Social Sector Research Directions

The Social Sector Research Directions describe areas of research interest and importance to government

These government social sector research directions describe in broad terms the types of knowledge and information required by government social-sector agencies as they make informed decisions about improving outcomes for people, families, whānau and communities.

Superu's legislation triggered our involvement in the identification of these research directions[1]. We have extensively engaged with government agencies to identify a wide range of evidence needs in the sector. We asked people to think about evidence which the sector needs **now** and in the **future**. We were particularly interested in *sector-wide* evidence needs, not just evidence needs which apply to one agency.

A summary of our consultation

- 14 workshops with government agencies (mix of senior and junior staff in policy and research)
- Cross-sector forum with 70 policy and research staff
- Feedback from Departmental Science Advisors
- Feedback from Social Sector Board Chief Executives and Deputy Chief Executives
- Written consultation with agencies to identify research underway, gaps, and prioritisation
- Meeting with Social Sector Deputy Chief Executives
- Meetings with some social sector NGOs
- Meeting with Superu Whānau Reference Group.

Overview of findings

A number of high-level research areas were identified, as summarised in Figure One (page 2) and described in more detail from pages 2-21. More work will be required to identify research topics and questions within each area. Finally, individual social sector researchers and agencies will need to set priorities based on their own strategic requirements.

Note that there is a separate, specific set of Family Violence Research and Evaluation Directions which can be found on the Superu website at superu.govt.nz/famviolence.
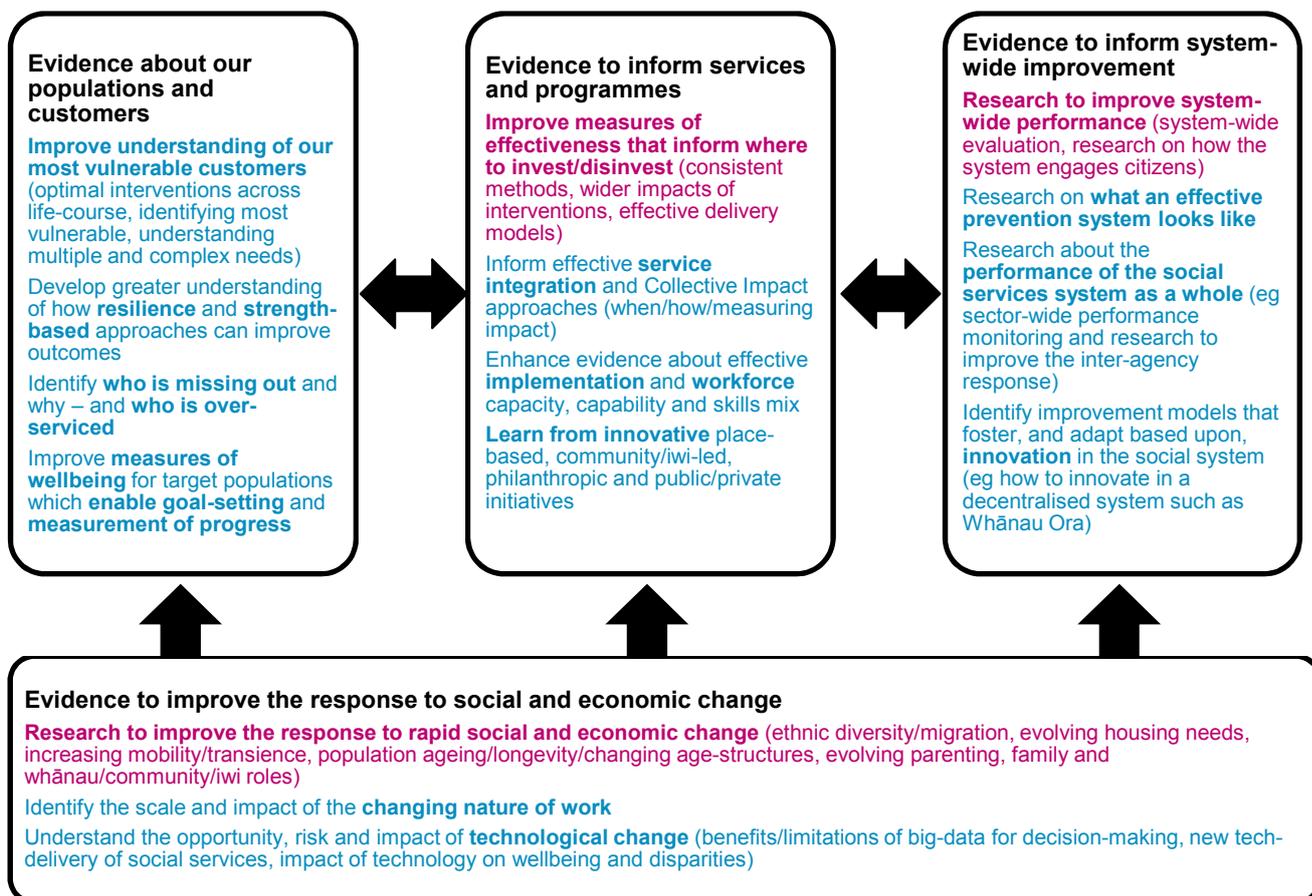
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[1] The Families Commission Amendment Act 2014 states in 8A 1a) "in order to perform its monitoring, evaluation function, the Commission has the following additional functions: to identify evidence and research that will assist in determining or achieving the Government's policies and priorities in the social sector".

What next?

Superu will use the research directions to inform its own research programme. We will also use this document as the basis for conversations with agencies and researchers about level of 'fit' between their social research portfolios and the directions framework.

Figure 1: High-level research areas

Urgent priorities and other important long-term priorities

Evidence about our populations and customers

Improve understanding of our most vulnerable customers (optimal interventions across life-course, identifying most vulnerable, understanding multiple and complex needs)

Develop greater understanding of how **resilience** and **strength-based** approaches can improve outcomes

Identify **who is missing out** and why – and **who is over-serviced**

Improve **measures of wellbeing** for target populations which **enable goal-setting** and **measurement of progress**

Evidence to inform services and programmes

Improve measures of effectiveness that inform where to invest/disinvest (consistent methods, wider impacts of interventions, effective delivery models)

Inform effective **service integration** and Collective Impact approaches (when/how/measuring impact)

Enhance evidence about effective **implementation** and **workforce** capacity, capability and skills mix

Learn from innovative place-based, community/iwi-led, philanthropic and public/private initiatives

Evidence to inform system-wide improvement

Research to improve system-wide performance (system-wide evaluation, research on how the system engages citizens)

Research on **what an effective prevention system looks like**

Research about the **performance of the social services system as a whole** (eg sector-wide performance monitoring and research to improve the inter-agency response)

Identify improvement models that foster, and adapt based upon, **innovation** in the social system (eg how to innovate in a decentralised system such as Whānau Ora)

Evidence to improve the response to social and economic change

Research to improve the response to rapid social and economic change (ethnic diversity/migration, evolving housing needs, increasing mobility/transience, population ageing/longevity/changing age-structures, evolving parenting, family and whānau/community/iwi roles)

Identify the scale and impact of the **changing nature of work**

Understand the opportunity, risk and impact of **technological change** (benefits/limitations of big-data for decision-making, new tech-delivery of social services, impact of technology on wellbeing and disparities)

Evidence to improve understanding of our populations and customers

Note that 'clients' are referred to in different ways across the social sector, and the word 'customer' has increasingly been used to refer to 'customers of government' rather than 'customers of an agency'. Customers also tend to be distinguished from (though they often overlap with) 'populations of interest' or 'citizens' who may or may not be engaged with social services.

