

A young person with long hair, wearing a grey sweater and dark shorts, stands barefoot on a sandy beach. They are looking out at the ocean where a vibrant rainbow arches over the waves. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The person's reflection is visible in the wet sand.

Young people speak out about Wellbeing:

An insights report into the Wellbeing of
Rangatahi Māori and other Young People
in Aotearoa



Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission

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Overall summary

This report adds to our collective understanding of the drivers of youth wellbeing which, in turn, influence mental health.

Mental health is affected by a range of factors, such as a person's family situation, community, access to housing, work or education. Young people, as a group, experience further inequity and compromised wellbeing, compared to others. To understand how wellbeing can improve, we must listen to and act on the voices, perspectives, and expertise of young people.

Four themes for the drivers of youth wellbeing were identified. Under each theme are calls to action. It is important to note that these calls for action are not exhaustive, nor do they address all issues faced by all youth in Aotearoa. They reflect the expressed concerns of young people, following a review of public calls to action made by young people between 2018 and 2021, an academic literature review, and validation by rangatahi Māori and young people who were chosen by representative youth-led or centric organisations who support young people with intersectionality (such as rangatahi Māori, rainbow, disabled, state care, experience of distress and, of addiction).

Uncertain futures

Young people in Aotearoa today feel they are facing an uncertain future with inherited social, economic, and environmental challenges ahead. Collectively, we need to:

- Ensure government agencies are coordinated and resourced to involve rangatahi Māori and young people in decision-making about their futures, where their mana is upheld.
- Support and empower youth inclusive climate change actions, since they are the future generations that will inherit it.
- Include in the education curriculum – civic engagement education, life skills, mental health awareness, financial literacy, household management and critical thinking for young people transitioning into adulthood.
- Increase the pathways to income support, affordable housing, education and mentoring opportunities.
- Expand access to wrap-around services, including mental health and addiction services, across all localities.
- Ensure service providers tailor supports and services based on young people's feedback across a range of sectors, along with assessment of risks that impact young people.

Racism and discrimination

Discrimination, including anti-rainbow discrimination and ableism, racism and the impacts of colonisation are significant issues facing young people, particularly affecting rangatahi Māori and ethnic minority groups. Young people want to see:

- Increased platform-monitoring and proactive interventions against discriminatory and racist elements across media outlets and social media platforms.
- Growing workforce opportunities that actively include the participation of young people with disabilities.
- Actively promoted awareness of intersectionality, cultural competency and trauma-informed care to underpin all services accessed by young people.

Social media and safety online

Social media and digital spaces are deeply integrated into many young people's lives, with both benefits and harms. Making this a safe and supportive space for young people will require:

- Prioritising a roll-out of internet and digital tools and technology, to enable equitable online participation and social connection. Particularly in rural areas and lower-income households.
- Developing social media and online safety guidance and regulations for caregivers, family and whānau to support young people to be safe online.
- Monitoring and managing algorithms that produce distressing social media content.

Whānau wellbeing and intergenerational connections

Connection to whānau, and to culture develops cultural resilience which is integral to wellbeing. This should be supported and fostered through:

- Increased autonomy for iwi, hapū and whānau to make and operationalise decisions about their lives on their terms, as expressed in Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Developing mechanisms and pathways for rangatahi Māori to grow connections to whenua and whakapapa in the absence of direct whānau contact.
- Supporting parents and older whānau members, kaumatua and kuia, to understand and participate in digital and social media, to foster intergenerational connections.
- Providing tailored support to parents, caregivers and responsible adults of young people experiencing mental distress or addiction.

Although there is no simple 'fix' or response to the themes, we as kaitiaki of mental health and wellbeing, our government partners, communities and individuals can take up these calls to action to uphold the mana of rangatahi Māori and young people's wellbeing.

