

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Social assistance in the modern world is about much more than the passive payment of a benefit. For most people the best form of social assistance is a well paying, sustainable job. Labour's approach to social development has seen record numbers of New Zealand families achieve just that, with 273,000 more New Zealanders in work now than when Labour was elected in 1999.

Our vision of social assistance is one where we support people in times of need, but also assist them to lift their skills and abilities so they can build a better future for themselves and their families. We work to increase people's ability to participate in their community and their improve future prospects.

Today's world is far more dynamic and challenging than when the First Labour Government put in place the social security system. Many more people are working part time and moving jobs or changing career path several times through their working lives. This requires an active social assistance system that responds to today's needs and circumstances and fully realises the capacity of people to participate in the economy and society.

That is why we have taken a social development approach to social assistance - one where we invest in people so that they can secure a job, afford a decent place to live, build a better life for their children, and participate more fully in their community.

Social development also drives our vision for social services and social policy, ensuring that services and policy work together to assist New Zealanders fulfil their potential.

INCOME ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES

Labour endorses the Every Child Counts Campaign and is committed to:

- Putting children and families at the centre of policy development and implementation
- Ensuring every child gets a good start
- Ending child poverty
- Reducing child abuse and neglect

Labour has:

- Made the largest investment in low and middle income families in three decades, through the introduction of Working for Families.
- Introduced, through this package, help for about 61 per cent of all families with dependent children through cumulative increases to the targeted tax relief available to families by 2007.
- Also helped, through Working For Families:
 - Around 28,000 families and 33,000 children through child care subsidy increases of about \$23 a week on average;
 - Around 95,000 households through increases, on average, of around \$19 a week to their Accommodation Supplements.

Labour will:

- Extend family tax relief to a further 60,000 working families – beyond those assisted through Working for Families – by increasing the amount of income a family may earn before they stop getting the maximum family support rates from \$27,500 to \$35,000 and reducing the abatement rate from 30% to 20%. This will mean:
 - 350,000 families will be entitled to family tax relief in 2006.
 - Almost all families with household income under \$70,000 a year will now become eligible for family tax relief, along with a substantial number of families with household income between \$70,000 and \$100,000 a year. Some larger families earning more than this will also benefit.
 - A family earning \$35,000 a year will in effect pay no net income tax at all from 1 April 2006, and any two child family will effectively pay no tax at all until their joint income reaches at least \$40,000.

The level of income a family has, and the number of children dictates the eligibility. The table below indicates eligibility for a family with children under 13.

<i>Family income before tax</i>	<i>Up to 69,320</i>	<i>81,540</i>	<i>93,760</i>	<i>109,880</i>
<i>1 child</i>				
<i>2 children</i>				
<i>3 children</i>				
<i>4 children</i>				

If a family has four or more children or two or more teenage children they can earn more and still receive family tax relief.

- Continue to implement the original Working for Families package, to further improve the incomes of families and lift thousands more children out of poverty.
- Introduce on 1 April 2006, as part of this, a new In-Work Payment for 136,000 working families, worth up to \$60 a week for families with three children or less, with up to \$15 for each additional child.

The In-Work Payment will replace the current Child Tax Credit and is designed to make moving off a benefit worthwhile for modest-income households. For instance, at present a sole parent with two children earning two-thirds of the average wage is no better off in work than on a benefit. The introduction of the In Work Payment from 1 April 2006 changes that by putting another \$30 a week into the pocket of that family if they're in work. It 'makes work pay'.

- On 1 April 2007 increase Family Support rates again by \$10 for every child.
National would refuse to implement this \$10 a week increase, robbing many of the poorest children in the country to pay for tax cuts of over \$90 a week for those earning above \$100,000.

The combined impact of Labour's programme of family tax relief from 2005 onwards will result in:

- An average increase of around \$115 a week in direct income assistance to families with children with a family income in the \$25,000 to \$45,000 band by 2006; and
- An average increase of around \$80 a week in direct income assistance to families with children with a family income in the \$45,000 to \$70,000 band by 2006.

Many families with higher incomes will also benefit. All families eligible for family tax relief will also receive a further \$10 a week per child from 2007.

SUPPORT FOR THOSE IN NEED PLUS HELP TO FIND WORK

The Labour led government has fundamentally rebuilt the social assistance system to ensure it provides the support and assistance required in a modern economy. We have invested heavily in financial assistance to families and adjusted the system to make work pay. Alongside this, we are providing better support and services to help people find jobs, such as case management, training and skill development.