Research Area 1. Improve information about vulnerable populations

Although most decision-makers in the social sector understand the types of vulnerable populations that use social services, a more sophisticated diagnosis of vulnerability will help inform targeting of resources and tailoring of services to match population needs. A variety of factors influence the on-going need for social services. An immediate policy response which addresses 'surface level' needs may not address the full range of interlinked needs and causal factors which make clients vulnerable. There is a need to advance our understanding of the dynamics of vulnerability. This includes transitions into,

and away from, vulnerability, interconnected needs, and the relationship between vulnerability and transitions through the social services system.

Some people may require interventions across their entire lifespan, whereas others will benefit from a smaller number of interventions targeted at key windows of opportunity in their life. Opportunities will vary depending on the context but early intervention tends to yield greater long-term benefits. We know that people's lives are complicated and filled with unexpected setbacks and successes. Rather than relying on 'snapshots' which describe vulnerability at a particular point in time, decision-makers need evidence which describes the long-term consequences of acting, or failing to act, across the life-course. There are a number of evidence needs in this area which will vary depending on the issues being tackled and the populations involved. Evidence needs in this area are described below.

Although we describe a variety of specific evidence needs below, in reality these are closely interconnected and not mutually exclusive. For example, identifying how customers transition through social services is connected with identifying windows of opportunity. Pursuing research on one will advance knowledge of the other.

1.1 Identifying **windows of opportunity** through improved research on the life-course (i.e. research on human development aimed at informing policy and practice). Evidence should inform when/where/how to intervene *early* to improve later outcomes. There are a number of windows of opportunity where possible outcomes diverge. Some people appear to adapt and flourish during periods of transition whereas others are less resilient. Examples include transitions in education and employment, first pregnancy, and first offences. Identifying windows of opportunity requires good life-course information which highlights pathways in and out of vulnerability, as well as pathways that can build resilience. Decision-makers need to know when to address problems and within what context, before they happen or prevent escalation of problems – and to do so in a way which measurably enhances outcomes for the population of interest. Using life-course as a framework will require agencies to think outside of their normal frame of policy-reference – it requires acting early, acting on transition, and acting together for the benefit of the customer.

1.2 Connected to the above, is research on the **customer experience as they move through different social services over time**. Customer-centred information, such as customer-journey mapping and service experience information enhances existing service level information about clients. If this information is customer-centric (rather than describing agency processes) and presented at a social-sector level, this will help us understand interconnections between the use of different social services 'pain points' for customers, duplication of services, and how the mix and sequence of interventions can be optimised from the customer's point of view. Combined with 1.1. above, decision-makers are looking for sector engagement trajectories from a young age (for example, Corrections have recently added offenders' CYF histories into predictive risk modelling).

1.3 Identifying **populations who are vulnerable for significant periods of their life**. Despite progress in the social sector towards understanding children at higher risk of poor outcomes as young adults, and progress in modelling forward-liability in particular parts of the social sector, information on populations most in need across the social system is still emerging.

1.4 An improved understanding of the interrelated **causal determinants of social disadvantage**. Understanding how to improve social outcomes requires an understanding of how causal factors are interconnected. For example, family violence may be caused by both social determinants (eg housing, education, income inequality) and social harms (eg alcohol/drugs). Research should provide a better

understanding of the consequences of exposure to different types of risk, a clearer understanding of interlinked causal drivers (rather than indicators) of disadvantage, and suggest nuanced policy and service responses which address causal determinants. Often this will require quantitative research with suitable comparison groups to help isolate the impact of particular drivers – so far the social sector has largely used quasi-experimental evaluations using linked administrative datasets to assess the impact of interventions – similar methodologies could be used in causation research.

1.5 Connected to the above is the need for **improved information about clients with multiple and complex needs**. For example, do we understand what is driving increased reporting of multiple health conditions? What works for clients with multiple and complex needs? And should we seek different goals for these clients compared with others? Research should provide information about aspirations, realistic outcomes, and interventions which work for clients with high and interrelated needs. The Productivity Commission report on *More Effective Social Services* identified that clients with multiple and complex needs are under-served.

1.6 **Sources of strength for different groups and how to build self-efficacy among vulnerable populations**. This includes identifying existing capability of emotional, social, cultural and physical resources at an individual, family and community level, and understanding how to leverage off these capabilities to improve outcomes. Research should focus on building culturally relevant evidence-based interventions which build upon the strengths of individuals, families, whānau and communities.

1.7 Evidence about the broader **social and economic context** surrounding individuals, including improved information about family, whānau, and community networks. Social norms and behaviour in the community can impact on outcomes for children in care. Information on local social and economic conditions surrounding clients/populations of interest enables a more holistic policy and service response. For example, if public health resources are devoted to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, the intervention will have a different impact on populations living in 'food deserts' compared to populations living in areas with ample supply of fruit and vegetables. Decision-makers need models and evidence which provide a suitable level of detail about the community and economic context (as well as information about individuals and families).

1.8 **Segmentation of populations into identifiable, actionable and meaningful subpopulations**. Segmentation would differentiate populations by their needs and aspirations to inform targeting of relevant services (from a menu of services across the social system). The social sector is currently exploring customer-relevant outcome measures and measures of risk – particularly for vulnerable children and young people. Risk profiles associated with segments should have clear explanations about the degree of uncertainty associated with them, and the distribution within them.

1.9 Information about **emerging and potentially vulnerable population groups**. This may include families facing crises, vulnerable elderly, populations vulnerable to homelessness and transience, migrants and refugees, and obese populations. These populations may not be prioritised using Social Investment tools based upon current data. Understanding emerging vulnerable population groups will help decision-makers prepare for vulnerability which is not a current area of focus for Government, but could be in the near future.

Research Area 2. Develop a greater understanding of resilience and strength-based approaches (also – can resilience be transmitted to the next generation?)

This research area is connected to the previous area, and calls for the development of a wider and deeper understanding of how policy and services can be designed to build resilience and identify effective strength-based interventions.

Intergenerational research

Most families draw upon their own resources and benefit from universal services in a way which reduces risk and builds resilience for their children. Evidence suggests that the children of vulnerable families can benefit from targeted programmes aimed at parents/caregivers, such as effective parenting programmes. There is also a body of research demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of social harm, such as domestic violence and alcohol and substance abuse – as well as research about intergenerational transmission of resilience, such as through the promotion of Māori language among parents and children.

Decision-makers are interested in intergenerational effects which influence long-term outcomes, but are amenable to interventions. Policies, programmes, and community services may target positive intergenerational change through increasing support and exchange between generations.

Intergenerational research requires rich information about the context of people's lives to inform the nature and extent of interventions aimed at 'breaking the cycle' of disadvantage. The evidence should support the case for intervention, the outcomes targeted, and the design of programmes and services aimed at improving intergenerational outcomes.

Existing international and national longitudinal studies can provide some information to inform policy and services aimed at improving intergenerational outcomes, but each study has a particular focus and may not be able to address some key policy questions in New Zealand, such as how to build family and whānau resilience, how to improve social services for parents and their children, and outcomes for families in financial hardship. It is possible that longitudinal analysis of linked administrative datasets, such as the Integrated Data Infrastructure, holds promise for policy-relevant studies of intergenerational effects among vulnerable and 'hard-to-reach' populations. This is particularly the case when 'family units' can be constructed within datasets, and when that data can be linked with further information from the Census and large-scale social surveys. Specific evidence needs include:

1.1 **Bringing together existing evidence from longitudinal data analysis** – including further analysis, interpretation, and knowledge activation to provide a coherent viewpoint about what is known, what is unknown, and what could be developed to build resilience and minimise risk. This knowledge would build evidence about the extent of existing evidence for particular areas of interest for the government social sector – for example, the potential for interventions targeted at parents and caregivers of vulnerable children.

