Policy | 2014

Social Development

HIGHLIGHTS

Labour will:

Hold an Inequality Summit to put in place policy priorities for the incoming Government to implement.

Get young New Zealanders off the unemployment benefit and into apprenticeships by paying the equivalent of the dole to employers willing to offer a permanent full time job.

Lift the abatement-free thresholds for all main benefits to $150 per week to provide a pathway into paid employment.

Introduce a $60 a week Best Start Payment paid to almost all families during a child’s first year of life, with ongoing payments through to the age of three targeted at modest- and middle-income earners.

Improve the experience of children in state care by establishing and expert advisory group and reviewing the Children, Young Person's and their Families Act 1989 to better reflect the needs of children and their families.

Labour’s vision

Labour believes New Zealand should be a place where everyone, no matter what their circumstances of birth or what unexpected troubles life throws at them, is included and has opportunities to get ahead: Labour will support people to build their capabilities, make their own contribution, and have a stake in society.

Labour wants to see all New Zealanders reach their potential, knowing that if hardship and tragedy happens, there will be real social security and a pathway back to hope. Labour does not want New Zealand to be a country where people lose hope, and disadvantage is reproduced across generations. To break this cycle, Labour has policies that go beyond the Social Development portfolio itself:

* higher wages, a living income, fairer taxes, reduced inequality
* training and other services to enable people to get (back) into work
* healthy, affordable housing
* access to healthcare for all, but especially for young children
* access to childcare and adequate time to spend with children
* equal educational opportunities moving from education into work
* freedom from family and sexual violence
* support for disabled people
* security of income in old age
* an active and well established community and voluntary sector working with communities, families and government

Addressing rising inequalities

It is widely accepted that income and wealth inequality in New Zealand has been getting worse, not just in recent years but since the late 1980s

Measures of this inequality include:

* Wage rates last year on average barely keeping pace with the cost of living and 46% of wage and salary earners receiving no pay increase despite the economy overall growing by about 3%.
* a significant reduction in the proportion of economic output going towards wages – from 55% in 1981 to 45% today;
* the decline in the minimum wage, which averaged around two-thirds of the average wage in the post-War period until the policies of Muldoon, followed by the neoliberal period, slashed it to just 40% of the average wage by 1999. The fifth Labour government brought it up to half of the average wage, but it has flat-lined since then;
* declining home ownership, now at its lowest level since 1951;
* 20% of wage and salary earners now reliant on Working for Families to supplement their income;
* 260,000 children, around 40% of them with working parents, now living below the poverty line.

Labour agrees with the evidence that rising inequalities are bad not just for those on the lowest incomes, but for all of society. Stopping rising inequalities needs action on several levels across government and society. Labour will identify the best ways to deal with the most important issues here in New Zealand, drawing on local and international experience.

Labour will:

hold an Inequality Summit designed to bring together the collective knowledge of experts and put in place policy priorities for the incoming Government to implement, with a view to addressing rising inequality and creating a more equal society

reinstate the Social Indicators reporting that the current government has abandoned, and develop it to better monitor progress and provide evidence-based direction.

We will also tackle child poverty, in keeping with a new Child Poverty Reduction and Eradication Act – see *The best start in life for children* below.

The effects of inequality are felt at community and family level every day of the week. Labour will listen to those doing the work at community level, and seek their input on improving the ways government does things.

Better income from work and fairer tax arrangements

The Labour Party was built on the philosophy that the best route out of poverty is decent paid work. Sustainable employment is crucial to self-esteem, to achieving a good standard of living for the whole family, and to providing a foundation for the success of current and future generations.

Labour’s fair tax and wages policies are designed to ensure that New Zealanders can secure a job, afford a decent place to live, build a better life for their children and participate in their communities.

Labour is determined to raise working people’s incomes and increase income security – especially for those families on low incomes.

Labour will:

increase the minimum wage by $2 an hour in our first year, to $15 an hour in our first hundred days in government, and increased again to $16.25 an hour in early 2015

set a course to raise the minimum wage to two-thirds of the average wage by the end of our second term, as economic conditions allow

support the Living Wage campaign for New Zealanders and take the lead by ensuring that all core public servants are paid a Living Wage

over time and as funding permits, extend the Living Wage and seek to use the purchasing power of the Crown to assist in moving the wages of the lowest paid, commencing with core public service contracting

progressively address inequities in the pay of the publicly-funded aged care and disability care workforce and non-teaching staff in state and integrated primary and secondary schools.

Labour will continue to focus on improving the working lives of the most vulnerable members of the labour force and to strengthen protections available to workers.

Our comprehensive *Work and Wages* policy sets out the ways we will commit to building a modern, fair and flexible employment relations system based on a skilled workforce, secure employment, decent wages and increased productivity as part of increased prosperity for all New Zealanders. Along with raising the minimum wage to ensure a decent living wage, Labour will also ensure that working people have adequate support.

