

Young people speak out about Wellbeing:

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



Te Hiringa Mahara

Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission

Young people speak out about Wellbeing: An insights report into the Wellbeing of Rangatahi Māori and other Young People in Aotearoa.

A report issued by Te Hiringa Mahara – the New Zealand Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (Te Hiringa Mahara).

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Te Hiringa Mahara – the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission was set up in February 2021 and works under the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission Act 2020. Our purpose is to contribute to better and equitable mental health and wellbeing outcomes for people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://www.mhwc.govt.nz/>

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The mission statement in our strategy is “clearing pathways to wellbeing for all.” This insights report acknowledges the increasing levels of distress among rangatahi Māori and young people.

It recognises the barriers to wellbeing by drawing on the voices of young people across Aotearoa New Zealand, and the need for cross-party and cross-agency commitment for long-term systemic changes to address them. Transforming the ways young people experience wellbeing can only be realised when young peoples’ participation is prioritised in any decision-making that involves them, and the determination of their futures.

Foreword

The mental health and wellbeing of rangatahi Māori and young people¹ is one of the most important issues we can focus on today. We only need to acknowledge increasing levels of distress, and the many well-known barriers to wellbeing, to understand that much more needs to be done to support young peoples' mental health and wellbeing.

There is no quick fix for improving youth mental health and wellbeing, and while we welcome continued investment in youth² mental health services, we need cross-party and cross-agency commitment for long-term systemic changes to address the fundamental barriers to wellbeing.

This report is our call to action. What these findings present is proof that there are changes we can make now.

At the heart of our call to action is young peoples' participation. Young people need to have real opportunities to be involved in anything – and everything – that impacts them. From providing rangatahi Māori and young people the tools to navigate life transitions and to make their own decisions, taking serious and measurable action on climate change, and designing supports and services that best meet their needs, to ensuring the online world is safe and supportive. It is crucial that rangatahi Māori and young people determine their own futures and have a seat at every decision-making table.

We call on leaders, agencies and entities that contribute to the wellbeing system in Aotearoa to work together, address the barriers to wellbeing we have outlined in this report and, most importantly, involve rangatahi Māori and young people at every step of the way.

The views of young people have made this report possible - they have shared their experiences, frustrations and hopes with us, in an effort to shape their futures. Young people want to be heard, and Te Hiringa Mahara is proud to listen and to elevate those voices, to support greater wellbeing for all rangatahi and young people.

Board Chair | Hayden Wano



¹ "Young people" used throughout this report will include both rangatahi Māori and other non-Māori young people. "Rangatahi Māori" will be used specifically for content that only applies to rangatahi Māori.

² Young people who are 12 to 24 years of age, in alignment with the definition of 'youth' used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and New Zealand's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.



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We acknowledge the following groups, as well as the large number of individuals who spoke to us: Yes Disability; Complex Care Group; Te Ngākau Kahakura; Māoriland; VOYCE Whakarongo Mai; Youthline; QYouth Nelson; Outline; Adhikaar Aotearoa; Ngā Uri o Whiti Te Rā Mai Le Moana Trust; Whāraurau Youth Advisors; New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, and we also acknowledge the contributions of participants at a hui organised by the Complex Care Group.

We also would like to acknowledge Abdulla Shiblaq, Charquera Tobin and Ihorangi Reweti-Peters for their time and effort in peer-reviewing this report.

We hope you feel you have been heard both in this report, and through our advocacy in the years to come.

Content warning

This report contains language and reference to topics that some people may find offensive or distressing.

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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.

Introduction

The mental health and wellbeing of young people is integral to their development and influences their trajectories into adulthood which has long term impacts on society as a whole. Young people are valuable members of hāpori/communities since they are the future leaders of Aotearoa, but are not growing up with the same privileges and opportunities as those who came before them.

This insights report builds on an existing body of work looking at declining youth mental health and wellbeing and seeks to reflect and amplify the words of young people themselves.

Through research and engagement with young people, we identified four themes that reflect the needs, hopes and opportunities young people shared where collective action could better protect, support, and enhance their mental health and wellbeing.

Some groups of young people and communities experience further inequity and compromised wellbeing, compared to others. This report seeks to identify where disparity exists and where this is being reinforced by inequitable systems and services.

To grow our knowledge and understand what needs to change, it is vital that we listen to and act on the voices, perspectives, and expertise of young people themselves.

This report is a call to action for government, decision-makers and community leaders to listen to young people, and to progress actions that positively influence the systems that impact on young peoples' wellbeing and mental health.