1.2 **Transmission of resilience** – factors which promote transmission of cultural heritage, knowledge, language, and education to the next generation and the link to well-being. This is especially important for Māori, Pacific and Asian populations and other groups who rely on their ethnic culture for well-being. Some interventions in the cultural, conservation and community service areas deliberately target intergenerational participation. Research could identify effective interventions which foster positive intergenerational exchange.

1.3 **Examining geographical areas where disadvantage appears to cluster over generations** – identifying place-based approaches aimed at reducing entrenched disadvantage in a particular locality.

1.4 **Identifying intergenerational costs and benefits of interventions** – existing cost-benefit analysis may not take account of the intergenerational impacts of interventions. Evidence-based intergenerational impacts would augment existing policy analysis and encourage stewardship when designing interventions.

Strength-based interventions

With the growing focus on self-directed support and self-management of disability and long-term conditions, there is increasing interest in identifying and building on the strengths and capacities of those supported by services, as a means to help them resolve problems and deliver their own solutions. Strengths-based approaches concentrate on the inherent strengths of individuals, families, groups and organisations, deploying personal strengths to aid recovery and empowerment.

Many are of the view that use of strengths-based approaches will be instrumental in successfully shifting the balance of care, and lead to development of services that are focused on prevention and independence. This could challenge social services' historical focus on clients' deficiencies to a focus on possibilities and solutions.

1.5 **Identify effective strength-based interventions and how they can be implemented in practice** – many researchers have generated potentially effective strengths-based interventions in social work, but the gap has tended to be around the systematic application and implementation of such interventions. There is also a need for further evaluations which can identify the most effective approaches. Evaluations relying on government administrative sources alone are unlikely to provide suitable monitoring and evaluation data – because often these sources draw upon clients' needs to address crises or support, which may lead towards deficit analysis.

Research Area 3. Identify who is missing out on services and who is over-serviced (and why)

Social Investment requires information to understand the needs of vulnerable people and the services they receive. Progress in this area has increased as Social Investment models are rolled out across the sector. However, further evidence describing how needs and provision match or differ, and the reasons for those differences, will help inform targeting and the redesign of services to make them more 'reachable'.

There is recognition that many of those most in need of social services miss out on the very services they require. There are also issues associated with completion rates across programmes. This could be due to low cultural competency, ineffective services or high indirect costs of participation. It is possible that evaluations overestimate the benefits of services if they examine the effectiveness of services only for clients who fully engage (without addressing those who missed out).

Robust data, mapping the needs of target populations, is needed. For example, data on those who are not current clients but could be, should be, or will be and also understanding how much existing service provision reaches those needs. In addition, it is likely that some groups of the population are over-serviced and receive more intervention than their needs require. Some of those participating in targeted programmes would have achieved similar outcomes in the absence of intervention (sometimes referred to as 'deadweight' effort). Quantifying, or geo-spatial mapping, the scale of differences between need and provision across the social sector, combined with a qualitative understanding of

the reasons for those differences, should enable decision-makers to prioritise efforts to improve access for particular populations or localities.

3.1 The evidence need in this area involves **a more consistent approach to mapping out who is missing out on services and why**. Pursuing this evidence need will have operational implications. For example, sector-wide agreement about the type of information collected from clients in receipt of social services. This is likely to involve information which is more comprehensive than basic demographic information alone, so further discussions about privacy may be required.

Research Area 4. Improve measures of well-being for target populations which enable goal-setting and assessment of progress

Goal setting for social sector

There is a desire among decision-makers for common measures which evaluate the progress of the social sector as a whole using population outcome information. At the moment there is a fragmented approach to measuring social outcomes. Agreement about the goals of the social system (as captured for example by the Better Public Service targets[2]) should be translated into commonly agreed measures of progress, which would encourage further collaboration across agencies. Working backwards from agreed goals would help identify the optimal mix of interventions required to improve population well-being. For example, a collective approach to measuring societal benefits, not only fiscal benefits arising from interventions, could allow a consistent approach to the data used in the Treasury's Cost-Benefit Tool. Well-being measures should be developed, based on outcomes that matter for different segments of the population and are tailored to life-course stage and degree of vulnerability. Examples of this approach trialled in Budget 2016 will be developed further as the social sector arrives at an integrated view about the customer*. In addition, customer-centric evidence can inform the tailoring of outcomes so they are appropriate for different vulnerable population groups.

Decision-makers seek social indicators which demonstrate progress towards longer term outcomes. These indicators may be used to tailor interventions or measure effectiveness in the short and medium term. Decision-makers are interested in relevant evidence-based measures which are amendable/attributable to interventions, and linked to the well-being of customers.

*An example of taking a population view of measuring long-term outcomes is being trialled through a focus on vulnerable children aged 0-5 and youth aged up to 24. Both groups of the population are areas of focus for government social sector agencies. Outcome measurement frameworks were agreed in consultation across government agencies. Population outcome measures were divided into different domains which will be used to track progress in well-being over time, including economic opportunity, education, health, safety and security and participating as citizens. Some domains will have stronger evidence measurements than others. In particular measures of child and youth engagement with community, culture and society tend to be weak and require consideration in the data collection agenda moving forwards.

Social well-being

The Stiglitz Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress in 2009 investigated the limits of GDP as an indicator of social and economic progress. The Commission argued for a broader set of measures beyond production, including health, education, environment, and personal activities. In particular, the Commission identified a need to measure and assess domains which impact quality of life. There are various domains where quality social well-being data is difficult to obtain, but the social sector particularly struggles to obtain up-to-date information about social connectedness, political voice, and safety. Existing measures are often inadequate

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[2] https://www.ssc.govt.nz/bps-results-for-nzers

because they are not based on the evolving needs and aspirations of New Zealanders, are too infrequent, generate inadequate sample sizes restricting local level analysis, or because the quality of the data collected has flaws (for example, low response rates and partial coverage obtained through the Quality of Life survey).

Decision-makers working in population agencies are interested in culturally relevant measures of well-being and living standards (for example, whānau well-being/Pacific well-being). This could deliver a more holistic approach which takes account of a broad set of culturally specific measures of well-being. This may be increasingly important over time as New Zealand experiences increasing ethnic and cultural identity.

Even when useful data is available and comprehensively reported (for example, MSD's Social Report) it is often difficult to identify the inter-relationships between social and economic factors in order to deliver a practical understanding of how government can promote overall well-being.

There are a number of potential evidence priorities in this area, including:

4.1 **Agreeing a common set of integrated outcome goals** to increase cohesion among social sector agencies by using evidence-based indicators which are linked to improved customer well-being and are appropriate for target populations. These outcomes could be available as an agreed menu of well-being options available to decision-makers and communities.

4.2 Improving the quality and quantity of **data collection to inform Social Sector Initiatives being implemented with children and youth**. A particular focus in this area could be increased data collection (frequency and sample sizes) to support measurements of child and youth connection with parents, families, community, culture, and society.

4.3 **Investment in further measures of the social well-being of New Zealanders (including culturally relevant measures)** this would involve more data collection on living standards, quality of life, subjective well-being, and other measures tracking the well-being of New Zealanders (which may require asking all sections of the public about their aspirations and what is important for their own well-being).

4.4 **Further analysis, and use of, existing measures of social well-being** and quality of life, to determine policy and service implications.

Research Area 5. Improve evidence of local needs to build strong communities and tailor local responses

Analysis and policy/programme design in the social sector are often conducted at the national level without sufficient acknowledgment of local conditions and local needs. However, social sector agencies are currently exploring place-based approaches to investigate how Social Investment can work on the ground. Decision-makers are exploring delivery and governance models which connect central and local agencies as collaborators to test, develop, and implement place-based initiatives. Local service delivery models underway include: Social Sector Trials, Whānau Ora, Children's Teams, and local neighbourhood policing initiatives. Local level evidence has informed the design and delivery of these approaches. However, information needs to inform targeting and evaluation often become more apparent as implementation progresses.