Labour has:

- Driven unemployment down to the lowest level in the OECD, with 273,000 more New Zealanders working now than when we took office.
- Achieved record numbers of job placements to help people move from a benefit into work - for example, in the year to September 2004, 79,369 placements were made, compared with just 37,852 in the year to September 1999.
- Reduced numbers receiving the Unemployment Benefit by two-thirds from 150,000 in June 1999 to 50,000 in June 2005.
- Introduced the Jobs Jolt package to accelerate people moving off benefits and into jobs, as well as specific changes to the benefit system to ensure beneficiaries capable of work are actively looking for employment.
- Made the Work and Income agency better connected to the needs of employers, as shown through partnership agreements with fifteen industries.
- Promoted to employers the employment potential of youth, mature and migrant job seekers.

For the Long-Term Unemployed:

- Put in place initiatives including enhanced wage subsidies, intensive case management, home visits and increased availability of training.

For people on the Sickness and Invalid's Benefits:

- Piloted and expanded new services across the country as part of a strategy to get people back to work wherever possible – including more active case management, support funds to meet specific needs a person may have in order to work, and assistance to have medical needs addressed.

For sole parents:

- Improved case management support, introduced a requirement to complete a personal development and employment plan that is reviewed every year, and brought in Pathways payments to assist with the extra costs in making the transition to paid employment.

Labour believes the benefit system should provide security for those who need it and lead to work opportunities for those who can take them. The purpose of any assistance should be to assist people to move on with their lives.

Our social assistance system was first designed in the 1930s. Adjustments, refinements and additions over the years have left us with a complex system, with too many layers and administrative requirements. Over the last six years we have made much progress in modernising the benefit system to meet the needs of a new century.

Labour will:

- Introduce legislation next year to carry out the most comprehensive and positive social assistance reform since our system was designed almost 70 years ago.
- Dramatically reduce the time spent on administration and allow case managers to focus more on moving people into work, by introducing a Core Benefit for working age New Zealanders and a new Service Delivery model, which focuses on results not categories.

No one will get less as a result of the Core Benefit. But the spotlight will shift from people's barriers to their potential. Rather than categorising people on the basis of why they are unable to work, the service will focus on what support people need to move into work, regardless of why they are receiving a benefit.

These changes will continue to improve case management and widen eligibility to employment programmes that assist people gain skills and move into employment.

They will build on, and incorporate lessons from, the Sickness and Invalids Benefit Strategy, and the reform of the Domestic Purposes Benefit.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Our future as a nation is reliant on the skills, attributes and creativity we instil in our children and young people today. It is vital that our children receive the nurture and support they need to equip them well for the future. Equally we need to ensure that young adults make a successful transition from their teenage school years into the wider world of work and lifelong learning.

Labour has:

- Established the Families Commission to act as an advocate for the interests of families within the government and in the public arena, and also commission research into family issues and parenting support programmes.
- Extended Family Start services to reach around 30 communities throughout the country, to provide assistance to families with children aged up to five years whose family and social circumstances place their health, education and well-being at risk.
- Launched an initiative to provide free high quality early childhood education for approximately 1,750 children in Family Start or Early Start programmes.

- Introduced, for three District Health Board regions, a trial parenting support service which offers parents an individual parenting session and two group sessions during the first fifteen months of their child's life
- Given parents raising pre-schoolers more support through SKIP - Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents – which provides resources and training to assist in positive parenting.
- Put in place a range of community-based and government services as part of the implementation of Te Rito, the New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy, including family violence prevention programmes, more active intervention by Work and Income, and Family Safety Teams, which have been piloted in four regions, to co-ordinate government agencies.

Every New Zealand child deserves the best, and we want to guarantee that that's what they get. While most New Zealand families do well, some struggle, often in the face of formidable odds. Labour's approach is to take every opportunity to assist children at each stage of their lives, in the way that best meets their needs and those of their parents.

We know that community agencies such as Plunket already do great work to support families with young children. In the next term of government we will:

- Further increase our support to such community agencies to allow them to:
 - Provide support through programmes like Well Child and the new Parenting Support Service pilot
 - Coordinate services to families, including through one-stop centres, and
 - Provide more levels of support to those that need it (as with Family Start).
- Also expand early intervention programmes where there is evidence that they are succeeding in helping to get children onto the right path early in life.
- Mandate state sector chief executives, NGOs, the Children's Commissioner, Chief Family Commissioner, Chief Family Court and District Court Judges to work as a Taskforce for Action on Violence with Families to build on Te Rito and implement actions to prevent violence in families.