Calls to Action

Te Hiringa Mahara is kaitiaki of mental health and wellbeing in Aotearoa. Our role is to contribute to better and equitable mental health and wellbeing outcomes for all people in Aotearoa. We amplify the voices of our communities and keep watch on what is happening in our mental health and addiction systems, speaking up and bringing focus to areas where meaningful, long-term transformation can take place.

Drawing on the learnings of this report, we have highlighted actions below each theme that we as kaitiaki of mental health and wellbeing, our government partners, communities and individuals can take to uphold the mana of rangatahi Māori and young people's wellbeing.

The actions are driven by the voices of rangatahi Māori and young people as seen in the literature review and in direct advice to Te Hiringa Mahara. It is critical that rangatahi Māori and young people directly participate in decisions that impact them and their futures. It is important to note that while these calls to action are not exhaustive nor do they address all issues faced by youth in Aotearoa, they reflect the expressed concerns of young people.

Our hope is that the voices through this report and our subsequent advocacy, inspire action. We want political, community and other leaders to listen to these voices. Addressing youth mental health and wellbeing cannot be done overnight, but it can start now.

Approach and methodology

Our approach is centred on listening to young people in Aotearoa. The focus in this report is young people aged 12 to 24 years of age, in alignment with the definition of 'youth' used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and New Zealand's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.

In December 2021, we reviewed consultation with young people and other intersecting priority population groups. We were told:

- Young people are fatigued at talking to government agencies
- Young people are frustrated at providing the same ideas to agencies
- Rangatahi Māori are frustrated at not being able to contribute to whānau and hapū
- Many young people were regularly asked to give their time and expertise to several government consultations.

From this feedback, we drew on engagement and consultation records from other government agencies and organisations to avoid consultation fatigue. We undertook a desktop review of calls made by young people in the period following the He Ara Oranga Inquiry (2018 to 2021). This provided us with a series of thematic areas for further exploration.

We commissioned a [literature review](#) based on the learnings of the desktop review. This was conducted by *Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures* and delivered to Te Hiringa Mahara in August 2022.

Between July and August 2022, with an interim draft of the literature review and the results of the desktop review, we spoke with 95 young people representing 20 different community groups (including Kaupapa Māori and whānau / hapū roopu) through a mixture of online and face-to-face focus group meetings.

We asked young people to respond to the thematic areas, specific examples (found in literature), and to provide their perspectives. Along with ways they proactively sought to improve outcomes, and their calls for change to government and decision-makers. Those perspectives are presented as direct quotes to address the substantive learnings in the report and inspired the calls to action.

Our engagement was with rangatahi Māori and young people mostly aged 12-24 years, but where appropriate, we included older adults to ensure the inclusion of lived experience perspectives, particularly young people with disabilities (our engagement included young people with physical, sensory, learning, neurodiversity, visual and hearing disabilities to cover the span of disabilities). We also spoke to older adults who worked with or supported young people, such as non-verbal young people with complex care needs.

Literature Review

The literature review is based on a wide body of research and engagement with young people in Aotearoa from 2018. Our initial scan included academic research papers, government policy and engagement documents, reports from community and youth-led organisations, and large-scale surveys (such as the Youth2000 series) which discussed or reported on youth mental health and wellbeing.

From this initial scan, we focused our scope on the following criteria:

- Issues or themes raised by young people through surveys, qualitative research, or youth-led actions and campaigns
- Themes identified as a priority by young people who face intersecting forms of discrimination, including people with disabilities, Pacific peoples, rangatahi Māori, rainbow communities and those with lived experience of state care.

This resulted in four key themes that form the basis of this report:

- Uncertain futures
- Racism and discrimination
- Social media and safety online
- Whānau wellbeing and intergenerational connections

We commissioned *Koi Tū – Centre for Informed Futures* at Auckland University to assess these themes and provide a summary of academic evidence on youth wellbeing, again emphasising youth perspectives and qualitative research. It is important to note that the four themes of this project are not an exhaustive list, and several important issues are not covered. Hence, more research and attention to youth voices on other issues is required.

Findings

The drivers of youth wellbeing and mental health are complex and interconnected. Young people's wellbeing is tied to identity, connection, economic resources, sense of purpose, and safety. Hence there is no one simple 'fix' or response to mental distress, nor one way to enhance wellbeing.

Uncertain futures

Young people in Aotearoa today feel they are facing an uncertain future, with new social, economic and environmental challenges that previous generations have not faced. These challenges affect what some young people perceive as a world that is both "hostile and bleak".³

I think there's future fears, also the fear of no future, that there's no point to anything, the day-to-day mundane things. What's the point when the world's basically gone to shit and is getting worse every day.