Statistics New Zealand has local-level social, demographic and economic data. This data is available across a number of useful domains (for example, the Ministry of Education publish information on Iwi profiles). The Electoral Commission measures voter turnout and levels of participation, and some analytical work by the Treasury's Analytic and Insight

Team describes cohorts of young people within particular geographies. Most local level, social sector data is based upon Census information or related projections. National social surveys, such as the General Social Survey, have sample sizes that restrict the ability to conduct robust analysis at the local level.

Evidence needs in this area include:

5.1 **Local strengths and opportunities** – including a range of strategic and tactical information requirements such as understanding: existing local support networks, levels of civic participation, a sense of belonging and connectedness, relevant economic opportunities, and mapping skills/capability available to deliver social services. For Māori local level information may include further iwi/hapū data informing how to unlock the potential of whenua (land), whare (housing) and whānau (family) – particularly in light of Treaty settlements.

5.2 **Local fragility, risk and threats** – a whole-of-community needs-assessment which takes into account social, economic, housing and social housing, infrastructure, physical environmental factors, emergency preparedness and how these impact social service provision, including demographic, geographic and socioeconomic differences between local areas to identify those areas most at risk.

5.3 Local trajectories tailored to inform **future service/future housing demand**.

A need to share learning about the information, research and evaluation needs arising from existing and new **placed-based initiatives** is described in more detail elsewhere in this document.

Evidence to inform services and programmes

Research Area 6. Improve measures of effectiveness which inform where to invest or disinvest

Social Investment is a key priority for the whole social sector. It uses evidence to enable investment decisions that make a measurable difference to the long-term outcomes for vulnerable New Zealanders. It uses evidence to inform decisions about where and how to invest, and to monitor and evaluate effectiveness[3].

Systematically measuring the effectiveness of programmes and services for vulnerable people is a central component of Social Investment. Quantifying the differences government interventions make normally involves impact evaluations which assess outcomes for participants against a counterfactual situation. However, at present there is not a consistent approach to measuring effectiveness across the social sector. Some areas, such as welfare and corrections have interventions and data which enable a consistent programme of evaluations assessing impact, whereas other areas such as community investment, education, and place-based interventions have only emerging evidence. Developing a more consistent approach to impact-evaluations needs to acknowledge the variable nature of interventions and data across the social sector. Furthermore new and innovative programmes – such as Whānau Ora – which are not yet fully established, may require a different approach to assessing effectiveness. A 'one size fits all' approach to impact evaluations is unlikely to work but developing a consistent approach to evaluation does not preclude the need for flexible approaches to methodology.

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[3] For more discussion about 'Standards of Evidence' see:
http://www.superu.govt.nz/publication/in_focus_standards_of_evidence

The sector recognises the need to develop an improved understanding of what works, for whom, and in what circumstances. Advances in the coverage of linked administrative data holds promise for developing a more consistent and comprehensive approach to evaluating effectiveness. Increased data availability should allow for more impact-evaluations which, when combined with targeted qualitative evaluations, can foster an improved understanding about the effectiveness of interventions.

All of the following characteristics are important for good evaluations of effectiveness.

6.1 A focus on **developing consistent approaches to measures and methods** used to assess the impact of interventions – for example, agreed impact ratings across the social sector which enable decision-makers to assess how confident they can be about the size of impact. This may require tools or guidance which facilitate this comparison. A lack of consistency impedes the ability to allocate resources towards effective interventions. System-wide learning requires the publication of effect sizes with descriptions about the type of programme, the costs, and the distribution of outcomes. Furthermore, evaluations should also take a consistent approach to quantifying the impacts of services and programmes towards Better Public Service targets.

6.2 A focus on **developing culturally relevant measures of effectiveness** which differentiate how effectiveness is defined in different cultural settings and evaluation purposes.

6.3 Evaluation is often focused on new programmes and pilots to make a business case which informs scaling. A focus on **applying measures of effectiveness to the existing stock of programmes** to inform allocation of resources towards effective interventions and away from duplicative, ineffective or harmful programmes. Those writing and interpreting evaluation reports should make clear the difference between measuring effectiveness in a pilot setting compared with an existing service setting. Pilots test efficacy which may, or may not, be an indication of effectiveness when implemented more widely.

6.4 **Understanding why services have been effective**. Measures of effectiveness should not only focus on the programme itself, but on understanding the impact of those involved on the ground and delivery processes. Investigations which find out *why* a service has worked or not involve an understanding of the cultural and local context, and the processes and logistics used during implementation.

6.5 Social Investment also requires information on costs so that resources can be directed towards cost-effective interventions. This requires a focus on **a consistent approach to the collection of Unit-Cost information**, based on up-to-date information, so that interventions can provide information about Return on Investment. Costs should not only focus on the fiscal costs but include other indirect costs, such as the costs to citizens, for example, childcare/transport or opportunity costs.

6.6 A focus on **uptake rates and measuring selection effects** – which enable decision-makers to understand the nature of the types of people who take part and fully participate compared with the intended target population. This information can inform efforts to increase access and equity for populations in need.

6.7 A focus on understanding **the full distribution of outcomes and not just the 'average'**, and timing of those outcomes, among service/programme participants. This includes the identification of participants where the programme may be ineffectual or even harmful. This may require increased follow-up contact with programme participants.

6.8 A focus on **continuous improvement and multiple feedback loops** which allows evaluations to be compared against a baseline, but developed to systematically capture learnings as interventions are progressed. This involves cost-effective monitoring and evaluation (particularly at the development stages of interventions). Some describe this as **'real-time' evaluation**.

6.9 Developing the potential for **modelling, forecasting and scenario testing** which would estimate the range of possible long-term effects without the need for a large scale roll-out and long-term evaluations. This would involve applying existing data on costs and benefits, along with local information about needs and a series of realistic assumptions about implementation. Simulation modelling in New Zealand's social sector is an emerging area of practice (some research in this area is conducted by the Compass Research Centre).

In the long term there is a need to move beyond programme evaluations towards sector-wide measures of effectiveness, including evaluations which inform the optimal mix of interventions and policy settings which deliver the greatest impacts for clients. This is discussed in more detail at p19.

Research Area 7. Evidence to inform service integration and models of collaboration (a particular interest in evaluating Collective Impact)

The New Zealand government has been interested in integrated services for some time. More recently, the Productivity Commission emphasised the need for an integrated approach to service delivery for certain groups and devolution of decision-making closer to the community.

There is an existing body of local and international literature on what facilitates integrated services in terms of implementation, barriers, enablers and best practice. There is also information about theoretical models for service integration and collaboration, but limited outcome research or evaluation to conclude whom this benefits most in terms of both agencies (cost), and populations (well-being outcomes).

There is a lack of rigorous outcome evaluations of programme effectiveness around collaborative service initiatives. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether integrated services are more effective than the counterfactual. However, there are a number of provider and participant surveys, monitoring reports, and qualitative studies which indicate that integration of social services are successful.

There are a number of evidence needs in this area including:

7.1 Research **mapping the current extent of service integration** and capability to integrate throughout New Zealand. This could include information about sectors where there are further opportunities for greater collaboration, as well as areas where this is challenging, because of the nature of the service or for capacity and capability reasons.

7.2 Identifying **suitable delivery models and good practice** to inform the design and implementation of integrated services and wrap-around service delivery. This is particularly important given the current emphasis on decentralised decision-making, whānau-centred approaches, and the need to build capability based on 'what works'. This could include research about which model of integration to apply in which setting, and for which population. For example, who benefits most from a navigator or wrap-around service? This could also include research about how to address barriers to collaboration and improve service coordination.