An important factor for New Zealand families is ensuring that parents (and other carers) are able to undertake the mix of work and parenting activities that works best for them and their children. Some parents currently feel unable to take on paid work because of a lack of childcare options that meet their needs. At the same time, there are young women wanting to start a family but concerned about compromising their successful careers.

Labour will offer a range of measures to ensure that all parents and carers– both men and women, and from all socio-economic groups – have meaningful choices about whether, how and when they participate in paid work.

Labour has:

- Enhanced the work choices available to parents by increasing funding for Out of School Care and Recreation (OSCAR) providers, extending eligibility for OSCAR and Childcare subsidies to around 70% of all families, and making quality home-based care eligible for childcare subsidies.

Labour will:

- Expand options for high quality education and care.
- Provide funding for 20 hours free early childhood education for three and four year olds attending any licensed, teacher-led services from July 2007
- Work with industry to encourage family-friendly workplaces
- Make it easier for parents and carers to move in and out of the workforce
- Address barriers to work for second earners

SUPPORTING YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS

Most of our young people leave school with a positive destination, and a firm plan for how to get there. An estimated 92 per cent of 15-to-19 year olds are engaged in some form of employment, education, or training. But we must keep intensifying our efforts for the 8 per cent who are still in danger of slipping through the cracks, and help them avoid a track that can lead to long-term unemployment and antisocial activity like crime.

That is why the Labour-led government and the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs adopted a shared goal of having all 15-19 year olds in work, education, training or another suitable activity by 2007.

Labour has:

- Established community-run Youth Transition Services in ten regions around the country to coordinate existing services to ensure young people don't fall through the cracks after leaving school.

Labour will:

- Expand Youth Transition Services to cover all regions of the country. Each Service will involve government and community groups working in partnership to deliver services to 15 to 19 year olds leaving school without a clear pathway into work, training, or further education.

SUPPORTING AND VALUING OLDER NEW ZEALANDERS

We are committed to ensuring that retired New Zealanders have a secure income and have the opportunity to contribute the wisdom of their experience to younger generations.

Labour restored the wage relativity for New Zealand Superannuation, which National had cut, and established the New Zealand Superannuation Fund to provide long term security for the state scheme. Even so, we have always recognised that older New Zealanders are usually on fixed incomes and are vulnerable to increases in costs. That's why we recently widened eligibility for rates rebates.

Older New Zealanders are a valuable source of wisdom and many young families do not have access to supportive older mentors. Labour is keen to have them benefit from that knowledge. We also value the important role that some older New Zealanders play in taking care of their grandchildren or other relatives.

Labour will:

- Extend the support provided for grandparents raising grandchildren and other carers on a pension, in particular those taking on caring due to family breakdown, to provide them with the sort of allowances provided to foster parents.

- Further expand the SAGES programme to cover the training and transport costs of more older volunteers such as SuperGrans. We aim to support one-on-one life and home skills to 5,000 young families in need, along with administrative support and capacity building for the volunteers. SAGES provide information, encouragement, practical advice and support to families in areas such as budgeting, nutritious cooking, positive parenting and networking.

SERVICES FOR RURAL NEW ZEALANDERS AND FOR NEW SETTLERS

All New Zealanders – regardless of where they live or who they are – deserve first-class service from their government. We've worked hard over the last six years to restore the network of social and community services that had fallen into disrepair during the 1980s and 1990s. We intend to build on that success over the next three years.

Labour has:

- Improved access to government services, including Housing New Zealand, ACC, Career Services and Work and Income, through thirty Heartland Service centres, and two special purpose Metro Centres, throughout the country.
- Addressed particular problems faced by seasonal workers and better supported them, through the appointment of seasonal employment co-ordinators to work with the industries, and fairer rules to deal with fluctuating income.
- Opened up opportunities to new New Zealanders – and helped employers find the workers they need – by establishing the Auckland Metropolitan Migrant and Refugee Strategy with 38 specialist case managers in Work and Income centres across Auckland, to work with migrants and refugees and assist them into employment.

