

Human services



There has been a significant financial stimulus (~\$10B) administered by the sector in the form of the wage subsidy scheme, which is supporting 1.6 million New Zealanders to remain in work over a 12 week period. There are outstanding questions around whether the wage subsidy scheme is the most effective method to help New Zealanders through the COVID-19 crisis, including the auditability of the scheme, if it targeted the correct areas, businesses, and employees, and how fraud is/will be managed.

Unemployment is rising, with New Zealanders on the job seekers' benefit rising by around 30,000 people since March, and is forecast by Treasury to continue to rise. There is a lack of data around what industries and people this is affecting (age, gender, industry, ethnicity, type of work etc.) resulting in an inability to make informed decisions on effective initiatives to support the affected people. The Ministry of Social Development have set up some programmes, including Keep New Zealand Working.



There is increasing pressure on areas of the sector already under stress, including social housing (reductions in average income of housing tenants), food grants (increased by 45,000 after a week of lockdown), and the mental health line (calls to Need to Talk 1737 up 40%).

The impacts of COVID-19 will be felt disproportionately across the country with some regions/areas being significantly adversely affected (e.g. Queenstown). This will result in increased demand for services in these areas.

The impacts of COVID-19 may affect those who have previously not needed to access the social services for support (e.g. pilots), meaning the demographic the sector is serving may be quite different to the historic demographics and may have different needs.

There is a currently unknown effect on family violence in New Zealand. The UK is showing a sharp rise, and while there is no data available, New Zealand may predict a similar increase.

FADES analysis

- Financial – where do you invest to best support the economy, and the New Zealanders who need support?
- Digital – changing the ways of working for the Ministry of Social Development. Call centres are overloaded, there is an opportunity to support case workers to be effective when working from home. With an estimated 300,000 additional benefit applications, the Ministry will be looking at how they could cope with the demand by using automated decision making (which would require new legislation).
- Workforce – how do you upskill the workforce to adapt to the new ‘normal’? How do you scale organisations to support the demand from the sector over the next few years?
- Audit, Assurance, Fraud – how do you audit all of it to be able to target investment in the right areas.
- Integrated Services – how do you have clear pathways for vulnerable citizens to receive the support they need post-COVID-19, e.g: health, housing, financial and basis needs of food and shelter.
- Increased demand – how does an already struggling system deal with the increased demand due to increased unemployment and vulnerability?
- The engagement, contracting and commissioning strategies and practices for receiving support from NGOs are not fit for purpose with increased demand and the financial burden on those organisations.

Key questions for social services

- How can we ensure financial support is targeted at those who need it most, and where it will make the biggest impact? How should we be targeting specific regions and sectors?
- How will we fund the programmes/schemes that have been implemented and the future demand for social services?
- How can the sector link with the health sector to provide support around mental health and wellbeing?
- How do we re-open the borders in a safe way, but that stimulates the economy?
- What are the sector's options to help to support New Zealanders – work portals to connect employers with those who need it the most, student loan support (i.e. increasing repayment threshold)?

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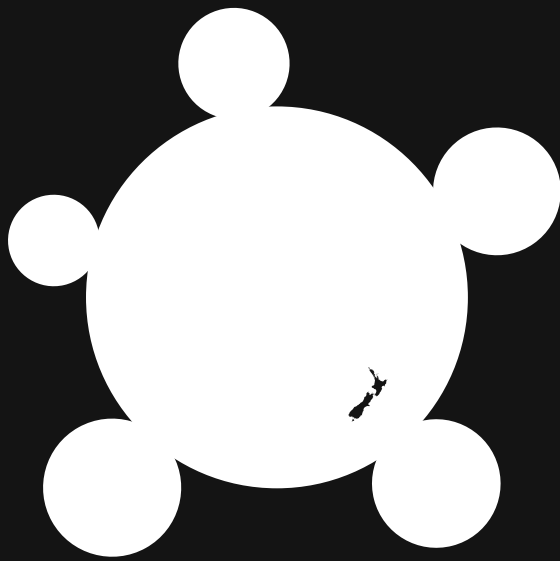
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