7.3 Research about **who should deliver services**, and who is the most trusted provider in a particular community. This would explore when to use community-level integration, iwi, local-council, wrap-around, or navigation approaches.

7.4 Although monitoring reports, surveys and qualitative evaluations show that integrated social services that apply a whānau-centred approach are promising with Māori, **more rigorous outcome evaluations of whānau-centred approaches** would further support these findings.

7.5 A research programme investigating the **costs and benefits of service integration** across a range of services compared with similar non-integrated approaches. Research will inform when to integrate, for whom, and in what circumstances. This could include research about when it is appropriate to invest in service integration (and when it is not required).

7.6 **There is a particular interest in evaluating the Collective Impact approach which is increasingly being used in place-based initiatives in the social sector**.

7.7 In addition to understanding more about effective service integration, decision-makers are interested in identifying **effective models of collaboration** to design and review policy. For example, what conditions allow effective collaboration, how to develop shared goals and co-design solutions, and how to know if the collaborative approach is the best approach? How can the effectiveness of an intra-agency policy response be evaluated? Developing methodologies which isolate the causes of success in intra-agency partnerships is particularly difficult – is it the collaboration or the interventions?

Research Area 8. Enhance evidence about effective implementation and workforce capability/skills mix

Even if evidence-based programmes are funded, customers will not benefit from them if the service is not implemented well. Services received on the ground can seem quite different to the design intended by policy makers. Improved evidence-based implementation should help deliver programmes effectively. However, implementation research is not a well-developed field in New Zealand. There are a number of evidence needs in this area, including:

8.1 The development of **research which enables decision-makers to successfully interpret and adapt programmes developed overseas**. Elements of programme design that are effective and should be retained and elements which require adaption, depending on the implementation context. For example, cultural responsiveness with Māori or tailoring services for rural areas.

Those with a keen interest in implementation need to seek information about the resources required to do a good job, such as:

8.2 A robust understanding of **provider and workforce capacity and capability and the appropriate mix** of workforce skills required to deliver outcomes. This information can inform programme adaptation and identify the resources required to build/grow. For example, the *Interim Report on Modernising Child, Youth and Family* identified a requirement for an appropriate mix of different professional skills to develop the child protection workforce.

8.3 **Innovative opportunities to reach customers** outside of the normal social services setting. This could include research on the efficacy, efficiency and effectiveness of alternative delivery mechanisms, such as primary health care or social workers in schools, hospitals in prisons, using social bonds to attract access ideas from outside government or using technology to deliver remote services. These alternative

approaches tend to provide a degree of flexibility sufficient to allow for practitioner innovation.

Evidenced-based practice and policy, which adapts evidence drawn from practitioners, implies the following:

8.4 Adapting **interventions based upon the experience of practitioners** and enabling the identification of common approaches based upon 'what works' on the ground. This is likely to include rapid feedback mechanisms such as data from wearables or administrative information, and developmental evaluation to inform the implementation process. This includes the need for decision-makers in government agencies to receive, and respond to, feedback from practitioners and communities.

8.5 **Behavioural science research** which suggests how to tweak practitioner and client behaviour on the ground to effectively 'nudge' behaviour so that it can lead to improved outcomes.

8.6 Research on how to identify, attract, and retain, the best mix of **professionals required in the future social sector workforce**. This includes identification of future capability requirements and vehicles for meeting those requirements.

Research Area 9. Learn from community-led and place-based approaches

There is strong interest in learning from recent place-based initiatives which currently include Whānau Ora, Children's Teams, Social Sector Trials and the regeneration of Tamaki, with further government approaches being developed through 2016. There are also community-led examples of collaborative service design delivered entirely outside of the sphere of government, including delivery by philanthropic organisations, businesses, and local community networks.

Some decision-makers believe that communities should always be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes (as they are closest to the problems to be solved). On the other hand, there are risks associated with increased expectations on communities to provide solutions including burden, variable capacity/skills, and inconsistent service delivery. If Government moves towards a more 'bottom-up' approach, different roles will be assigned to different agents and further discussion is required around outcome specification, ensuring access, monitoring, implementation and evaluation. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach is unlikely to work given that local resources, leadership, and community-cohesion vary throughout New Zealand.

Evidence needs in this area include:

9.1 The social sector can **learn from communities that appear to punch above their weight**. Researching these examples could provide lessons for service design and delivery, foster further innovation, and inform roll-out of alternative delivery models. Much of the research should be 'applied' research using 'realistic evaluation' to determine the impact of local context and mechanisms upon outcomes. Research and evaluation should determine when lessons can, and cannot be, transferred to other localities, as well as barriers inhibiting development of successful community innovation – such as compliance costs or restrictive social service contracting mechanisms.

9.2 Practical governance and **operational learning from place-based initiatives**. This research should synthesise the findings about what has worked, what has not worked, and why, around various social sector placed-based initiatives. It is likely that evaluations of local interventions in one part of the social sector will have implications for other parts.

9.3 Iwi and the Crown are investigating a range of approaches under which iwi have greater power to determine the type of social services provision in their rohe. These approaches are likely to become increasingly important in a post-settlement environment. **Research can highlight the experience of social service provision by iwi** to provide learnings about governance, effective whānau-centred approaches, and how to improve outcomes for members.

9.4 A need for more **robust evaluations tracking the impact of community-led approaches** (which often involve collaborations between stakeholders and joined-up service delivery – including learning from Collective Impact approaches). Evaluating impact in a place-based setting may require innovative thinking about methodologies, and data collection and analysis.

9.5 Identifying **models which foster local evidence-based decision-making** – these would start by identifying 'what success looks like' at a local level and then providing evidence-based options for interventions to meet agreed outcomes. Some decision-makers we have engaged with emphasise that local communities understand their own needs better than government agencies. The highest areas of need may be identified in partnership with clients, families, whānau, and communities (with suitable governance, funding, and accountability arrangements). But well-established models which allow local decision-makers to effectively engage with relevant evidence, choose relevant social services, and evaluate progress have yet to be developed. Organisations such as RAND Europe and Dartington Social Research Unit have developed systematic models which could provide lessons for New Zealand.

A potential research need about 'how the system captures innovation and the knowledge of positive operational improvements on the ground' is described below (p23).

Evidence to inform system-wide improvement

Research Area 10. Improve measures of system effectiveness

Building an evidence base of 'what works' in the sector involves understanding interventions that improve well-being for customers – this should not be limited to a subset of outputs or outcomes of interest to those funding programmes. In the long term there is a need to move beyond programme evaluations towards system-wide measures of effectiveness, including evaluations which inform the optimal mix and sequencing of interventions, as well as the optimal policy settings, required to deliver the greatest impact for clients.

A good starting point includes a greater understanding of the wider fiscal, cultural, social and economic impacts of interventions beyond their core purpose. Programmes developed in a particular portfolio are likely to have spill-over benefits (or negative consequences) of relevance to the rest of the social sector. Linked administrative data provides opportunities to measure intervention effects on a much wider basis. For example, the Ministry of Education recently examined linked administrative data to determine the cross-government fiscal savings connected with increased qualification levels. However, this approach still represents a 'programme specific' evaluation (which describes wider impacts).

There are some complex social issues where the government funds multiple interventions involving a number of agencies and/or a large number of providers (for example, interventions in the family violence or youth crime areas). The social sector should increase its understanding of joint impacts and develop assessments of the effectiveness of whole systems that address complex social issues. Although there may be evaluations

of individual programmes, relatively little is known about the best mix and spread of interventions that may be necessary across a system, and in particular how to measure the effectiveness of the overall response. Evaluating whole systems may require investment in new methodologies. There are methodological challenges involved in drawing the boundary for this analysis – for example, should an assessment of the family violence system be interlinked with an assessment of the child protection system in order to determine the optimal sequencing and mix of interventions required to reduce family violence? Working with relevant stakeholders to reach common agreement about boundaries, interrelationships, relevant outcomes, indicators, and measurement methods is required prior to commencing a system-wide evaluation. Doing so may be easier to implement on a local basis with appropriate national support.

