

*The Impact of Government Policy
and System Change on
Tāngata Whai Ora Seeking
Support for Sexual Violence and
Family Violence*

Briefing to New Zealand Political Parties
and Portfolio Holders

Abstract

Aviva's frontline experience across Canterbury highlights growing barriers to safety, justice, housing and support, with increasing pressure on victim/survivors and community organisations as essential systems become harder to access and less responsive.

Prepared by: Aviva August 2026

Executive Summary

Aviva works alongside people experiencing family violence and sexual violence across Canterbury. Through our crisis support, advocacy, social work, sexual violence support, and prevention services, we hear directly from people navigating New Zealand's justice, policing, housing, welfare, and health systems every day.

This briefing outlines significant and recurring issues being reported by our frontline kaimahi (staff). These are not isolated incidents. They are consistent patterns emerging across multiple services and affecting a growing number of whai ora (clients).

Across five key areas - policing, justice, housing, sexual violence support, and income security - we are seeing systems become harder to access, slower to respond, and less able to provide timely protection and support. As these pressures increase, risk is being transferred to victim/survivors, their tamariki (children), whānau (families), and community organisations attempting to fill the gaps.

The experiences described in this briefing highlight the real-world consequences of policy and funding decisions. They demonstrate how delays, reduced service capacity, and increasing thresholds for assistance can directly affect safety, wellbeing, recovery, and long-term outcomes.

Who is Aviva?

Aviva has more than 50 years of specialist knowledge, relationships, and mana within Aotearoa New Zealand's family violence and sexual violence sector. Founded in 1973 as Christchurch Women's Refuge, the first refuge in New Zealand, Aviva helped create the foundations for a national movement of protection, advocacy, and social change. Since becoming Aviva in 2013, our mahi has continued to evolve beyond crisis response to include prevention, early intervention, sexual violence support, safe accommodation, advocacy, and work with people of all ages and genders who are affected by violence. Today, we work across Canterbury, from Ashburton to Kaikōura, alongside whai ora, tamariki, whānau, communities, and sector partners.

Our advocacy is grounded in what whai ora and frontline kaimahi tell us about the systems they are navigating every day, and in our collaboration with others across the sector to strengthen outcomes for the people we support. We see how policy settings, funding decisions, service thresholds, and delays affect people's safety, recovery, and long-term wellbeing. This briefing reflects those shared experiences and seeks clear responses from political parties and portfolio holders about the policies and practical changes they would make to better support whai ora, tamariki, whānau, and communities to live free from violence.

Key Messages for Decision-Makers

Aviva asks Members of Parliament and political parties across the spectrum to recognise the following realities:

- Family violence and sexual violence remain significant and ongoing issues in all communities, regardless of economic circumstances
- Victim/survivors are experiencing increasing barriers to accessing timely protection, justice, housing, counselling, and financial support.
- Frontline NGOs and communities are supporting people with increasingly complex needs for longer periods of time.
- Government agencies appear to be narrowing their focus to core statutory functions, leaving fewer preventative, early intervention, and wraparound supports available.
- Without corresponding investment, responsibility for managing risk is increasingly shifting onto victim/survivors themselves and the wide community sector.

1. Reduced police capacity and inconsistent responses to family violence

What we are seeing

Our frontline kaimahi consistently report reduced police capacity to respond to family violence incidents, protection order breaches, and ongoing safety concerns. Victim/survivors frequently report delays in police attendance or an absence of response altogether.

There is a growing perception that police resources are stretched to the point where only the most serious incidents receive timely attention.

Impact on whai ora

Family violence incidents are not always receiving police attendance.

- Protection order breaches may remain unaddressed for extended periods.
- Safety planning based on police intervention has become increasingly unreliable.
- Survivors experience increased fear, isolation, and reluctance to seek help.
- Critical evidence that may support protection order applications, Oranga Tamariki investigations, and court proceedings is often not being collected.

Case examples

One wahine (woman) contacted Aviva three weeks after reporting a protection order breach to police without receiving a response. An Aviva worker was informed that the breach was one of 11 awaiting action and that only one family violence officer was available that day.

Another rural client experiencing repeated breaches of a protection order was advised to stop calling 105 because she was "taking up too much time", despite the breaches continuing.

As a result, our safety planning conversations have changed. Where we once encouraged clients to move to a safe place and call police, we now increasingly discuss how they can keep themselves and their tamariki safe while waiting for a response that may be delayed or may not arrive.

Related system issues

- Reduced dedicated family violence policing capacity.
 - Loss of experienced family harm specialists through restructuring and redeployment.
 - Growing demand combined with insufficient frontline resourcing.
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2. Justice system delays that prolong trauma and slows recovery

What we are seeing

Justice system delays are repeatedly identified by whai ora and kaimahi as one of the most harmful aspects of the system.

Our sexual violence team reports that initial crisis responses - such as medical care and evidential interviews - are generally timely. However, significant delays often follow.

In many cases:

- Up to one (1) year passes before a case is assigned to an investigating officer.
- A further year may pass before a charging decision is made.
- If a case proceeds to court, the court process can add another 18 months to two (2) years.

