

# Together alone

A review of joined-up social services

## Summary

NEW ZEALAND  
PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

Te Kōmihana Whai Hua o Aotearoa



The Productivity Commission asked consulting economist Julie Fry to review the recent progress of joined-up social service initiatives. Later, in the *A fair chance for all* inquiry, we'll explore practical ways to improve them.

Fry looked at 18 initiatives spanning a broad range of approaches. They all aim for more effective and joined-up social services for people in the greatest need. Here's what she found.

### Collaborative initiatives

Successful collaboration among social service agencies can build individual, whānau and community capabilities. Joined-up services are the most helpful for people facing many complex barriers to reaching their aspirations.

### What works?

Effective collaborations require adequate, dedicated funding from the outset. They also need:

- trust between providers, and between providers and recipients of support
- clear objectives that are shared by providers and recipients
- sound governance and enough staff
- effective data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

Successful initiatives are being expanded and introduced in other places. Examples include the Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke family violence programme and Te Ara Oranga methamphetamine harm reduction pilot.

## What doesn't work?

Collaborative initiatives often face barriers with the way government operates. For example:

- Overall, government doesn't understand or have the capabilities to support collaborative action. It's reluctant to genuinely decentralise funding and decision making to communities.
- Government funding is insufficient. It's uncertain, short term, and often requires complex accountabilities. This results in service gaps and significant unmet need.
- Providers can feed back systems-level problems to government, but the feedback isn't being addressed. Instead, providers often 'bend the rules' or 'find a way around things'.

There are other challenges too. For example:

- When collaborative initiatives start reaching more people with better services, they may uncover huge volumes of unmet needs.
- Many social services face workforce constraints, and resolving them will take long-term investment and planning.
- Deep-seated causes of disadvantage such as colonisation, racism, patriarchy and ableism need to be addressed.

## What could government do better?

Fry identifies several areas where government can improve its funding and support for collaborative initiatives, including:

- taking the lead on strategic workforce planning
- setting standards and data protocols
- encouraging honest feedback and acting on it
- addressing the underlying causes of colonisation, racism, patriarchy and ableism
- providing data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems and expertise
- ensuring government agencies meet their obligations.

The Commission will explore practical ways of tackling these areas in the *A fair chance for all* inquiry.



[www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all](https://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all)



For more detail, read Julie Fry's full report:  
**Together alone: A review of joined-up social services**



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