Evidence needs in this area include:

10.1 A greater understanding of **the wider fiscal, cultural, social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) of interventions** beyond their core purpose.

10.2 **Developing evaluations of the effectiveness of whole systems that address complex social issues**.

Research Area 11. Inform development of system-wide prevention activity

Traditionally the government social sector has invested only small proportions of overall expenditure towards prevention activity. A focus on prevention is supported when decision-makers take responsibility for managing the long-term costs associated with missed opportunities. For example, the Accident Compensation Corporation identified that home falls have a major impact on forward claims liability. As a result, ACC invests heavily in falls-prevention programmes.

The challenges associated with complex social sector evaluations are amplified in the prevention area. These challenges include: identifying and measuring realistic outcomes, allowing for long and uncertain lead times between intervention and benefits, tracking cohorts of participants, identifying the effective components of prevention programmes, controlling for secular trends, and separating out external influences arising from family and community, as well as other interventions. The latter is particularly challenging when there are large numbers of small community-based interventions (such as community-based youth-crime initiatives).

There are examples of prevention evaluation frameworks used in the fields of health and justice. Assessing effectiveness in disease and injury prevention involves continuing quantitative analysis of health outcomes resulting from prevention practices. Interim evaluations often measure the impact that prevention policies, programmes or practices have on public health or clinical practice.

Prevention evaluations in criminal justice tend to include measuring improvements in awareness, attitude, and self-reported practice – as well as ongoing performance measurement using a range of administrative data. The Australian Institute of Criminology has evaluated crime prevention initiatives across Australia. They argue that a performance measurement and reporting framework supported by a comprehensive information management system is essential for understanding prevention effectiveness – and that evaluations should be targeted at high priority areas.

As part of Social Investment, decision-makers are increasingly interested in opportunities for early intervention and prevention activities. Evidence needs in this area are described below.

11.1 **Rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of prevention activities** are important for the wide acceptance of preventative interventions in the social sector and the willingness to pay for them. The primary criterion for these evaluations should be that prevention improves social outcomes at a reasonable cost. This requires evaluations with sufficiently long time horizons to track impact. Given the importance of prevention activity for improving long-term outcomes and reducing long-term costs across the social sector, there is a need to generate system-wide learning from evaluations of prevention interventions (via publishing and sharing what works).

11.2 Prevention activity in one part of the social sector will impact other parts, so in the long-term the social sector should determine a cross-sector approach for determining the optimal mix and sequence of prevention interventions required to prevent social harm. A system-wide approach to prevention would identify common goals for our most vulnerable populations, and define a series of interlinked primary, secondary and tertiary initiatives which can prevent social harm. The social sector may also draw upon successful frameworks from overseas as we **build our understanding of what a successful prevention system looks like** in the social sector. Grounding a framework using New Zealand evidence would occur over time.

Research Area 12. Research, monitoring, and evaluation of the performance of the social services system

12.1 The Productivity Commission report *More Effective Social Services* identified the need for an independent organisation to undertake system-wide monitoring, research and evaluation, as part of working with a Transition Office to implement social sector reform. The Commission suggested that Superu could take this role (p354). Regardless of the entity, the Commission have stated an **ongoing need for macro-level assessment of the performance of the social services system**. Potential areas of interest include the effectiveness of inter-agency working, monitoring results against spend, monitoring evaluation, and the identification of effective leadership and service delivery models.

12.2 At an operational level there is also a need to conduct **research which improves how the social services system engages with citizens** across their life-course. Interlinked stages of citizen engagement range from identification of need, contact with an individual or family, assessment for service, delivery of service, and withdrawal. Research which addresses service failures at one stage has the potential to improve performance across the system.

Furthermore, most social services are designed around a linear stage-of-life approach (such as discrete programs for women of reproductive age and for children at particular ages). It is possible that these arrangements do not cater well for diversifying family and cultural arrangements among New Zealand's vulnerable populations.

Research Area 13. Identify improvement models that foster and adapt, based upon innovation

In order to move beyond our existing toolkit of interventions and grow a productive social sector, decision-makers should draw lessons from innovative service delivery and foster ongoing innovation in the system.

Innovation in the social sector tends to be incremental in nature, resulting in cumulative change which can have a significant impact over time. Innovation often occurs in the middle levels of organisations, led by individuals who are actively engaged with clients and willing to work around rules and procedures. However, some recent innovations have also been triggered by centralised decisions, such as piloting social bonds and the roll-out of liability modelling.

The Productivity Commission's report *More Effective Social Services* emphasised that the traditional 'top-down' approach to contracting social services does not tolerate risk and prescribes services in a way that hinders innovation. Short-term, overly prescriptive, funding mechanisms work against innovation.

However, even if sufficiently funded, a 'bottom-up' approach can limit the wider adoption of successful experiments. In decentralised systems, such as Whānau Ora, or organisations with a large number of branch offices, it is likely that innovations occurring on the ground are not often captured and re-tested or developed elsewhere.

A system that learns requires feedback loops to adapt and improve as further evidence of effectiveness accumulates. Information Technology and peer-to-peer networks have an important role in enabling the widespread sharing of ideas and further innovation. Evaluations can also capture innovative approaches and share the knowledge with others.

13.1 Research is needed to identify sustainable **improvement models which both foster, and learn from, innovation** on the ground. These models should strike the right balance between providing evidence-based intervention options and a sufficient degree of freedom to innovate. These models will involve different approaches to funding, contracting, and governance to increase the quality and quantity of service to clients. Potential models include managed markets and client-directed budgets. The system can also learn from innovative ways of connecting with families and whānau, via learning what has worked and what has not worked on the ground through Whānau Ora services. Innovation models will become increasingly important if decentralisation of social services increases over time.

13.2 There are inspiring examples of service innovation delivered by NGOs, philanthropic organisations, businesses, and local community networks. **Philanthropists, social enterprises and for-profit businesses should be researched as valuable sources of new ideas for social services.**

Evidence to improve the response to social and economic change

Ensuring that decision-makers have access to the evidence required to adapt to increasing and evolving demands requires a forward-thinking research agenda. In the near future New Zealand will be older; increasingly Māori, Asian, and Pacific; the nature of our work will change; we will work into old age; wait longer to have children (if at all); and live in smaller households. A forward-looking research agenda helps the system to understand, and adapt to, arising demand-side pressures. There are other emerging drivers of social change which are not the subject of current discussions in the social sector (and so are not covered in this document) but include the implications of threats such as obesity, terrorism, cyber-crime, and climate change.

The impacts derived from research in the following areas may be more speculative compared with research described elsewhere in this document, but examining near-horizon issues helps the sector to be agile and responsive to change. Meeting evidence needs described in this section is likely to involve partnerships between government and academia to draw out the findings, or further develop relevant studies. In particular there will be several connections with relevant National Science Challenges including Ageing Well and A Better Start[4].

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[4]Refer to the following websites for more information on these National Science Challenges:
http://www.ageingwellchallenge.co.nz/ and
http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/science-innovation/national-science-challenges/#AW

Research Area 14. Understand the scale and impact of rapidly changing demographics, population movements, and evolving family and whānau/community roles/structure

A wide range of social and demographic change occurring now and in the near future will impact institutions and service delivery. Evidence needs stem from understanding the implications from the following areas of change:

14.1 **Changing ethnicity** including the growth of Māori, Pacific and Asian populations in the workforce and the growth of multiple ethnic identity. A particular focus area is ensuring New Zealand taps into the potential economic growth of the Māori population. A potential research question raised at our cross-sector forum was: 'can we demonstrate that what is good for Māori is good for New Zealand?' (either in terms of quantifying the impact of investing in Māori and/or whether the principles and values-based approaches used in Māori service delivery can be used for the benefit of programmes aimed at other populations).