Labour will:

hold a Commission of Inquiry into wages and collective bargaining, and implement its findings to ensure workers get a fair deal

roll back National’s anti-worker employment law changes and make positive changes, including:

* restoring workers’ right to contest dismissals during the first 90 days of employment by abolishing the current government’s Fire At Will law, and
* scrapping youth rates, because they violate the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Labour wants New Zealand to be a country where everyone gets a fair go and pays their fair share- not a country divided by the growing gap between rich and poor, where even middle income New Zealanders are priced out of property markets. Labour will rebalance the tax system in ways that will encourage productive investment and enable everyone to prosper.

Labour will:

implement a fairer tax system, including a new Progressive Top Tax Rate of 36 cents in the dollar on income over $150,000 a year to reduce the size of the tax cuts that the highest-income New Zealanders are receiving (this will impact 2% of taxpayers), and a Capital Gains Tax, excluding the family home

make sure the highest income New Zealanders and corporations pay their fair share of tax so we can afford to invest in health, education, and upgrading the economy.

Every young person earning or learning

Labour will ensure that everyone under 20 is in work, education or training. We will achieve this goal by the end of our first term in government.

Youth unemployment has gone unaddressed for far too long. Not enough has been done to ensure there are sufficient jobs and training opportunities open to young New Zealanders. This situation has been made worse during the recession. Youth have been disproportionately affected and many are not seeing the benefits of the recovery.

75,000 young New Zealanders aged 15-24 are not in work, education or training. This amounts to a rate of more than 11 percent, which is double the unemployment rate for the rest of the population. 45% of our total unemployed are youth – the highest percentage of any youth population in the OECD.

There is no “silver bullet” for addressing youth unemployment or providing the opportunities for all young people to achieve their potential. What is needed is a range of initiatives that are built off what we know works and that will prepare young people for a rapidly changing world, and a range of career paths.

Those under 20 are the prime targets of Labour’s approach because it is at this time that young people are making critical decisions about their careers that can determine their pathway in life.

We know that without access to jobs or training this is the group most vulnerable to long term unemployment. Ensuring that jobs training and support is available to all young New Zealanders will help make sure the pathway they take is the right one.

Labour will:

commit $183 million over 4 years to a comprehensive Youth Employment Package to ensure all New Zealanders under the age of 20 are in work, education or training, including through:

* a Contract for Youth to target those most in need of intensive support, in particular any young person who has been out of work or formal training for more than six months after completing schooling.
* Kick Start Apprenticeships to get young unemployed New Zealanders off the unemployment benefit and into apprenticeships with a $9,100 subsidy (the equivalent of the dole payment) to employers willing to offer a permanent full time job
* extending Youth Support Services providers back to a broader focus on assisting youth in their communities to make the transition from school into further education, training or employment
* funding for 2,000 Maori Trades Training places and 1,500 Pasifika Trades Training places over four years.

The Maori Trades Training places will be provided by partnerships between tertiary providers, iwi entities and industry training organisations for key industries (e.g. fishing and forestry). Good pastoral care and mentoring will also be an important element. They may either be interspersed within general trades programmes or else delivered as a specialist programme.

Pasifika Trades Training operate in a similar style, by bringing Pasifika community groups, the ITOs and tertiary providers together to provide a training environment that encourages young Pasifika people to succeed.

See Labour’s *Youth Employment* policy for further details of this package of initiatives.

Reforming welfare: fairness when you need support

Losing your job, becoming ill or impaired, going through a marriage breakup - these are huge, anxious events in anyone’s life. Almost everyone who this happens to wants to get back on their feet as soon as possible. Labour believes in enabling this to happen rather than punishing those in difficulties.

Labour will support people to do exactly that. In times of economic instability the government has a role to ensure that jobs are created and that, where jobs are not available, support is available to those who need it.

Under Labour, Work and Income will become an agency that ensures those most in need of government support receive what is needed to live a life of dignity and respect, and that provides access and opportunities into education and employment for those who are deemed capable of doing so.

Labour will:

ensure that the Code of Client’s Rights is implemented at Work and Income offices.

Part-time work is a proven way to transition from unemployment into full employment. Labour wants to promote pathways into full employment for all of those supported by social security, where they are capable of doing so.

We will remove the disincentives to engage in part-time work by lifting the threshold of how much a person can earn before their benefit is reduced by abatement rates. The thresholds are currently $80 per week for those on Jobseeker Support and $100 per week for Sole Parent Payment and Supported Living Payment. At these levels, benefit payments are reduced after just 5-6 hours work per week on the minimum wage for jobseekers and 6-7 hours for others. Labour’s commitment to raise the minimum wage to $16.25 per hour means that the abatement thresholds can be raised without impacting on the gap between low-income work and benefit earnings.

Labour will:

lift the abatement-free thresholds for all main benefits to $150 per week.

The initial cost of this change is estimated at $40 million a year. However, we expect this to be offset by savings made by people on benefits taking up more part-time work.

Labour will continue to crack down on welfare fraud, recognising that those who abuse the system undermine public confidence in it, and that ongoing confidence is crucial to ongoing public support.

But we utterly reject putting the boot into people when they are down, and making them feel hopeless if disability becomes permanent. Those entitled to support will get it, with dignity, care and respect.

Labour will focus on the positive.

