

9 December, 2025

Hon. Matt Doocey
Minister for Mental Health

Tēnā koe Minister

Request for response to child and youth mental health petition

As Aotearoa New Zealand's trusted and independent voice for better mental health, the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand (the MHF) is concerned about poor and worsening child and youth mental health rates. Although young New Zealanders experience the most mental health challenges of any age group, they also experience more barriers to support, and longer mental health and addiction service wait times.

Young people tell us they are feeling hopeless because their needs aren't being met.

"Trying to get mental health support felt exhausting and confusing. I often had to keep explaining over and over what was going on. It made me feel invisible when it took a lot of courage to speak up in the first place." Amber, 15

Parents tell us of missed opportunities for early intervention, and despair at their children being unable to access the support they need.

"If our son had been accepted into youth mental health services when he needed support – not based on when services could take him – that would have made a huge difference. He was often declined due to waitlists or discharged due to waitlists." Parent

Last month's New Zealand Health Survey data confirmed no statistically significant improvements for child and youth mental health rates. The amount of young people experiencing high or very high distress has nearly tripled since 2014/15, and anecdotally we are hearing that in lieu of support, some tamariki and rangatahi are turning to unsafe practices.

The lack of any cohesive Health New Zealand and Ministry of Health work programme to address this most pressing issue – despite warnings for nearly a decade – feeds our concerns that worsening child and youth mental health rates are being ignored, and young people aren't being heard.

As you know, on 28 October this year the MHF launched a petition calling on you, as Minister for Mental Health, to take urgent action on child and youth mental health.

To date, we have received 14,134 signatures of support for this petition, from a range of concerned New Zealanders. The petition remains open, and these numbers are steadily growing.

The MHF is asking for urgent and significant action. We support a wide range of solutions across the full continuum of care backed by recent reports and research recommendations.¹ We are asking you to commit to delivering a nationwide child and youth mental health 'Urgent Action Plan'. Young people cannot and should not have to wait for a prolonged policy and planning cycle. We are asking you to commit to significant youth mental health investment and drive immediate service improvements: [funding 10 new youth hubs](#) (Youth One Stop Shops), raising the age limit for child and adolescent mental health services to 24 years, and expanding existing school-based mental health and wellbeing services.

We are encouraged to see significant mental health crisis response funding announcements that took place outside of Budget cycles this year and remain hopeful that funding for child and youth mental health can be made urgently available as it aligns with your focus on delivering faster access to support. I'm sure you'll agree, investing in the wellbeing of our future generations is a robust business case and fits strongly with your priorities.

We ask that you formally respond in writing to our petition's request for urgent action. Because over 14,000 New Zealanders want tangible change, we will continue to engage with the public until we are satisfied an adequate response is forthcoming.

I look forward to your timely response. You can view our petition asks at sign.mentalhealth.org.nz. As always, the MHF is available to provide advice and support as you see fit, as are young people themselves who have very clearly articulated over the years the solutions to the challenges they face.

"Our mental health is not an issue in a document, or a talking point to be delayed or ignored. Our mental health is who we are, and when our mental health is struggling we are struggling. We need time, effort, and money to be put into youth mental health support because we deserve to live happy lives, we deserve to be healthy." *Malak, 16*

Mauri tū, mauri ora

Shaun Robinson

Chief Executive

ⁱ For example:

Cross-party Mental Health and Addiction Wellbeing Group. 2023. Under One Umbrella: Integrated mental health, alcohol and other drug use care for young people in New Zealand; A desk-top review of the literature and possible future directions. Platform Charitable Trust.

Fleming, T., Crengle, S., Peiris-John, R., Ball, J., Fortune, S., Yao, E.S., Latimer, C.L., Veukiso-Ulugia, A. and Clark, T.C., 2024. Priority actions for improving population youth mental health: An equity framework for Aotearoa New Zealand. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 34, p.200340.

Hayward, M., Stubbing, J., & Gluckman, P. 2025. Addressing youth mental distress in Aotearoa New Zealand. Kōi Tū Centre for Informed Futures.

Office of the Auditor-General. 2024. Meeting the mental health needs of young New Zealanders.

Stubbing, J., & Gibson, K. 2021. Can we build 'somewhere that you want to go'? Conducting collaborative mental health service design with New Zealand's young people. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(19), article e9983.

Te Hīringa Mahara (the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission)'s many reports recommending long-term system transformation.