their ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, disability, and geographic location. Many of these young people also struggle to access support services, for example, services that are culturally appropriate, accessible, accepting, and gender-affirming.

The Youth Plan will focus particularly on seven priority cohorts. These are:

- Rangatahi Māori
- Pacific young people
- Rainbow young people
- Disabled young people
- Young women
- Young people from ethnic communities (in particular former refugees and recent migrants)
- Young people living in the regions

The priority cohorts are not distinct categories, and many young people belong to multiple groups, with intersectional identities that result in unique experiences. When forming actions, this complexity must be considered.

It is important to remember, even within each cohort, individual experiences are diverse. Labels such as "ethnic" or "rainbow" are necessary generalisations that capture broad trends, but all people within these groups do not

share one common experience. For example, ethnic young people include those born in Aotearoa New Zealand, those who migrated, and refugees undergoing forced migration, all following different paths and belonging to different population sub-groups.

Actions and measurements must embed diverse definitions of voice, and leadership. Particular attention should be given to the priority cohorts along with tailored responses to address their unique needs. Young people cannot succeed as a group while those facing disproportionate threats to wellbeing are left behind.

Tool 3: Age Range Guidelines

The Youth Plan is for all young people aged 12-24 years. This wider cohort can be divided into two groups based on common development stages: young people aged 12-17 years, and young people aged 18-24 years.

These age ranges are a general guide for government agencies and others formulating actions for the Youth Plan. Broadly, the 12-17-year-old cohort are functioning in education environments, while the 18-24-year-old cohort are likely to be experiencing life transitions, including but not limited to: entering the workforce, further education, or moving out of home.

Experiences within each cohort are diverse. Young people are not meeting the same milestones or undergoing transitions according to fixed linear progression. Age, developmental stage, context, lived experience, and legal

rights are all factors to be considered. For example, the rights and needs of a 12-year-old will not always align with those of a 17-year-old. Additionally, many young people leave school or enter employment at different ages. Those formulating individual actions should consider whether their objectives would better suit a narrowed or more targeted age range.

Engagement with appropriate age groups is important when developing actions to effectively address their needs. Young people have valuable insights and are experts in their own experiences. Government agencies and organisations should acknowledge that the voices and perspectives of young people at all ages are crucial.

Tool 4: Engagement Continuum(13)

The engagement continuum includes different levels of engagement. The first level is **inform**: young people are provided with balanced and objective information on issues or changes that affect them. The second level is **consult**: young people are provided with opportunities to give feedback and have input into decisions. The third level is **involve**: young people are involved in identifying and describing the issues they care about, and included in identifying options to address these issues. The fourth level is **collaborate**: young people's advice and inputs are actively sought and embedded in final decisions and

(13) <https://tinyurl.com/5n6b3nar>

actions. The fifth level is **empower**: young people are key decision-makers and key players in implementing action.

Agencies are encouraged to consider the level at which they wish to engage with young people. This includes considering what level of engagement may be most appropriate for their mahi, the level of resource they have available, and the outcomes they wish to achieve with, and for, young people.

More intensive levels of engagement, such as "empower" and "collaborate", will feature a higher level of youth voice and leadership, but likely with a smaller cohort of young people. Less intensive levels of engagement, such as "consult" or "inform", will feature less concentrated levels of youth voice and leadership but often achieve a wider reach of young people.

The level of engagement can also be different at different points in an action's life cycle. For example, collaboration may be most appropriate during a design and testing phase. During implementation and evaluation, consulting may be more appropriate.

At all levels, communication and transparency is essential to ensure the depth and scope of engagement is mutually understood.

End of Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action— Strategic Framework