Labour will:

get young people and those put out of work though redundancy, sickness or injury back into work as quickly as possible, through -

* education and training,
* a return to more intensive and supportive case management of job seekers, and
* working with agencies with proven track records in helping people into work ensure that registers are maintained to connect beneficiaries and employers for jobs

make the most of the potential the Christchurch rebuild gives us to increase training and skilled work opportunities for New Zealanders

work with unemployed people to address underlying health issues and impediments to employment such as addiction and abuse

take a hard line on welfare fraud, but stop the bashing of people receiving benefit support when they are rightfully entitled to it, and need it to get back on their feet

review the impact of the current government’s welfare changes, with a view to retaining elements that are helping to move people into good, sustainable jobs, but doing away with elements that are simply making life harder for people to no positive effect.

Assistance such as the Training Incentive Allowance which was cut by National needs to be restored to give those on the Sole Parent Support or the Supported Living Payment more resources to be able to join the workforce.

Labour will:

restore $6 million funding per year to the Training Incentive Allowance for study in priority subject areas at Level 4 and above (diplomas, degrees).

Labour believes people want to make a contribution to society, usually through various kinds of work and care. Labour is committed to offering those who are sick or impaired, or who have caring responsibilities, the support and services they need to live active and fulfilling lives.

We recognise that there are some New Zealanders who are unable to work, either in the short or in the long term. Labour is committed to understanding and responding to people’s individual circumstances.

Labour will:

ensure that the Supported Living Payment for those permanently and severely restricted in their ability to work because of a health condition, injury or impairment is paid at a higher level than short term benefits, and that the Disability Allowance is available to meet direct additional costs.

ensure people with chronic illness and congenital conditions are not relentlessly required to prove their incapacity.

On the other hand, more people receiving benefits are saying they would like the opportunity to participate in paid work, training or other activities. We want to engage with these individuals to help them plan for the future.

Labour will:

focus on increasing the proportion of disabled people who are supported into paid work through increasing employer support and education.

Labour believes that care is work, and that parenting is some of the most crucial work ever done. We don’t believe the only good parent is a parent in paid work, or that raising children is just a handicap parents need to escape from in order to be productive.

Labour’s Best Start children’s policy package (see *The best start in life for children* below) aims to give parents more choices about work/ care/ life balance. Parents can choose to stay home and care, knowing they will not be severely disadvantaged in the job market, or have to forego all of their income.

Increasingly, grandparents are taking over the full-time care of their grandchildren. Labour recognises this, and the historic inequity around support for these carers. Under Labour, grandparents will be treated in the same way as people who undertake foster care.

Labour will:

undertake a review of the differences in government assistance provided to foster carers and to kin carers (including grandparents) with a view to ensuring that both groups are treated equitably.

For some people, voluntary work is a pathway back to paid employment. For others, where the prospect of paid work proves impossible, voluntary work is an important way to participate in the community and make a contribution.

Labour will:

recognise voluntary work with a non-government organisation as providing a service to the community because without the voluntary sector, much work would not be done in New Zealand; voluntary work is also a pathway for many to paid employment

work with the community and voluntary sector to recognise and support those doing voluntary work in the community.

Superannuation

Ensuring Superannuation is Sustainable

Labour is committed to a sustainable and fair superannuation system, which pays an adequate income to our senior citizens.

We guarantee no changes to the rate of New Zealand Superannuation. We are firmly committed to retaining the current rate for a couple of 66 per cent of the average wage. NZ Super is a vital safety net that provides every New Zealander with a guaranteed minimum level of income during their retirement. This must be protected for this generation and the next.

A sustainable superannuation system is essential and, in fairness to all generations, requires action now. The number of Kiwis above the retirement age has increased by 24 per cent since the last census, showing action is needed to keep universal superannuation sustainable.

Labour will:

gradually lift the age of New Zealand Superannuation eligibility from 65 to 67, starting on 1 April 2020 and taking 12 years to phase in.

There will be no change for anyone born before 1955. This includes everyone currently receiving NZ Super or those close to retirement.

Labour is committed to ensuring the transition to a NZ Super eligibility age of 67 is done fairly. Labour will ensure there is transitional assistance for those who can’t readily keep working in their normal occupation.

Labour realises that for some people working another two years is simply not an option. For some in manual labour an additional 2 years may not be physically possible.

Labour will:

develop a New Zealand Superannuation Transition payment, set at the same level as New Zealand Superannuation, for which those aged 65 or 66 who are not readily able to keep working in an occupation of the same kind and unable to support themselves, would qualify.

New Zealand Superannuation Fund

The Super Fund – one of the great successes of the last Labour Government – continues to go from strength to strength. But it could have been much better. The Guardians of the New Zealand Super Fund say that as of 30 June 2013 the NZ Super Fund was $10.8 billion smaller than it would have been if contributions had continued, with $2.2 billion of foregone investment gains.

The fund returned almost $4 billion in the twelve months to May 2014 ($3.9 billion)  at a rate of over 17 per cent.

Given those figures it is astonishing that National still refuses to resume contributions to the Fund until around 2020. That’s six years away. By then National would have suspended contributions for 12 years while trying to maintain the pretence they are pre-funding superannuation. We will have foregone billions of dollars in returns by then.

