



Budget Policy Statement 2018

Oral submission notes, 31 January 2018

Tēnā koutou katoa

Thank for hearing our Submission on the Budget Policy Statement. We welcome the opportunity to submit in person and to contribute to this important discussion. Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa (ACYA)

- seeks to promote respect for all children and youth and their rights.
 - we produce and present the civil society, alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee).
 - Our vision is an Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) where the rights of children and young people (up to 18 years) are upheld and embedded in law, policy, practice and wider society.
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- ACYA supports the Government's intention to place children at the heart of its decision-making to lift the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.
 - We welcome yesterday's announcements around the Child Poverty Reduction Bill and are particularly pleased to see there is to be a Child Wellbeing Strategy that covers all children. Improving the co-ordination and cohesion of policies affecting children is something ACYA has been advocating for for a very long time.
 - In our view UNCROC needs to underpin the government's initiatives to reduce child poverty and enhance the well-being of all children – it offers an enduring, internationally recognised framework to guide discussions and place all children at the heart of decision-making.

- The reporting process is an opportunity for dialogue with international experts, and also internally, about the issues facing children in Aotearoa NZ. It makes sense for the development of the Child Wellbeing Strategy to be integrated with UNCROC and the reporting process. The UN Committee’s [Concluding Observations\[3\]](#) should therefore inform planning and budgeting for children
- We are obliged to take children’s rights seriously and to implement UNCROC, but doing so is not about compliance for compliance’s sake.
- When we ratified UNCROC almost 25 years ago it was described as a “touchstone”. The then Minister of External Relations and Trade, the Right Hon. Don McKinnon, said “The Convention will help ensure that the interests of children are fully considered in the future”. We have yet to realise UNCROC’s potential on this.
- It is a set of agreed principles against which child wellbeing can be measured, planned and budgeted for over the long term. The UN has recommended that Aotearoa NZ use a child-rights approach in budgeting for children.
- It is also a basis for changes at the systemic level that facilitate a co-ordinated and holistic approach to children’s issues.

When asked, children make sensible suggestions

- We are very heartened by the requirement in the Child Poverty Reduction Bill that children be consulted before the child wellbeing strategy is adopted or changed.
- To be meaningful this consultation needs to be planned for and budgeted for from the beginning. This includes budgeting to provide children with the information they need to develop opinions and also to feedback to them on how their ideas have been incorporated.
- In our experience, based on research here and internationally, children are well aware of the economic realities many children and their families face. There is not one budget decision that will not impact, in some way, on children.
- An international study revealed that children and young people themselves made very sensible suggestions that are difficult to argue against and in fact, their suggestions align with the Budget Policy Statement priorities.
- For example “Plan well. There should be enough money in the budget to provide for all rights of children; and don’t forget to include children with special needs in your budgets; talk to us about budgets in ways we can understand and use social media; investing in children is a long-term investment but it is impossible for you to invest in us if you do not ask us what to invest in! We know; you should ask [\[8\]](#).”

What we recommend:

- We recommend using UNCROC to protect and promote the wellbeing and inherent dignity of all children to enable common ground for discussing and developing policies and practices for children. This includes Budget Policy Statements.
- There is an obvious synergy between the language used in BPS and UNCROC. Effectiveness, efficiency, equity, sustainability and transparency express the common values to articulate the moral obligations of a government to its young citizens.
- The Budget Policy Priorities are consistent with ACYA's overarching recommendation to implement and embed UNCROC to protect and promote the wellbeing and inherent dignity of all children. This means:
 - Making sure children are consulted with and listened to in policy and budgetary decision-making. (An example of this is evident in the Oranga Tamariki changes where children's views were taken into account throughout. Ministry of Education is now considering setting up a children and young people's reference group).
 - Having consistent and complete data about children so we know and understand the issue to ensure that policy responses and public spending are effective.
 - Greater cohesion and co-ordination between legislation, policy and practice as well as across sectors and agencies;
 - Having universal and proportionally targeted responses so all children's needs are met;

This is an auspicious year to put children at the heart of government decision-making. Aotearoa NZ ratified UNCROC 25 years ago this coming April.

While we are very pleased and supportive of the announcements made yesterday, legislation alone is not going to bring about the changes needed. Enhancing the wellbeing of all children will require robust planning and budgeting to really make a difference

We are happy to answer any questions.