- Hui for rainbow young people

[Younger people] they're worrying a lot more about things that past generations never would've had to worry about - what 12, 13, 14-year-olds were worrying about politics, 15, 20, 30 years ago?

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Planning for the future, it's so hard to find motivation when you don't know what's going to come

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

The systems don't work in a way to support young people not to feel anxious about this. You feel like there is this ticking time bomb behind you, people saying 'ugh, as if I'm going to make it to the end of university'

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

³<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bdbb75ccef37259122e59aa/t/5f3394a2654885030c051243/1597215912482/Youth19+Youth+Voice+Brief.pdf>

Government and system leaders must listen to young people

Young people told us that when they are invited to meet with government officials and Members of Parliament, their ideas are ignored on issues that affect them now and in the future.⁴ They are frustrated at having their time wasted.

There's a lot more bureaucracy that young people are aware of ... they have a desire to make change, but they don't have the greater awareness of how the world actually works and bureaucracy. And so, with that comes that frustration that you're running into roadblocks or feeling like they can't make change cause people aren't listening to them

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Political systems won't budge which affects our wellbeing

- Māoriland

Give us opportunities that everyone gets, like open days or internships. I want to be pushed

- Yes Disability

Young people want action on climate change

Climate change is consistently raised by young people as a pressing and present issue when they think about their future,⁴ since young people value the health of natural environment for their wellbeing,⁵ particularly for rangatahi Māori.⁶

There is a lot of anxiety and fear happening around the state of the planet. Current systems and messaging do not support young people to not feel anxious and fearful about those things.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

⁴<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bdbb75ccef37259122e59aa/t/5f3394a2654885030c051243/1597215912482/Youth19+Youth+Voice+Brief.pdf>

⁵ <https://communityresearch.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/formidable/8/Nga---Ko--rero-Hauora-o-Nga---Taiohi.pdf>

⁶ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2019.103638>

People with power aren't listening to the people of the land. We just can't keep going the way we are, consumption, diet, tools, the way we live – it's embedded

- Māoriland

There's no self-control or willingness to stop [climate change] by people who have the most impact. Lot of blame, a lot it is fearmongering us into doing things that are out of our hands

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

There's no point even considering that I might be a parent because I wouldn't bring a child into this world because of how serious things are, particularly with climate change as a sort of top reason for that

- Hui for rainbow young people

Young people are under pressure

Young people reported feeling intense pressure by agencies, organisations and communities to make the right choices about their own futures. They explained this pressure increased their experiences of stress and anxiety.

I have had so many kōrero with young people, “Oh, I need to decide what I wanna do when I leave school” in year 11. I don't know where that social message is coming from, potentially school or different avenues, but [young people] are feeling this like urgency to knuckle down and be like, “I can't change”.

- Youthline Advisory Committee

[Young people] feel they have to fit in this box or if they want to be viewed, as [having] contributed to society, there's only a few set paths for your future. And if you pick the wrong one, you'll be looked down on.

- Hui for rainbow young people

Adults going forward need to be more aware of the rangatahi and the tamariki and what could be happening in their lives and be respectful of that. Whilst also surrounding them with support and with love, and just like, 'yes, we need you, we want you, you are the future of our species' kind of a thing.

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

Young people need economic stability

Many rangatahi Māori and young people spoke about the connections between mental health and economic concerns, and the disproportionate impact of these issues on rangatahi Māori, Pacific and rainbow young people.⁷

The ability to afford to do things that people, in past generations have taken for granted like buying a house. Not on any of our young people's radar at all. It's not seen as an achievable goal

- Hui for rainbow young people

It's hard to focus on myself. I wanna move out of home but there's bills and my family. When you're in a house full of people nothing's ever really yours.

- Māoriland

Young people with disabilities highlighted that service providers' unwillingness to facilitate their transition to higher education had an implication for their future economic stability.

We all have the right to go to work, to have a job, to get paid so that we can get a pension, so that we can go on holidays, and to get a retirement fund. Look at what we are capable of. Look at our abilities and skills. We can do this, we need a job, real money

- New Zealand Down Syndrome Association

⁷ <https://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan-phase-one-report-back/appendix-4-youth-parliament-general-debate-thematic-analysis-a3-overview.pdf>

Calls to action

- 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.

Social media and safety online

Social media and digital spaces are integrated into many young people's lives, and Aotearoa has some of the highest rates of youth engagement in online media in the world.⁸ The impact of social media on wellbeing and mental health is subject to speculation in the absence of consistent evidence provided.

And that's not often looked into, because it's like, "Oh well, my kids are on social media, they know what they're doing," but they could be getting horrendously bullied or stalked, or messaging people that you probably wouldn't want them to message.

