

Children's Action Plan
Directorate

Children's Workforce

Core competencies discussion document

May 2015



Children's Action Plan

Identifying, Supporting and
Protecting Vulnerable Children

Children's Action Plan directorate

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Contents

Purpose	4
What is a shared core competency?	5
How could a shared core competency framework be developed?	5
Broad areas for consideration	6
Questions	7
Definitions	12
Respondent information	13

Purpose

We seek your views about what areas of skills, knowledge and values should be the focus for all people who work with children so that they can collectively better identify, support and protect vulnerable children.

This document is provided to start a conversation with representatives of New Zealand's children's workforce about the development of options for a national tiered core competency framework (the framework) and implementation plan.

The document provides information about broad areas of core competency which may be a logical basis to begin discussion about what may be included in a framework to support the children's workforce with a shared set of skills, values and knowledge so they can better identify, support and protect vulnerable children.

We seek your input about the merits of the core competency areas and your views about other areas that you feel are important but that have not been included. We also seek your views about the opportunities and challenges that may present in implementing a shared core competency framework.

Overview

The Children's Action Plan sets out a programme of action to change the way we work to protect vulnerable children by putting them at the centre of everything we do. The key objective is to keep vulnerable children safe before they come to harm so they can thrive, achieve and belong.

The Children's Action Plan includes a range of initiatives to support the Government's vision for a workforce that works together more effectively, with shared skills and language, and a common appreciation of the needs of the child.

What is a shared core competency framework?

A shared core competency framework across the children's workforce will move us towards greater consistency and consensus about how we work together effectively. Identifying what competencies are core for all children's workers differs from professional or role based competencies in that the focus is on those competencies that could be common across all parts of the workforce. The framework would not replace professional or role based competencies. The intent is to build on existing areas of skill, knowledge and values and share those strengths across children's workforce professions and roles.

It is envisaged that the framework will include tiers of competence so as to reflect the different levels of skills and knowledge required of all the workers who make up the children's workforce estimated to be at least 370,000 people (paid and unpaid).

How can a shared core competency framework be developed?

The Children's Action Plan is committed to a broad and thorough consultation involving employers, employees, representative bodies, non-government organisations, education and training providers, regulatory and professional bodies and trade unions. We are still in the early stages of considering what may be included within a shared core competency framework and how it might work best.

A Framework Design Team of highly-regarded, expert professional and practitioner representatives from the children's workforce is developing options for a framework and implementation plan. Information you supply via this discussion document will assist them to produce a draft 'straw man' proposal which will be provided to you as part the second phase of wider consultation beginning later in the year. For more information visit: www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz

Broad areas for consideration

Based on our review of competency frameworks in New Zealand and overseas we've identified seven areas as a starting point for a conversation about what may be included in a core competency framework for the children's workforce.

- **Taking a child centred approach**
Effective child protection systems are child centred. Failings in child protection systems are often the result of losing sight of the needs and views of the children within them, or placing the interests of adults ahead of the needs of children.
- **Effective communication and engagement with children, family and whānau**
Building and sustaining trust and rapport are critical for ensuring that the needs of vulnerable children are adequately identified and addressed.
- **Child protection and safeguarding, including family violence**
Vulnerability can take many forms, and the symptoms and warning signs can be subtle and interconnected. However, early identification and response can greatly improve the outcomes for vulnerable children. Available evidence indicates that there is a substantial overlap between the occurrence of child abuse and partner abuse in families.
- **Children's rights**
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to everyone under 18 years no matter who they are, what they look like, what their gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion, if they are rich or poor, speak a different language or have a disability. People who work with children should respect, support and promote children's rights.
- **Child health**
Healthy children live in families, environments, and communities that enable them the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. People who work with children should understand child health and how to support children to *achieve, belong and thrive*.
- **Child development**
An understanding of how children develop, and how emotional, physical, sexual, intellectual, and social development progresses in children, is vital for recognising possible issues of vulnerability and intervening early to support their well-being.
- **Collaborative working practices and recording and sharing information**
A children's workforce that is able to work together better gets improved outcomes for vulnerable children. This means having a shared framework of knowledge and skills, as well as developing specific capability in cross-professional and cross-agency working. Timely and accurate sharing of information is an important part of effectively addressing the welfare and safety needs of children.

Questions

Questions 1 - 5 seek information about what should be included in a shared competency framework; Questions 6 - 9 seek information about opportunities and challenges in establishing a shared competency framework; Question 10 provides opportunity for any additional comments

Q1. Statement: “Everyone who works with children should possess a core set of competencies (skills, knowledge and values) to achieve the best outcomes for children.” Indicate below the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
			X		
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Guidelines only would be desirable. We do not support separate or additional mechanisms for regulation, assessment, or review of children's workforce competencies which are embedded in job descriptions, organisational policies and professional regulation.</p>					

Q2. To what extent do you agree that the seven core competency areas are the right ones to begin the discussion about what skills, knowledge and values should be common for all children's workers?

