



Structural Ageism in Aotearoa

An analysis of the presence of Older People in strategic documentation across government



Ageism is the last socially acceptable form of discrimination.

It is defined as prejudice or discrimination against a person based on their age, and can occur in a number of ways:

- Internalised** - the way we think about or impact ourselves based on our age
- Interpersonal** - the way we relate to or discriminate against others based on their age
- Cultural** - specific cultural ideas that impact people of certain ages
- Structural** - the way that systems and policies impact people based on their age

Structural Ageism is the sum effect of policies that negatively impact older people, but it is also the absence of policies which consider older people, causing them to be deprioritized in policy settings

In early 2024, we undertook an analysis of key strategic documents across Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa | The New Zealand Government to determine what extent Structural Ageism is impacting our policy settings.

Your government entity was part of this assessment.

Who We Assessed

Of the 221 government entities, we determined which were the most relevant to older people, and which were the most important to their quality of life.

This left us with 35 entities for our assessment, some of which are no longer functioning.



For each of these entities, we looked for three key pieces of documentation:

Briefings to Incoming Ministers - what an entity prioritises telling its minister

Statements of Intent or Strategic Intentions - what an entity prioritises including in its own workstreams

Specific Strategy Plans or Statements of Performance - what an entity prioritises in accountability to the public

We were able to find at least one of these for each of the entities above, but thirteen entities had incomplete assessments as at least one of these was not available online.

In each of these documents we searched for key terms to let us know if older people were present -

Direct Mentions

Old*
Age*
Senior
Kaumātua
Kuia
Koeke
Elder

Other Mentions

Pension*
Superannua*
Retire*
Vulnerab*
Medically*
Marginalise*
Frail*

Terms were truncated to ensure we could find all instances (ie, *age*, *aged* and *ageing*) in one search

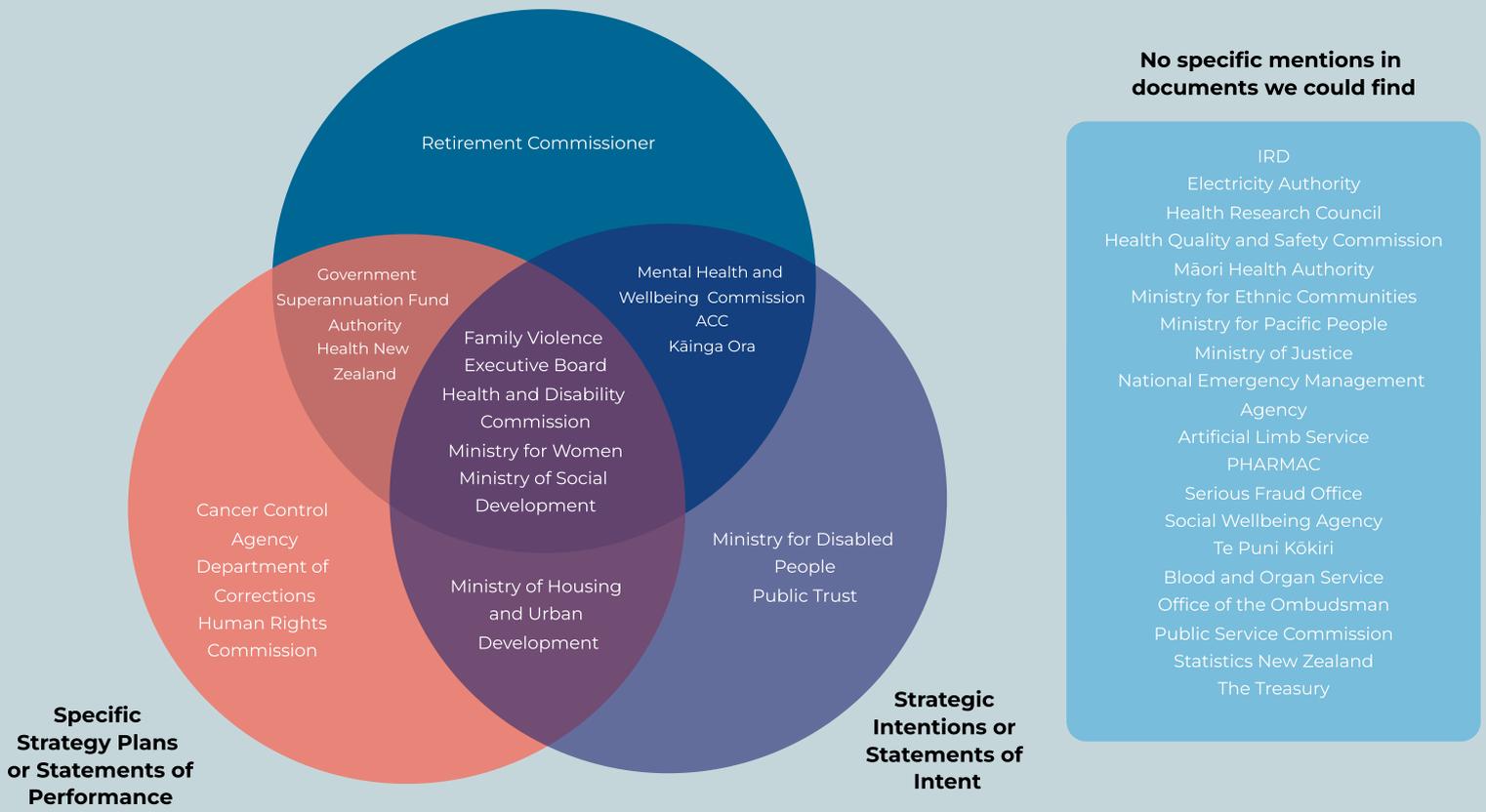
All searches were assessed to ensure they were relevant to our assessment (ie, age of people, not services or infrastructure, or superannuation recipients, not the investments of the superannuation fund itself)