New Zealand can’t afford to lose that sort of money with the ballooning cost of New Zealand Superannuation forecast to exceed the cost of education in just three years’ time.

Labour will:

restart contributions to the Super Fund when the books are back in the black, ramping them up over time.

Superannuation portability

Labour recognises the need to address the situation of those who are now permanent residents and citizens of New Zealand, but who worked and contributed to overseas pension schemes before they settled here. Currently people have the value of these pensions deducted from New Zealand Superannuation; and if the overseas pension is more than New Zealand Superannuation then their partner has that amount deducted from their superannuation entitlement.

An increasingly mobile society, including in retirement, raises complex issues as to how pensions are paid between countries.  The current pension portability arrangements aim to ensure that all New Zealand residents receive an equitable level of pension and that costs of pensions are shared between countries. But the unique nature of New Zealand Superannuation presents a number of policy and administration issues, including real or perceived inequity in the treatment of overseas pensions.

Over time a number of adjustments have been made to New Zealand Superannuation portability arrangements in order to overcome these issues. But there is more that can be done to ensure that all people are treated fairly. In particular, given the introduction of KiwiSaver as an additional means for people to provide for their retirement over and above their income from New Zealand Superannuation and Labour’s plan to make KiwiSaver universal from 2014, it is important to ensure that we treat people from countries with arrangements similar to KiwiSaver in a fair and equitable fashion.

Labour will:

review the legislation around overseas pension schemes, in particular to ensure those who have been active savers are treated fairly and not unduly penalised when they become eligible for NZ Superannuation.

The best start in life for children

Labour’s policy for children is at the heart of our social policy. Simply, Labour believes the long-term investment in our children is key to achieving real social development. Best Start sets out a long-term agenda for a strong, family-centred and evidence-based approach to the early years.

Labour will make sure families have the time, resources and supportive, flexible working arrangements needed to do the best job of parenting possible, especially in the crucial early years. We will support families to do the job they need to do: create stable, predictable family/ whanau and care environments.

Labour will support policy that brings together the best evidence about human development with the best evidence about what makes a positive difference. This evidence shows children develop and thrive when surrounded from the earliest age by people who love and care for them, who are not struggling with poverty and its stresses, who keep them safe from harm and hunger, and provide them with stable and secure boundaries.

This evidence shows that vulnerability to poverty, isolation and abuse all have real impacts, each requiring its own effective approach. It shows that every child needs the possibility of developing a capability for self-control, mastery and responsibility for reaching out to engage the wider world, and to cope with whatever situations comes up.

Labour is drawing upon the work of the Children’s Commissioner’s Expert Advisory Group in Child Poverty, and their report *Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand: Evidence for Action*. Many of the policies below are recommended by that report, or are responding to needs as identified in the report.

Focusing policy and services on achieving better outcomes for our children

Getting the best policy into place and delivering services and outcomes doesn’t happen by itself. Concrete steps will be needed to ensure policy is sustainable and coordinated, and that everyone is accountable for delivering the best outcomes.

Labour will:

establish a Ministry for Children with responsibility for the overall strategic direction of Government in ensuring child wellbeing

support the development of a strong interagency agreement outlining roles and responsibilities of each agency in early identification of vulnerable families, services and support for parents, and early interventions for children.

Under the guidance of the Minister for Children, the Ministry for Children will be responsible for agreeing with each partner Ministry the key indicators, against which their performance would be monitored.

Indicators would include a mix of process (e.g. notifications to Child Youth and Family) and outcome (e.g. deaths from assault, neglect or maltreatment) measures, designed to assess (using the best available data) the performance of each Ministry against its agreed goals.

Labour will:

introduce a Child Poverty Reduction and Eradication Act to drive the cross-departmental work set out above, and establish measurements and targets for the reduction of child poverty and its effects across housing, health, education and social development

introduce Child Impact Assessments, so that all legislation is examined and assessed for its impact on children before being introduced.

Information and monitoring of outcomes for our children is vital, if we are to know if our policies are working.

Labour will:

accelerate the full implementation of the Child Health Information Strategy to drive progress toward a Universal Child Health Record.

This would first require the establishment of a National Health register, rather than the four different systems currently used across the country, and would bring together information held by well child providers, lead maternity carers, GPs and hospital records.

Supporting the crucial first years of life

Labour’s core Best Start policies, focussed on supporting young families in children’s early years, will be rolled out progressively.

Labour will:

Paid Parental Leave from 14 weeks to 26 weeks, in line with Sue Moroney’s Member’s Bill.

This will provide around 26,000 families a year extra time with their new-born babies. The policy will be phased in over three years: 22 weeks from 2015 and 26 weeks in 2017.

Labour will:

introduce a Best Start Payment comprising of –

* a near-universal payment of $60 a week from when a baby is born through to their first birthday, for families earning under $150,000.
* ongoing payments through to the age of three targeted at modest- and middle-income earners.

For families that are eligible for paid parental leave, this payment kicks in when paid parental leave finishes.

The Best Start Payment will be a new payment to families who have children under three years of age. It will provide additional income during a child’s early years to give parents more options when it comes to balancing work and care obligations. It invests in children during their most critical years of development.