14.2 **Changing age structures** including the need to understand the implications of longevity and determine if we are living better for longer, or worse for longer (which has major implications for the labour market, health services, and New Zealand Superannuation). Elder abuse and neglect will become a more prominent social issue as the population ages, generating research needs around prevalence, triggers, cultural variation, and effective strategies. Accumulation of wealth, skills, and other forms of capital among the emerging workforce will be different from older cohorts (for example, home ownership could be a minority form of tenure). This has implications for the maintenance of a 'social contract' between generations – further research on the values and attitudes of one cohort towards other cohorts could inform policy and practice.

14.3 Understanding **the implications of New Zealand's unusually high birth rate** (which is higher than in most developed countries). Research can provide information about the life circumstances and mechanisms for valuing the development potential of the 60,000 babies born in New Zealand per year (overall death rates are approximately half that rate for the foreseeable future).

14.4 **The changing role of parenting, families, and communities**. There are global, national and local influences which are changing the nature of parenting and the role of families and communities. Increasing mobility, the growth of non-traditional family relationships, limited time availability, and changing employment patterns will influence social cohesion and the capability of families and communities to deliver care and provide volunteering. The impact is likely to be more acute for vulnerable populations such as single parents and those with significant caring responsibilities. These trends may impact the affordability of social services funded by governments.

14.5 **Migration patterns and increasing mobility/transience**. This includes both international and national population movements, as well as household formation patterns, and how this impacts sustainable provision of care delivered through social services, housing availability, social cohesion, and employment patterns. New Zealand is displaying increasingly uneven patterns of ageing, leading to smaller and older provincial towns, while at the same time, Auckland has a concentration of young and middle age people who are highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language and country-of-birth (for example, 39% of Auckland's population was born outside of New Zealand).

14.6 **Evolving housing tenure/housing needs** including the implications of declining home ownership, changing family composition, and evolving housing preferences and rapidly changing patterns of demand. In particular, research on the strategic

future implications of evolving tenure and capital endowment between different age cohorts will become increasingly important in connection with population ageing – research could challenge existing policy assumptions about provision for retirement.

14.7 **Changing languages and value sets** including the importance of language as a protective factor but also as a barrier for accessing social services, and the impact of new cultural/religious/value sets. This also includes research on how national identity evolves in light of rapidly changing populations, increasing diversity, and rising inequality and affluence.

Research Area 15. Identify the scale and impact of the changing nature of work

Radical structural changes to the labour market in recent decades include the growth of flexible employment regimes, globalisation, and the impact resulting from rapid technological change. Changing lifestyle choices and demographics also have an impact. A recent report by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) estimated that as much as 40 percent of the jobs in Australia could be replaced by computers in the next two decades[5]. Changes are likely to reach beyond manufacturing to affect a range of other technical and professional occupations. There are distinct winners and losers from recent economic adjustments. Unskilled youth and workers unable to develop skills in demand face relatively high rates of structural underemployment and unemployment.

Temporary and non-standard employment is likely to become more prevalent and a 'career for life' will be unusual. Insecure employment among workers vulnerable to unstable income and substandard working conditions is sometimes referred to as 'precarious employment'. However, trends in the scale of temporary employment in the labour market have not yet been confirmed through New Zealand surveys (the Survey of Working Life and the National Survey of Employers do not provide sufficient historical information). Further research is required to understand the scale and nature of the changing nature of work. No single government agency can be expected to take responsibility for researching the full range of implications associated with the changing nature of work. Evidence needs in this area include:

15.1 **A richer quantitative understanding about the changing nature of work in New Zealand**. In order to measure these areas effectively there is a need to develop strong conceptual models which describe typologies and hypotheses. Decision-makers in the social sector require this information for vulnerable and low-income populations. Potential research questions include: how have employment practices and contracts changed over time? Is insecure employment increasing? Have employment conditions and working arrangements deteriorated for workers? Has the need to seek multiple sources of income increased? What industries and types of employer/employee are involved in those changes?

15.2 **What are the characteristics of vulnerable populations** who are most affected by those changes? And what are the **pathways and transitions in and out of this type of employment?** How many people/who remains vulnerable to insecure income across their lives?

15.3 What are some of the **immediate impacts on job satisfaction, attitudes to work, and individual, family, whānau and community well-being** (for example, ability to secure finance, banking, and housing, as well as the impact on childcare arrangements/ability to care for others/volunteer)?

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[5] http://www.ceda.com.au/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/workforce

15.4 What are the **long-term impacts on the skills accumulation of populations**, later life prospects and life-course incomes?

15.5 What are the **main reasons that employers use non-standard working arrangements**?

15.6 What are the **long-term labour market and productivity impacts** associated with the changing nature of work?

15.7 **What are the costs and benefits of policy initiatives which aim to protect workers** against any negative effects associated with the changing nature of work (such as zero-hours contracts or predatory employment practices)?

15.8 **How can pathways be built to help vulnerable populations achieve a sustainable income** as they navigate an insecure employment environment? How can we ensure that individuals, families, and communities make positive adjustments to changes in the labour market?

15.9 What are the **implications of the changing nature of work for education**, training and life-long learning interventions? For example, considering the implications for provision of STEM education, lifelong learning, and the acquisition of adaptive, creative, and information-communication skills.

15.10 **Is New Zealand's tax and benefit system well-equipped to deal with the changing nature of work**? This could also include how social services, such as education and housing, deal with the implications of individuals and families with fluctuating income.

15.11 What are the **social impacts arising from the growth of top income earners** – in terms of social cohesion in an increasingly affluent society? (There may be positive impacts for philanthropy but negative impacts in terms of social inclusion, tax fairness, and equity of access to political processes).

Research Area 16. Understand the opportunity, risk and impact of technological change

Decision-makers in the social sector are interested in understanding the opportunities and risks associated with technology and increasing connectivity. Opportunities include education, employment and regional development. Risks include safety issues, the rise of cyber-crime, negative impacts on behaviour, and the 'digital divide'. Research in this area may be more operational (compared with research on changing work/demographics), with immediate service delivery implications which can be applied across the social sector. Some evidence needs in these areas are listed below:

16.1 Children and young people's use of technology and social media is evolving at a rapid pace, with implications for their well-being. To understand these changes there needs to be **wider awareness of the types and use of social media by children and young people, and their impacts on well-being – plus the range of good practice and opportunities available**. Highlighting these can help parents, caregivers, service providers, educators, policy makers and other adults better identify and respond to the challenges and opportunities of children and young people's social media use.

16.2 Research on **how technology has been used to successfully deliver social services** in a way which increases equity, access, and improves long-term social and economic outcomes. In particular, implementation research on technology in therapeutic interventions, such as health tracking apps/online tools, bio-technological

cyborgism through implant technology, or blended person-machine delivery of services will become increasingly important with the spread of mobile technologies, integrating individual-level tracking data with other administrative data sources, and the drive for cost-savings in service-delivery.

16.3 **Research on how to increase digital access to social services and use of technology among populations experiencing material hardship** (and reduce the 'digital divide'). There is a need to review what works and what does not work from a range of policy options and service delivery responses (including 'assisted digital', 'low cost/free bandwidth', 'targeted training').

Appendix: Background on Social Sector Research Directions

The need for a coherent forward-looking research agenda for the social sector

The social sector seeks to achieve a number of interrelated outcomes for individuals, families and communities ranging from supporting people into work, securing access to quality housing, raising education achievement, improving health and independence, and supporting strong communities. Some of the key issues our sector grapples with include how to break cycles that create disadvantage; how to deliver services which improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities; and how to target investment for greatest long-term impact.

