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**For immediate release**

## Children's Commissioner welcomes release of Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy monitoring report

"Having a child and youth wellbeing strategy is vital and putting that strategy into coordinated practice is where we will really be able to make a difference for New Zealand's children and young people," says Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft.

The report released this afternoon tells us that paid parental leave has been extended to 26 weeks, free GP visits extended to under-14-year-olds, free lunches have been made available in some of our schools, New Zealand history is being taught, and there has been a funding boost for Te Kōhanga Reo, among other things.

"These are significant advances, and we must acknowledge them," says Commissioner Becroft.

"This report tells the story of some important but, first steps forward on a much bigger journey to implementation. I look forward to seeing them followed up with the big bold changes in the future necessary for fundamental improvement."

The recent UNICEF report on child wellbeing ranked New Zealand near the bottom of the OECD and EU countries, which is sad but not surprising, Commissioner Becroft says. "Too many children are missing out and are disadvantaged, and this resulted in our low ranking for years."

"This world-leading Strategy would be the circuit-breaker for our dismal international record on child wellbeing," he says.

The Commissioner says that these are immensely challenging times for everyone. Many New Zealand children and their families are hurting and it's critical that the government responds appropriately.

"COVID-19 has shone a light on the inadequacy of our welfare system and children and young people will bear the brunt of our long-term recovery," he says.

"Many young people face huge challenges including child poverty, racism, and mental wellbeing. The recent Youth19 report has shown us that significant depressive symptoms have doubled to 23 percent for young people since 2012 and suicide attempts have increased. Our young people are struggling, and they need support."

The Commissioner look forwards to more progress and identifies the overhaul of the welfare system, improved access to warm and dry houses, real partnerships with iwi, action for disabled children and young people and support to prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder as some initiatives that would make a real difference.

"Our children and young people need a future that is not just shovel-ready, but future ready."

ENDS

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