The payment will finish on the child’s third birthday, at which point they will become eligible for 25 hours Free Early Childhood Education (see below).

For the first year, eligibility for the Best Start Payment will be universal for all households with a combined income of $150,000 or less (subject to the standard residency requirements). This covers about 95 percent of households with a child under one year old.

For children aged between one and three years old, Best Start Payment will be subject to abatement (reduction of payment) once a household’s income rises above $50,000 a year.

As part of the move to a Best Start Payment, one existing payment – the Parent Tax Credit – will be abolished. This payment for the first eight weeks after the baby is born, for families not receiving Paid Parental Leave, will now be redundant.

Education and children’s development and wellbeing

Access to high quality Early Childhood Education is crucial to children’s development.

Labour will:

make 25 hours per week of quality early childhood education available free to all three and four year olds, and those five-year-olds who aren’t yet in school

extend the policy of Free Early Childhood Education for the most vulnerable children earlier than three years of age

actively support the establishment of new public early childhood centres in areas of low-provision through targeted establishment grants

work over time to reinstate funding for centres that employ 100% qualified staff in early childhood education, recognising our long-term goal to have all centres accessing this funding.

See Labour’s Education policy for further information.

Schools are a vital part of children’s lives, and make a huge contribution to their wellbeing.

Labour will:

partner with community and voluntary organisations, incorporating the most cost-effective approaches currently operating, to provide free food in every decile 1-3 primary and intermediate school that needs and wants it

continue to support innovative, evidence-based child development programmes such as the Brainwave Trust model, and find ways to integrate these programs into school contexts.

recognise and support the role of schools as community hubs, including by actively encouraging the co-location of other social services on school sites, such as health services and programmes that support parents

Teen parents need to be able to continue their education if they and their children are to escape long-term negative outcomes.

Labour will:

work to expand the availability of education provision for young mothers, including by –

* consulting on increasing the age of eligibility for enrolment in teen parent units,
* reviewing what other forms of support could be provided to adult learners with young children seeking to participate in secondary school education
* restoring funding to the Training Incentive Allowance (see *Reforming welfare* above).

Parenting, care and vulnerable children

Becoming a good parent is a skill that can and must be learnt. At the same time, too many New Zealand children are still at risk in dangerous family and care situations. Vulnerable children need to be identified early, and measures put in place to prevent harm coming to them.

Labour will:

adopt the current government’s Action Plan for Vulnerable Children

ensure there is a new mums’ programme in every District Health Board, targeted at parents who need our support the most to give their babies the best start in life.

This programme will be focused on the most vulnerable 5% of mums and families. Midwives, health professionals, CYFs and even the police will be able to refer mums to the programme at any point in their pregnancy, but will be encouraged to do so as early as possible.

Professionals will then work together to ensure the family has a co-ordinated group of services working with them, and they will also automatically receive extended Well Child/Tamariki Ora visits (see below).

We envisage that all babies born to mothers in the new mums’ programme will transition to the regional children’s team to ensure that all local agencies are working together to support those families on an ongoing basis.

Labour will:

Labour will extend Well Child/Tamariki Ora visits so that our families in the most need get extra support before baby even arrives.

We want to extend visits from organisations like Plunket, so that they’re providing intensive support before baby is even born, and ongoing support for as long as they need after the baby is born.

In particular, we will fund two prenatal visits from Plunket (or an alternative Well Child provider for those families who choose this) targeted to those families who need it. This will be in addition to the seven ‘core’ visits and the additional discretionary postnatal visits that are currently funded. We will also give Well Child/Tamariki Ora providers the flexibility to offer an additional discretionary visit during the initial postnatal period.

This will allow the mother and parents to discuss any concerns they might have, address potential issues like alcohol and drug use, and help them to prepare their home for the arrival of their baby, including ensuring they have access to a safe, dry sleeping environment.

But more than this, evidence tells us that early contact with the same nurse, and in the home, helps to form a relationship of trust, and has been found to have really positive results not just for the baby, but for the whole family and whanau.

About 18,000 pregnant women a year will receive these prenatal visits and follow-up support.

Labour will:

establish an expert advisory group to explore ways to improve the experience of children in state care.

New Zealand currently has almost 5,000 children in state care, many of whom will cycle through multiple foster homes in their lifetime. Some will never return to their families, and we should be seeking ways to ensure that they greater certainty, stability, safety and quality of care.

Labour will:

conduct a review of the Children, Young Person’s and their Families Act 1989 with a view to rewriting the law to better reflect the needs of children and their families in the 21st century

allow income management to be used as a tool by social agencies where there are known child protection issues and it is considered in the best interests of the child, especially where there are gambling, drug and alcohol issues involved.

New Zealand’s adoption laws need an upgrade.

Labour will:

update our adoption laws in line with the Law Commission’s review of adoption legislation.

Children and families’ health

There are many areas where health services provision makes a huge difference to outcomes for children and families

Labour will:

introduce free GP visits and prescriptions for children up to age 13, as announced in Budget 2014, and ensure free after hours primary care for children is properly implemented

Budget 2014 allocated funding to extend free provision of GP visits and prescriptions for children up to age 13. However, the policy does not come into effect until 2015. Labour has decided to implement this policy after the election.