Labour will:

- Continue to expand the number of Heartland Service centres to help connect rural New Zealanders to government services.
- Apply this model to bring together specialised services for other groups of New Zealanders.
- Expand our successful seasonal work programmes into all regions that need them.
- Expand the Migrant and Refugee Strategy approach beyond the Auckland region to assist migrants and refugees in other centres.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND POLICIES BASED ON REAL NEEDS AND SOLUTIONS WITH PROVEN EFFECTIVENESS

Labour believes in building up a strong evidence base for social policy development, by working with the academic community, coordinating research, sponsoring social research conferences, and supporting investment in social research. We are also committed to ensuring that successive governments take the social impacts of their policies seriously, and can't sweep evidence of worsening social conditions under the carpet.

Labour has:

- Established the Ministry of Social Development and built its capacity to provide whole-of-government advice on strategic social policy issues.

- Strengthened the capacity of the public service to provide sound social policy advice backed by quality research and evaluation.
- Committed significant funding to invest in social research and boosted the capacity in priority areas in the social sciences.
- Published a regular and comprehensive Social Report, raising the status of social and community well-being indicators, and reinforcing the linkages between social development and economic performance.
- Initiated a biennial Social Policy Research and Evaluation Conference involving speakers from New Zealand and overseas.
- Involved communities and academic experts in policy development through genuine consultation and input – including in areas such as child and youth policy, family violence prevention, social security reform and social research.
- Established and funded the Aotearoa New Zealand Social Sciences Research Network, hosted by Massey University, in recognition that grounded research is fundamental to developing good policy.

Labour will:

- Continue to ensure that progress in the area of social development is transparent and easily monitored by passing the Social Report Act. This will lock in social reporting as a key government publication in the same way the Fiscal Responsibility Act has ensured regular reporting and greater accountability on financial matters.
- Build on the efforts of the new Aotearoa New Zealand Social Sciences Research Network to work with the social science community to develop ways for researchers in this area to collaborate further and strengthen the effectiveness of social science as an evidence-base for social policy.
- Explore the establishment of an independent Research Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Development to ensure robust information is available and people are well informed on social issues.

CHILD YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

Labour is committed to meeting the needs of children and young people, and ensuring that they grow and thrive in a safe, secure environment where their wellbeing is assured.

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services play a key role in ensuring the safety of at risk children and supporting community organisations that work with families and children. Labour has strengthened key public services such as Child Youth and Family, and ensured they have the resources they need to help and support families and young people.

Labour has:

- Increased Child, Youth and Family's operational funding by more than 40 per cent, and increased the number of social workers by 26 per cent or 237 staff since December 1999. As a result the number of unallocated cases has reduced by 78 per cent between May 2004 and July 2005 (down from 4592 to less than 1000), in spite of growing numbers of notifications of child abuse and neglect, and high demand for Child, Youth and Family services.

Labour will:

- Review the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 to ensure that, consistent with the principles of the Act, the legislation is consistent with international best practice
- Increase residential capacity for young offenders
- Increase the number of social workers in schools
- Ensure that social workers within the Department are registered
- Improve and increase collaboration with Non Governmental organisations to support families and eliminate violence and abuse of children and young people
- Ensure continued evaluation of best practice implementation in all areas of work
- Develop an inter-agency blueprint for the care of disabled children
- Continue the implementation of the Residential Services Strategy, an action plan to provide better facilities and targeted programmes for children and young people, who for a variety of reasons, need to be in closely supervised 24-hour residential care.

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Labour has recognised the vital contribution that the community and voluntary sector makes within New Zealand, by investing in the sector and encouraging sector empowerment.

Labour has:

- Established the position of Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector to be a voice in Government for sector issues
- Established an Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector in the Ministry of Social Development, to be a centre of expertise in Government on voluntary sector matters
- Established the Charities Commission to promote and enhance the strength and credibility of the charitable sector
- Provided funding to support *Volunteering New Zealand* as a nationwide voice and coordinator for volunteering interests and volunteer centres
- Established the Support for Volunteering Fund. More than half of it has been applied to the infrastructure costs of existing Volunteer Centres – currently \$302K per annum to 9 Centres and Volunteer New Zealand. Volunteer Centres, information and development points on volunteering, form a worldwide network

Labour will:

- Collect information through the Charities Commission to enable more informed consideration of the various tax issues affecting charities
- Continue to improve the funding process and funding arrangements of the Community and Voluntary Sector
- Continue to support the growth of volunteer centres
- Continue to ensure voluntary sector issues are well represented at a national level