

Government reforms

Significant structural changes and legislative reforms are underway, affecting healthcare, education and local government. These changes are responses to inequalities, inefficiencies, and overly bureaucratic processes. The changes are likely to have significant, possibly uncertain in some cases, impacts on participation, skills and capabilities for play, active recreation, and sport

What we're seeing

Structural and functional changes

Significant changes are underway in the health, education, and local government areas. Common threads across them are attempts to reduce inequalities at the local level, and reducing duplication, unhealthy competition, and running costs while still enabling local decision-making. The changes signal shifts away from some of the devolution introduced twenty or 30 years ago.

Health sector changes

A major restructure of the health system is underway. This recognises that the District Health Board system established at the start of the century has contributed to health inequalities, inefficiencies, and budget blowouts. Māori, in particular, have not seen the same health benefits as Pākehā.¹ Creation of Health NZ and the Māori Health Authority, and other changes, are intended to address these failings. While there is widespread support for change, some political parties, and others, have concerns that a Māori Health Authority will lead to separatism. Māori, and many others, view it as an essential feature, so long as it is properly resourced and able to influence health policies.²

Vocational training changes

The consolidation of polytechnics and institutes of technology into a single national organisation - Te Pūkenga - is also a significant change. It is intended to reduce duplication and competition, and improve links between campus, online, and on-the-job learning.³ However, establishment of Te Pūkenga is not proceeding well, undermining confidence that it will improve vocational training.⁴

Reforming Tomorrow's Schools

Greater frontline support is to be provided for schools, through a new Education Service Agency, more leadership support, and simplified property management. Inequalities in school outcomes, and improved support and connections between schools are also being addressed by other changes in the Ministry of Education.⁵

Local government changes

A review of local government is underway. This will identify how NZ's system of local democracy and governance will need to evolve over the next 30 years.⁶

Local Government NZ has set out its vision for the future. This includes improving trust, participation, and inclusiveness in local democracy, as well as a focus on wellbeing and not just infrastructure. Improving partnerships with central government and Māori are also seen as critical.⁷ Three Waters Reform represents a significant change in infrastructure management. Unsurprisingly, this is not without opposition. There are concerns about fairness and equity, both financial and social, of the changes, as well as distrust of co-governance. Misinformation has contributed to some opposition. The reform process is undermining trust between central and some communities.⁸ Replacement of the The 1991 Resource Management Act will also have significant consequences for local government and their communities.⁹

Structure, resources, culture

To be effective structural and regulatory changes usually need to occur along with changes in institutional cultures, and adequate resourcing. Culture change is often harder and slower than structural change. The Public Service Act 2020 recognises the need for culture and skill changes to improve collaboration across the sector.¹⁰

Potential implications

Create

- Healthier populations
- Improved local democracy

Relate

- Potentially improved community relationships & engagement with local government

Consume

- More tailored health & educational services for Māori and Pasifika communities

Degrade

- Social, economic and physical activity inequalities decline
- Weakened trust in central government if reforms fail

Connect

- Better partnerships between central government and communities
- Enhanced connectivity between physical activity, health, education, and wellbeing

Define

- The new roles, and ways of working, of central and local government in the future
- What does effective devolution of services look like?

More information (links)

¹ [The plan to get rid of DHBs](#)

² [Explained: The reforms that will turn the health system from an NPC to a Super Rugby of healthcare](#)

³ [20 tertiary training organisations will lose identities to become Te Pūkenga](#)

⁴ [Report shows doubts about national polytechnic](#)

⁵ [Reform of Tomorrow's Schools](#)

⁶ [Local government reforms](#)

⁷ [Vision for the future](#)

⁸ [Three waters: What you need to know](#)

⁹ [Overview of RMA reforms](#)

¹⁰ [Public Service Act 2020](#)