We will also make GP visits and prescriptions free for people aged 65 and older, make GP visits, prescriptions, and dental care free for pregnant women, and extend and improve the Care Plus programme so that a further 250,000 New Zealanders with long-term health conditions can get free GP visits and a wellness plan.

Labour will also increase funding for Youth One Stop Shops and other programmes directed at young people through the Primary Health Boost and the billion dollar funding allowance.

Health services are core to generating good outcomes for children and young families. As part of Labour’s Best Start policies, Labour will improve the ways maternal and early childhood health are delivered:

Labour will:

require District Health Boards to set a key performance indicator for pregnant women to be booked in for an appointment with a midwife or another Lead Maternity Carer for an antenatal assessment by 10 weeks gestation.

The earlier in pregnancy that medical and social assessment can take place, the sooner intervention can occur if it is necessary. There are many other medical and social conditions that can have profound detrimental effects on both the mother and foetus, and if they are picked up early subsequent intervention can markedly improve the outcomes.

This is particularly important given the increasing incidence of obesity, diabetes, and other non-communicable diseases in New Zealand

Ten week assessments will also enable the early identification of vulnerable mothers, as soon as possible during pregnancy. This identification can then be followed by appropriate intensive wrap-around services (see *Parenting, care and vulnerable children* above).

This will be introduced as a national health target, starting with a target of 80% by 2015 and lifting to 90% by 2017.

Labour will:

ensure ‘quadruple enrolment’ for baby at the time of birth with a GP, Well Child/Tamariki Ora provider, the immunisation register, and dental health.

It will help to ensure that all children are identified, and linkages made between the family and the health system right from the very start. Quadruple enrolment will also make it easier to monitor child immunisation and the health services that a child receives during their preschool years.

Labour will:

ensure all women have access to free antenatal classes, with a focus on first time mums and those who would benefit from them the most.

There is good evidence showing that women who attend antenatal classes have better birth experiences and long-term outcomes. Antenatal education can improve bonding or attachment, breastfeeding rates, parenting self-efficacy and parenting knowledge. It is also an important channel for the delivery of important health messages, such as safe sleeping and immunisation.

Antenatal classes are also recognised as one of the best settings to support vulnerable women. Unfortunately vulnerable groups, including teenage parents, are much less likely to attend antenatal classes. In a 2009 study only 10% of participants were of Māori ethnicity and less than one per cent were of Pacific ethnicity.

A clear and unequivocal commitment to all first time mothers having access to free quality antenatal classes is an important prerequisite for reaching these under-served groups.

We will work with DHBs to ensure these programmes are delivered by trained adult educators, and that they are relevant to mums in their community.

Housing policy that helps families keep healthy and feel secure at home

Warm, dry, secure and adequate housing makes a difference to families. It reduces costs, creates less stress, reduces infectious disease and saves kids from moving schools and neighbourhoods so frequently it undermines their education.

Labour will:

retain income related rents in state houses and continue to invest in the acquisition and maintenance of state houses

introduce a healthy homes guarantee so that every rental home in New Zealand is a healthy home that meets minimum standards of insulation and efficient heating.

All rental housing (state, social and private sector) will be required to meet minimum health and safety standards in regard to insulation and effective non-polluting heating.

Landlords will need to make a declaration, or guarantee as part of any new tenancy agreement that their property complies with the standards.

Housing supply in New Zealand is in crisis across the board, and this crisis drives up costs for everyone, including families with children. Simple market solutions are simply not working.

Labour will:

increase rates of home-ownership through KiwiBuild, which will build 100,000 affordable homes over ten years.

See Labour’s *Housing* policy for further details.

Eliminating violence against women and children

Labour is deeply concerned with the high incidence of family, domestic and sexual violence in New Zealand. It is overwhelmingly women and children who are the victims of domestic and sexual violence, and Labour’s policy will recognise the gendered aspect of this violence.

Sexual violence

New Zealand’s rate of sexual violence and the lack of support and justice available to most survivors is unacceptable. Sexual violence is preventable, and Labour is committed to eliminating sexual violence in New Zealand.

Family and domestic violence

New Zealand has a serious and worrying problem with family and domestic violence and the consequences of this violence are huge. There are costs to individuals, families and the community.

The current situation

The level of violence against women and children – sexual and domestic - is unacceptable and out of line with many similar countries. The social and economic costs of this violence are huge – to individuals, to families and to our whole community.

On average 35 New Zealanders are killed in family violence and family violence related homicides every year. One in three New Zealand women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. 20,000 women and children needed the help of Women’s Refuge last year alone.

As of 2012 the Police no longer record domestic violence crime statistics meaning the data is poor. However family and sexual violence is clearly an increasing problem. The number of family violence investigations in 2012/13 was 89,952 up from around 84,000 the year before. Levels of sexual assault are rising significantly and are at their highest point since the current system of reporting began in 1996 at 3,739 in 2013 compared to 2,732 in 2008. The figures underplay the significance of the numbers because of the very low level of reporting of crime against women and children.