A single mention of older people was sufficient to 'pass' this assessment.

What We Found

Most government entities do not have specific mentions of older people in their key documentation.
This diagram shows only the specific mention of older people

Briefings to Incoming Ministers



Why Does It Matter?

Being invisible in strategic documents means not being specifically considered when decisions are being made

Every one of these entities was designated as important to older people and their quality of life, yet more than half have no specific consideration for older people in their key documentation

Our older people deserve to be considered in the policies, strategies, and advice to government of entities that impact their lives

How can we help?

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services invites your government entity to a conversation about how you can combat Structural Ageism within your own work.

Regardless of where your organisation sits in our original assessment, there is always work to be done to improve the way we address ageism.

Together, we can make a difference in combatting the last socially acceptable form of discrimination and make Aotearoa New Zealand a world-leading force to combat ageism.

Ko Wai Tātou

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) represents more than 230 member organisations providing a range of community, health and social support services across Aotearoa. These organisations include some of the most recognised and highly regarded names in social service provision, and all are world famous in their own rohe.

Nationally, the range and scope of our member networks is extensive. Around 230 separate providers in 55 towns and cities throughout New Zealand deliver 37 types of services through 1,024 programmes. Members employ over 5,000 full-time staff, 7,000 part-time staff, and coordinate almost 16,000 volunteers.

Their mahi informs our deep understanding of the everyday lives of New Zealand communities as we work towards achieving a just and compassionate society for all. We see this work as an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ, which we seek to fulfil through our commitment to giving priority to the systematically disempowered. We feel a deep sense of responsibility to uphold the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and take action to push for equity for all.

Our work is focused in three policy areas – Equity and Inclusion, Children and Families, and Older People. For each area, we have a specialist working group made up of leaders of service organisations from across the country who provide up-to-date knowledge of experiences and need in their communities. We call these groups ‘Policy Groups’.

This knowledge, along with input from the representatives of Council’s six members, informs our mahi of providing research, representation, connection, good practice dissemination, policy advice / information and advocacy services for our members.

Our Member Organisations