Some victim/survivors are therefore waiting four (4) years or longer to reach final resolution, and in many cases cannot return to work or education.

Impact on whai ora

- Survivors remain in prolonged periods of uncertainty.
- Recovery and healing are delayed.
- Ongoing proceedings allow users of violence to continue exerting power and control.
- Tamariki remain caught in unresolved parenting and care arrangements.
- Repeated delays compound trauma and create feelings of hopelessness.

Case examples

Kaimahi report clients routinely wait two to three years for trials while being told that delays are simply "the system".

One survivor described the process as so overwhelming they felt unable to move forward with their life and said: ***"I wish I'd just killed him as I would have been out of prison by now."***

A frontline worker described the family court experience as: ***"Soul destroying"*** due to repeated hearings, last-minute adjournments, and ongoing opportunities for proceedings to be prolonged.

Related system issues

- Court administration under-resourcing.
- Lack of enforceable timeframes for resolution.
- Capacity constraints across the justice system.
- Limited recognition of the cumulative impact of delays on victims and survivors.

3. Housing instability and barriers to emergency accommodation

What we are seeing

Housing insecurity remains one of the most significant issues affecting whai ora experiencing family violence.

Our kaimahi report increasing difficulties accessing emergency accommodation and support before a housing crisis reaches breaking point.

Impact on whai ora

- Victim/survivors remain in unsafe living situations because they have nowhere else to go.
- Families experience homelessness or unstable temporary accommodation.
- Housing insecurity compounds trauma and disrupts recovery.
- Children experience ongoing instability and uncertainty.

Case examples

A parent with a one-month-old baby became homeless when their tenancy ended. Emergency accommodation assistance was declined because they were able to temporarily sleep on a couch. The family moved to a campground with no secure long-term housing solution as winter approached.

Another whai ora facing unemployment, food insecurity, and tenancy termination was declined support despite family violence making it unsafe to return to whānau. Advocacy efforts revealed that agencies were largely unable to intervene until homelessness had already occurred.

Related system issues

- Reduced emergency accommodation availability.
- High housing costs and rental pressures.
- Eligibility thresholds that delay support until crisis point.
- Limited preventative housing interventions.

4. Reduced access to sexual violence counselling and ACC changes

What we are seeing

Access to specialist sexual violence counselling has become increasingly difficult.

Kaimahi report ACC-funded counselling wait times of around 18 months. As a result, survivors often remain without trauma-specific support for extended periods while community organisations attempt to bridge the gap.

Impact on whai ora

- Delayed access to specialist counselling and recovery support.
- Increased distress, anxiety, and mental health deterioration.
- Greater pressure on already stretched NGO services.
- Increased inequity for survivors unable to self-fund support.

Case examples

Aviva previously maintained a waiting list and assisted clients to connect with counsellors. This practice ended when waiting numbers exceeded 300 people.

Alternative holding pathways have also proven difficult. Kaimahi report concerns regarding responsiveness from interim support services, like 'Safe to talk', leaving many survivors without meaningful support while waiting.

Kaimahi also report growing concerns regarding ACC Sensitive Claims processes, including extensive interviews requiring survivors to recount impacts of trauma before they are adequately supported.

Additional prevention concerns

Staff have also highlighted a reduction in primary prevention activity.

Examples cited include:

- The cessation of ACC funding for the Mates and Dates healthy relationships programme in 2022.
- The discontinuation of further funding rounds for ACC's Community-Led Primary Prevention initiative.

These concerns arise against a backdrop of ongoing family violence and sexual violence demand.

Related system issues

- Long specialist counselling wait times.
- Workforce shortages among counsellors and psychologists.
- Limited interim support capacity.
- Increased barriers to ACC compensation pathways.
- Reduced investment in prevention initiatives.

5. Cost-of-living and income support pressures increasing risk

What we are seeing

Cost-of-living pressures are increasingly affecting safety, mobility, and basic wellbeing.

Fuel costs, rising living expenses, housing costs, and eligibility thresholds for assistance are all creating additional barriers for people attempting to leave violence or establish safety.

Impact on whai ora

- Reduced ability to leave unsafe situations.
- Food insecurity even among employed individuals.
- Greater financial dependence on abusive partners or family members.
- Increased vulnerability following employment loss.

Case examples

One client reported being unable to afford sufficient petrol to transport children to school or leave during family violence incidents.

Another employed client was declined income support despite experiencing food insecurity, impending job loss, and imminent housing loss because their income exceeded assistance thresholds.

Related system issues

- Rising living costs.
- Tightening eligibility criteria for support.
- Inadequate responsiveness to rapidly changing financial circumstances.
- Increased economic vulnerability among survivors.

Closing statement

Behind every policy setting, funding decision, eligibility threshold, waitlist, and system delay is a person trying to live safely and rebuild their life.

For the people Aviva supports, policy change is experienced not as an abstract administrative decision but as a direct impact on their safety, wellbeing, and future.

We ask all political parties and portfolio holders to consider how current settings are affecting victim/survivors of family violence and sexual violence, and to prioritise solutions that improve safety, reduce wait times, strengthen prevention, and ensure those seeking help can access it when they need it most.

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Supporting people and communities to live free from family violence and sexual violence