Children often suffer twice over – as victims of violence against them and witnessing or experiencing the consequences of violence against close family members – often their mother. The harm and the link to intergenerational violence is unacceptable.

The deaths, the harm, the ongoing consequences of violence cannot continue. It is irresponsible when the extent of the problem is known and it is clearly preventable. All people in our country have the right to live free of violence and control.

New Zealand has a moral and international obligation to ensure women and children are safe and free from violence. New Zealand’s latest review of our progress in implementing our obligations under CEDAW and our latest UN Periodic review both raised issues with our high and increasing levels of violence against women and with the low levels of reporting and conviction. Concerns about lack of data were also raised.

Action is needed to reduce the high rates of violence. This requires both an immediate response and a long term coordinated plan.

Labour’s plan

Labour will take decisive action with the aim of being world leading in eliminating violence against women and children. Leadership will be from the Prime Minister to ensure the seriousness of this undertaking and to prioritise action being taken. Responsibility will be with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to ensure that there is a whole of Government approach.

We will invest $60 million in additional funding over four years and redirect existing funding to support immediate initiatives for eliminating violence against women and children. In addition we will commit to a long term, collaborative approach involving all relevant Government agencies and non-government agencies to increase resources in the sector in future. We will focus on three key areas: prevention, support services and justice.

Labour will:

Provide leadership to eliminate violence against women and children from the Prime Minister down, with the lead agency being the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Adopt a collaborative, resourced, long-term New Zealand Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children in consultation with other parties and the sector.

Provide $60 million over four years for family and sexual violence to support front line services, primary prevention, and education. This includes increased support for transitional housing.

Reform the justice system to provide real justice to survivors while protecting the right to be presumed innocent. This includes providing specialist training.

Review prosecution guidelines to ensure Police appropriately and consistently arrest and charge offenders, and review the operation of Protection Orders.

Preventing Violence Against Women and Children

Tackling awareness

The highly successful “It’s Not Okay” campaign has been scaled back to just $500,000 per year. Labour will implement a national awareness programme targeted at reducing sexual and domestic violence, building on the evidence from the “It’s Not OK” campaign.

Ensuring adequate and stable funding

Current resources for tackling sexual or domestic violence fail to provide a stable base for sexual and domestic violence services. Labour will provide sustainable funding to build a nationwide network of violence prevention services, including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services.

Greater resources are needed at the source to prevent sexual or domestic violence occurring rather than simply dealing with it at the bottom of the cliff. Effort must be put, not just into the victims of offences, but also into their potential offenders. We will increase resources into primary prevention for sexual violence.

Education

Many of those who are subject to sexual or domestic violence at a young age are not aware their situation is unusual until they learn about normal and respectful relationships. We will have an immediate focus on schools, ensuring that all students receive specialist sexuality and relationship education. There will be a minimum standard of sex and sexuality education in the curriculum for all state funded schools – including about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

In addition there is inadequate resourcing to ensure all of our young people have access to quality rape prevention education. Labour will increase and secure funding for rape prevention education with an immediate focus on schools and girls self-defence.

Supporting Front-Line Services

Ensuring adequate and stable funding

We will restore funding to cuts made to Women’s Refuge, family violence programmes, rape and sexual violence survivor support services and increase ongoing resources into the sector.

In 2011 Women’s Refuge lost $700,000 in funding for its crisis centres as a result of changes in funding rules and with the establishment of Whanau Ora a further $11 million was redirected from family violence programmes towards its establishment leaving projects like Te Rito family violence network facing a severe loss of funding. Labour will undo these cuts by investing additional resources into the sexual and family violence sectors to provide an adequate level of funding going forward.

We will also build on successful services under Whanau Ora dealing with family violence, and violence against women and girls, and respond to any problems and unmet needs created by the new funding model by once again establishing an ongoing funding mechanism to ensure security of service provision.

We will work with the sector to create a well-funded and resourced support network for survivors of sexual and domestic violence, beginning with initial support when sexual violence is reported through to meeting long-term needs. Support must be provided not just for those who have directly experienced sexual and domestic violence but also for children who witness and are affected by violence.

Victims of violence often have to rely only on voluntary organisations or limited ACC funded counselling to deal with abuse. We will ensure there are adequate ongoing counselling services for all victims of sexual and domestic violence including children who have witnessed domestic violence.

It is important that measures to tackle violence do not put the entire onus on dealing with the victim rather than the person responsible for the crime. For men who want to access help, but haven’t entered our criminal justice system, it is far too difficult to obtain support. We will continue to fund specialist front-line services for offenders.

Workforce development

As the Glenn Inquiry has shown, while we have some excellent people in the public service who tackle domestic violence, some victims have had inconsistent treatment or dealt with staff who did not understand their situation. We will ensure specialist training on violence against women and children, with an emphasis on the power dynamics of violence being provided to members of the judiciary, court staff, police, counsel for the child, counsel, court appointed experts (such as psychologists) and government officials (WINZ, Housing New Zealand).

Housing

There is insufficient emergency housing for women when leaving abusive relationships. Resolving this must be a priority for Housing New Zealand and related agencies. We will fund a Pilot Programme for transitional housing for women and their children leaving domestic violence.