Competency	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
Effective communication and engagement with children, family and whānau				X		
Effective child protection and safeguarding, including family violence				X		

Understanding and respecting children's rights				X		
Knowledge and understanding of child health				X		
Knowledge and understanding of child development				X		
Taking a child centred approach				X		
Collaborative working practices and recording and sharing information				X		

Comments: We suggest these need reframing competencies - "Effective child protection and safeguarding, including family violence" is an outcome rather than a competency, though it could be an organisational competency. The ability to safeguard children is dependent not only on the core competencies of workers, but also on effective systems.

Regulation, contracts, computer systems, information technology and poorly integrated health and social service delivery systems are often barriers to workers' ability to deliver effective protection, particularly where there are difficulties in sharing data and information and where there is disparate understanding, reporting and enforcement of government regulation and organisations' policy. For example, in some areas of work, and in some locations, staff of relevant organisations meet regularly to share information, but in others, with similarly profiled organisations, staff may not meet because managers may deem "out of contract" or there may be a different systems or philosophical approach.

Similarly, it is not always clear where the locus of information sits, and where workers' responsibility and ability to access or share information begins or ends. Nurses, for instance, may report concerns about a child, but never know if or when the report has been followed up, as there appears to be no obligation to inform them. If a child is removed, or placed in care, it is not clear who is responsible for ensuring that their health needs are met, for example that they are enrolled with a GP. In very general terms, we sometimes find that with very vulnerable children, the ordinary health component of care is focused at the 'expert' level (i.e. Paediatrician, child psychiatrist etc.) and that there is little obligation to involve the primary health care worker, for example, the school or Plunket nurse (if there is one) or GP, or keep

them informed. Guidelines about interagency/interdisciplinary information sharing and the level at which it should occur would be useful.

Health workers, including nurses and GPs, need to be an integral part of the frontline children's team along with police, social workers, and teachers, though we note that collaboration is resource intensive. Lack of resourcing for early intervention programmes such as *Strengthening Families* continues to ensure a reactive approach to child abuse. NZNO reiterates the position that we have always maintained, that *all* children are vulnerable and must be protected. We would be extremely concerned if the children's workforce core competency framework were to lead to duplicate competence processes for front line professionals. Nurses' competence and fitness to practice is robustly regulated by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003, for example, and organisations such as Plunket have very robust policy, education and training for nurses working with children.

Q3. Are there other areas, not listed above that you think are core competencies that everyone who works with children should possess?

Comments:

- Knowledge of legislation/regulation and professional accountabilities in relation to, for example consent, custody/guardianship, school attendance, privacy, contracts, etc.
- Note: The New Zealand Qualification Authority is currently consulting on a revised (secondary and tertiary education) unit standard (8552): [Describe legal consequences and protections relating to domestic violence and child abuse](#) which covers:
 - Care of Children Act 2004
 - Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989
 - Crimes Act 1961
 - Domestic Violence Act 1995
- Human Rights legislation and relevant codes eg of privacy would also be important.
- Advocacy for children's needs should be highlighted as part of "children's rights". i.e. the practical . Child Poverty action Group CPAG raise our awareness of on a daily basis, that seems to get largely ignored/discredited...

Q4. Statement: "While everyone who works with children needs a minimum level of competence in each of these seven areas, it would be useful to provide levels of competency to reflect the more advanced skills needed by different members of the workforce." Indicate below the extent you agree or disagree with this statement.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
			X		
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Specific expertise in relevant areas eg justice, health, education, social development is essential and must be established by the relevant professional bodies.</p> <p>While we agree with the principle that different levels of knowledge and skill are expected of people working in different roles, these are not best captured in a set of core competencies. They are best be referenced in competencies that apply to regulated professions e.g. RN competencies for RNs. (e.g. Plunket nurses have different levels of the same competencies required to distinguish competent, proficient and expert/advanced practitioners).</p>					

Q5. Statement: "The seven areas of core competency are currently reflected in the daily activity of workers in my profession or organisation". Indicate below the extent you agree or disagree with this statement.

Competency	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
Effective communication and engagement with children, family and whānau				x		
Effective child protection and safeguarding, including family violence				x		
Understanding and respecting children's rights				x		
Knowledge and				x		

understanding of child health						
Knowledge and understanding of child development				x		
Taking a child centred approach				x		
Collaborative working practices and recording and sharing information				x		
Comments:						

Q6. How are children's workers in your area supported to build capability to be able to identify, support and protect vulnerable children? For example, in training or professional development that they undertake.

Comments:
<p>Nurses working in with children in public health, and well child services have an annual update on child protection. Employers, such as Plunket, have very stringent guidelines and policy on family violence, child protection, reporting etc. which is included in orientation and education and policy training. Regulated health practitioners are also supported (and bound) by codes of practice and conduct, and by professional codes of ethics, and position statements such as NZNO's for position statement on family violence.</p> <p>Annual practice requirements for regulated practitioners include professional development, peer review and other audited processes to assure ongoing competence and fitness to practice; appropriate orientation/training to new areas of practice etc.</p>

Q7. What areas of strength exist within your profession or organization that support knowledge, skills and values in these core competencies? For example; leadership and management practices, job descriptions, supervision, policies and procedures.