In recent years, government agencies have increasingly taken a sector-wide approach to investment decisions, data integration, and service delivery. However, research and evaluation are largely undertaken on a portfolio-by-portfolio approach. Each agency will have a unique set of research needs, but it has become increasingly apparent that the most difficult social issues touch all agencies. For example, the *Interim Report on Modernising Child, Youth and Family* notes that individuals who had at least one State care experience incurred CYF spending of $100,000, but benefits and corrections expenditure of $200,000[6]. This is just one example of where a shared understanding of population needs, effective service options, and system improvements can help the government respond to the long-term needs of clients.

Historically, it has been difficult to articulate the sector's overall evidence needs. Academics have sometimes asked Superu: 'what is government interested in researching?' This has been a challenging question to answer! A lack of articulation makes it difficult to unlock the full potential of some of our nation's greatest evidence resources, including public science funding, academic research, and the research potential of linked administrative data (such as the Integrated Data Infrastructure). It also limits our ability to gain system-wide learning from the existing research capacity within government.

The need for a coherent and forward-looking approach to research has been highlighted by Andrew Kibblewhite, Head of the Policy Profession and Chief Executive of the Department for Prime Minister and Cabinet. He described stewardship as meaning policy managers and leaders should take "a longer term focus to building capabilities in research, in the generation and use of evidence … it could mean undertaking research and analysis on issues that are not priorities today, but could become priorities in the future."[7]

Identifying a forward-looking research agenda for the social sector is a challenging task, but a necessary one. Decision-makers face rapidly evolving service needs and rapid social, economic and demographic change. There are increasing demands for a coherent and robust evidence base to justify investments in the social sector. There are finite research resources available to the social sector.

Superu has identified evidence needs through extensive engagement

In order to understand evidence needs across the sector, Superu conducted a series of workshops with 14 government agencies (this included all agencies with Chief Executives on the Social Sector Board). We hosted a cross-sector forum which included a mix of policy and research staff across social sector agencies. We also engaged the Social Sector Board, the Chief Science Advisors, some social sector NGOs and Superu's Whānau Reference Group in conversations about research priorities. In our analysis, we

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[6] P38, *Modernising Child, Youth and Family: Interim Report from the Expert Panel*, 31 July 2015
[7] Speech to IPANZ (Institute of Public Administration New Zealand) 26 May 2015 by Andrew Kibblewhite, Head of the Policy Profession.

have considered the implications of recent reports of significance for the social sector including, the Productivity Commission's report *More Effective Social Services*, the Interim Report on *Modernising Child Youth and Family*, and the Ministry of Social Development's *Community Investment Strategy*.

From our engagement activity we identified four broad categories of evidence demands which cut across the social sector:

- Evidence about our populations and customers
- Evidence to inform programmes and services
- Evidence to inform system-wide improvements
- Evidence to improve the response to social and economic change.[8]

Ideas for research may arise from considering the interconnections between these categories, for example, what are the system-wide implications of demographic change?

Within each category we describe a number of research areas – 16 in total. The areas of research are not about particular topics or social issues (which could overlap with specific research agendas – such as the family violence research agenda or agency's agendas) instead they are areas with relevance across the social sector.

We recognise that the research areas are interconnected. For example, research on understanding the customer experience feeds directly into information about service effectiveness.

There are a number of specific evidence needs which sit underneath each research area (described within the body of this document).

Further work is required to assess the state of the evidence and take action

This document is an important starting point. It describes a range of evidence needs. To advance matters will require focused efforts to assess the current state of evidence, identify critical gaps, and work towards filling them. In some areas this will involve translating existing knowledge, in other areas it will require the generation of new evidence.

The type of action will vary depending on the research area, actions range from:

- *Knowledge creation* – designing and undertaking new research
- *Mining and analysing existing databases* – analysing either survey or administrative data
- *Synthesising existing evidence* – pulling together existing research literature
- *Knowledge translation and dissemination* – producing tailored products and resources to audience needs and translating research findings
- *Knowledge exchange* – interaction between researchers and knowledge users

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[8] It may be possible to apply the four categories of evidence need as a framework to ensure a comprehensive approach to gathering evidence for cross-sector interventions. For example, when considering evidence to improve outcomes for vulnerable children (aged 0-5):

- *Evidence to improve understanding of our populations and customers*: Where is the need greatest? How can we express interconnected problems? Who misses out on services they need? How do we measure progress in well-being? How do we tailor local solutions?
- *Evidence to inform programmes and services*: What interventions are effective for meeting identified needs? How do we wrap-around services for those in need? How can we assess effective implementation approaches? What community-led approaches have worked?
- *Evidence to inform system-wide improvement*: Do we have the right suite of interventions to meet needs? How will we know that the whole system is effective? How do we measure the success of prevention? How do we foster, and learn from innovation (to improve the whole system)?
- *Evidence to improve the response to social and economic change*: Do we understand the rapidly changing demographic make-up of vulnerable children? What emerging needs are there? How can we develop sustainable pathways for the future world of work? How can we leverage the opportunities and risks associated with rapidly changing technology?

- *Knowledge application* – sound and ethical implementation of knowledge to practice.

Superu has a number of work programmes that provide evidence across the social system. For example, the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study is starting to provide a picture about the dynamics of vulnerability among young children and their whānau. Our *What Works* series synthesises evidence on what we know and don't know about a specific social sector topic or issue. Superu's clients include Ministers, policy and programme developers, and NGOs. Our own programme of work should align with social sector evidence needs.

But more widely than this, Superu has an important role to play in championing the needs of the social sector, and identifying and enabling opportunities which will advance relevant evidence. Examples of this include influencing social science funding decisions, opportunities for relevant data analysis, relevant work within the academic community (such as working on partnership opportunities with the three social science National Science Challenges), and enabling cross-government research and evaluation projects. But we do need to do this in partnership to make a strong impact by realising the benefits of targeted, highly relevant evidence for the sector.

Superu and the Chief Scientists identified a number of implementation considerations which will help grow a healthy evidence system for the social sector (described in a diagram below). These are more about *the ways we do research, evaluation and analysis* rather than the topics of the research.

Implementation considerations

(Superu and the Chief Science Advisors identified activities which will help to grow a healthy evidence system for decision-makers across the social sector)

Growing a healthy evidence system
(in government social sector agencies)

- Map current evidence-activity against priorities.

- Scan opportunities for cross-sector catalyst projects to demonstrate best-practice use of evidence.

- Focus on most urgent needs first.

- Accelerate use of data analytics and cross-sector data resources (e.g. IDI and other linked administrative datasets, Growing up in New Zealand data).

- Apply multiple lenses to ensure diversity of evidence base, inc. family/whānau lens, Māori lens, Pacific lens, community lens, economic lens.

- Report back to sector on progress.

- Review and renew research priorities regularly.

- Improve system-wide learning (e.g. a community of practice to share methods/agree common standards, build capacity for rapid evaluation approaches, effective dissemination and knowledge activation).

- Build capability for the long term (e.g. evaluating cross-sector impacts of interventions, evaluating system-effectiveness, building an evaluation culture, build capacity to horizon scan).

- Engage decision makers with the evidence base. Maximise ability for decision makers to commit to action based on evidence.

- Growing leadership which is adaptive and stewards for the future.

Examples of priority populations described in agency workshops

Aged 0-5, Aged 10-13, aged 15-24, children in care, teenage/single parents, Māori, Pacific, low socio-economic status groups, migrants, offenders, victims, prison population, gangs, vulnerable elderly, clients with multiple and complex needs and/or mental health issues, disabled clients, tenants in low quality housing.

Note: family violence was discussed as a topic but because this is subject to its own research agenda development in early 2016, this topic is not covered in detail here.