Reforming Criminal Justice

Labour recognises that the response to violence requires action in the criminal justice system as well as in public health and education. This needs to be a considered response and as such we will allow the Law Commission to complete its review on alternative trial mechanisms, including the establishment of a specialist sexual violence court.

Sexual Violence Reforms

Labour will implement reforms to improve the criminal justice system’s approach towards sexual violence, in order to provide real justice to survivors whilst protecting the right to be presumed innocent. Labour will consider the following reforms following the Law Commission review on alternative trial mechanisms:

* changes to ensure that victims are not put on trial, including to the “rape shield” and cross-examination rules.
* allowing complainants to adopt alternative trial processes, such as a restorative process, for sexual offence cases.
* the establishment of specialist sexual violence courts. This will include specialist training on the dynamics of violence for all judges and staff involved with the court, including counsel. There will also be specialist support agencies funded to support women through the process.
* amending the definition of consent in instances of sexual violation to ensure it does not impose an unfair burden on victims of violence.

Family Violence

Training to ensure adequate understanding of violence is required not just for sexual violence but also for domestic and family violence. We will ensure all members of the judiciary, court staff, counsel for child, counsel, court appointed experts, and New Zealand police receive specialist training on the dynamics of violence.

As the Family Violence Death Review Committee found half of intimate partner violence deaths take place during a planned or actual separation. Many victims of family violence deaths already have protection orders against the offender for them or their children at the time of their death. Labour will review the operation of Protection Orders.

Arrest and Prosecution

While there has been improvement over the last two decades far too few domestic and family violence cases are adequately followed through from complaint to prosecution, more work is needed in this area to ensure consistency for all victims of violence.

Labour will review prosecution guidelines to ensure New Zealand Police appropriately and consistently arrest and charge domestic violence offenders.

We will further ensure the Police are adequately resourced and trained and have embedded the changes recommended by the 2007 Bazley report on police conduct, and adopt a focus on prevention and community safety

In addition we will ensure specialist Adult Sexual Assault teams and Child Protection Services are properly resourced.

We will ensure the data on arrests and prosecution for family, domestic, and sexual violence are collected and made public.

Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children

This issue requires leadership, namely political leadership at the highest level. It is a hidden issue in our society and victims suffer stigma and shame. It is a complex issue involving power dynamics and requires a holistic and meaningful approach from Government.

This will require a long term unified commitment by politicians, women’s and community organisations, government agencies and New Zealanders. This country ought to be a world leader in seeking to end domestic and sexual violence.

Labour will build a consensus across the specialist sectors and political parties for a long-term adequately resourced plan to eliminate domestic and sexual violence. Our plan will consider the 12 year, multi-million dollar cross party approach announced in Australia National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children and the UK’s 10 year “A Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls” Strategy.

National action plans are increasingly common internationally. Other countries with action plans include Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

The concluding observations of the latest United Nations review of New Zealand’s progress on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended the development “of a national comprehensive strategy to prevent and address all forms of violence against children” and CEDAW recommended further measures to address violence against women.

How it would work

A New Zealand action plan would set out the overarching goals for the country to achieve to eliminate violence against women and children. These could include: preventing violence, providing front line services, ensuring the justice system works for victims, and driving cultural change.

Leading this issue from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet rather than the Ministry of Social Development will send a powerful message to government and the public that it is being taken seriously.

The precise goals, the initiatives to achieve them, and how progress will be measured would all be set by the plan in collaboration with other parties and the sector. It would see Ministers and their departments working collaboratively and reporting back to Cabinet on its progress.

A New Zealand Action Plan by its nature will create a robust system for reporting and showing progress in reducing levels of violence against women and children. New Zealand has poor reporting of violence towards women and children and improving reporting is already an area Labour is focussed on. In creating this plan we will deal with concerns raised by Women’s Refuge and others about data collection and how changed reporting minimises the extent of the problem.

An Action Plan provides opportunity for the Government to work together with other parties and, the sector to identify areas where the Government needs to act, initiatives to resolve the issues in those areas, and how to measure progress could. The plan would also provide a focus on prevention and culture change.

Development of the plan would identify gaps and shortages in funding to resolve family and sexual violence issues which could then be resolved through the plan. For this it could draw on the Taskforce on Sexual Violence and the Taskforce on Family Violence for evidence-based advice.

In developing the plan we will ensure that policies that deal with family and sexual violence recognise gender perspectives and are evidence based. This includes understanding the power and control dynamics of domestic violence.

In addition we will ensure that our policies recognise the needs and issues of all people affected by domestic and sexual violence; for example by providing for the particular needs of disabled women, ethnic/migrant women and Maori women. This includes ensuring organisations which specialise in assisting these groups, such as Shakti, are adequately resourced.

Other Measures

Labour will build on the existing work and the expertise of the domestic and sexual violence sector. There are a number of areas where we do not need to reinvent the wheel.

We will immediately consider the recommendations of the Sexual Violence Taskforce that have not been implemented and the report of the Social Services Select Committee inquiry into specialist sexual violence services, and implement those recommendations where accepted. We will also prioritise analysing and responding to the recommendations of the Family Violence Death Review Committee.