Competency	Please provide examples of what supports strength in each core competency area.
Effective communication and engagement with children, family and whanau	<p>Eg annual training updates</p> <p>Professional development recognition programmes (PDRP)</p>

	CPASS Child Protection Advisory Support Staff - for advice, training and guidance, and information and data base.
Effective child protection and safeguarding, including family violence	Training, lectures, professional journals eg Kai Tiaki, NZNO legal forums, discussion, peer review
Understanding and respecting children's rights	As above
Knowledge and understanding of child health	Education, training – many post registration education courses and papers available through tertiary institutes, online etc.
Knowledge and understanding of child development	As above
Taking a child centred approach	
Collaborative working practices and recording and sharing information	
Comments	

Q8. What ways could these competencies be strengthened in your area of profession or organisation?

Competency	Please provide examples of opportunities to strengthen in each core competency area.
Effective communication and engagement with children, family and whānau	
Effective child protection and safeguarding, including family violence	
Understanding and respecting children's rights	More opportunities to learn about legal rights framework
Knowledge and understanding of child health	
Knowledge and understanding of child development	
Taking a child centred approach	

Collaborative working practices and recording and sharing information	
Comments: These could be strengthened by applying not only to the children's workforce but also to all bodies that influence power over the resourcing available to families and other groups that support families to care for children e.g. across government (all levels and most departments) because if children's health and wellbeing is not identified as a priority in the first instance, improved outcomes across the population will not be achieved.	

Q9. What would be the opportunities and challenges in establishing a shared children's workforce core competency framework?

<p>Opportunities Comments:</p> <p>Please note earlier comments: any competency framework should inform rather than duplicate existing competency frameworks for health professionals.</p>	<p>Challenges comments:</p> <p>Challenges in establishing a shared children's workforce competency framework lie in the existence of professional competencies that can have the lens of meeting children's needs applied to them for the relevant workers. The purpose of the proposed core competencies is not clear – beyond being akin to a more detailed shared Vision. e.g. what relationship is envisaged with the professional competencies for RNs, Social workers, etc? How is it proposed that the competencies are assessed? By whom?</p>
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10. What additional information would you like the Framework Design Team to consider?

<p>Comments: The definition of children should be those under 18 years of age, those who have an intellectual disability and function at this level, and those who are still at school.</p> <p>Please note these comments are informed by members and staff of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) including our colleges and sections and nursing policy and research advisers.</p> <p>NZNO is the leading professional nursing association and union for nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand. NZNO represents over 46,000 nurses, midwives, students, kaimahi hauora and health workers on professional and employment related matters. NZNO is affiliated to the International Council of Nurses and the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.</p> <p>NZNO promotes and advocates for professional excellence in nursing by providing leadership, research and education to inspire and progress the profession of nursing. NZNO represents members on employment and industrial matters and negotiates collective employment agreements.</p> <p>NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and contributes to the improvement of the health status and outcomes of all peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand through influencing health, employment and social policy development enabling quality nursing care provision. NZNO's vision is Freed to care, Proud to nurse.</p>

Definitions

Vulnerable children

The white paper defines vulnerable children as:

“Vulnerable children are children who are at significant risk of harm to their wellbeing, now and into the future, as a consequence of the environment in which they are being raised, and in some cases, due to their own complex needs. Environmental factors that influence child vulnerability include not having their basic emotional, physical, social, developmental and/or cultural needs met at home or in the wider community.”

Children

Children include people up to and including the age of 17

Competency framework

There are many definitions of competencies and competency frameworks. In basic terms, competency frameworks list the skills and knowledge required by a workforce in order to meet certain standards or be effective.

Core competencies

Core competencies differ from professional or role based competencies in that they focus on those competencies that are common across all parts of the workforce. In this way they are often used when dealing with a diverse workforce as a way of moving towards greater consistency and consensus in setting expectations and ways of working.

The white paper offers the following perspective:

“Developing consistent levels of knowledge and skill across sections of the children’s workforce can help to ensure that those working with children are able to respond to children’s needs and those of their families and whanau according to the requirements of their professional roles, including responding appropriately to situations of potential abuse and neglect.”

Children’s workforce

The White Paper for vulnerable children takes a wide interpretation of the children’s workforce defining it as:

“Everyone, including volunteers, who plan, manages and delivers services to and for children, in organisations dealing with children and young people.”

These organisations include government agencies and NGO’s working with children, including volunteer organisations.

Respondent Information

Thank you for participating in this initial consultation.

Information supplied will be provided to the Framework Design Team and will only be used to assist the development of a draft competency framework proposal.

We will provide the draft proposal to you later in the year and seek your input again.

To keep informed please visit www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz

If you have any questions, please email: admin@childrensactionplan.govt.nz

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