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

Young people seek community and connection online

Many of our people are young people that are disconnected from each other because they've been educated in isolation in the mainstream. So online has been a positive for us to interact with each other. Face-to-face is better for us as a community

⁸ https://women.govt.nz/sites/public_files/NZ-teens-and-digital-harm_statistical-insights_2018.pdf

- Complex Care Group

Social media is treated by older generations as a separate entity from reality, when in fact it has become a part of our social fabric. This makes it hard to have these conversations with older generations

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

There is pressure to be visible and a need to be safe

Young people expressed the difficulty in detaching from digital spaces and social media. Social connections and friendships are maintained online, having a presence online is seen as necessary for jobs, and in some cases for school or community connections.

In our conversations, we heard about many older adults misunderstanding the reasons young people are online. These misunderstandings obscured constructive conversations about staying safe or preventing harm.

Previous generations didn't see everything, it wasn't in your face all the time. It's so overwhelming for young people.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

And the older generations who are supposed to be imparting lessons about safety and boundaries and limits of online spaces and stuff like that, can't do so because they lack the understanding and familiarity with any of the topics

- Hui for rainbow young people

Increasing equitable access to online connections is important, but these spaces need to be safe

Young people from those groups experiencing bullying, racism and discrimination were the ones who found online spaces vital to connect with like-minded people. However, access to digital devices and internet connections is inequitable.

Social media is a safe or at least different space when you're shut out of spaces in real life, but it's risky

- Yes Disability

Rainbow young people connect to each other using social media, which is really important. But it means that things can be happening in all sorts of places and people really feel the impact of that, whether it's somewhere else in Aotearoa or if it's overseas. It can be the impact of following what's happening in other countries around the world that really does have that impact on people's wellbeing

- Hui for rainbow young people

Social media increases young peoples' interaction with content that is not intentionally harmful but can cause distress because of the volume of information and the difficulty of shutting it off.

Young people don't really have a choice because the world that they live in involves social media hugely. And so much of the information that they get fed through that is negative information about the world. And so in a way that fear is kind of pushed onto them because of what they're being fed every day

- Youthline Advisory Committee

The way you react to the news "oh that's terrible...scroll". That feeling isn't talked about. Emotions so heavy, fear, sadness, guilt, and no capacity to digest.

- Māoriland

You get bullying at school, but with social media you're adding another level of bullying. Social media platforms need to have policies about being safe online.

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

People online [are] being more radicalised to hate and target trans people and rainbow people in general ... a lot of those keywords are the same, it also means that sometimes young people who are looking for things

around being trans or being rainbow are exposed to that sort of content as well

- Hui for rainbow young people

Young people are clear in identifying the responsibility of platforms in regulating what is published. They wanted to see more efforts to regulate material, protect young people from harmful messages, and provide support for developing the skills and tools to understand what they see and hear online.

It's ultimately up to Meta, Twitter, TikTok to make those structural decisions, which don't protect rainbow people, people of colour, disabled people and all the intersecting groups within.

- Hui for rainbow young people

Social media [providers] will remove some things but you can report someone being racist or threatening people and it just says, 'there is no issue here' and then just leaves it ... [companies] say 'we do not allow bullying, we do not allow this', but they do. And if they're going to put that 'this is our policy', they need to follow through with their policy.

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

More focus on censorship on what kids are sensitive to, the way it goes into your brain and body.

- Māoriland

We need to teach our young people how to have that critical lens early on. Teach young people to weigh up information and its validity. That's not a skill that's necessarily taught. There's a lot of misinformation out there that could be really damaging.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

All this raru in the world. There needs to be a trusted voice. 10-20 years ago, kids weren't exposed to that stuff. Kids

are like, “I don’t have the skills and tools to change this”.

Navigating that is tricky

- Māoriland

We don’t yet know the effects of having access to global information all the time. The comprehension of the world can be skewed as the algorithm creates echo chambers

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Calls to action

- 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.

Racism and Discrimination

In 2021, Te Rau Tira highlighted that rangatahi Māori students faced on average, greater poverty and ethnic discrimination than non-Māori students. It also reported on racism, trans and homophobia experienced by young people in school settings. In 2022, the **What About Me?** national youth health and wellbeing survey results were published, reflecting the views of over 7,200 school students aged 12-18 years. The statistics show that rainbow and young people with disabilities find it harder to express their identity and to find pride in who they are, compared to their non-rainbow and non-disabled peers.

Acceptance and celebration of diversity is something that young people from many different identities note as important for wellbeing.⁹

Cultural competency is a hot word. Everyone wants to go to a workshop; but one day of that isn’t going to make a difference. Is it understanding Te Aō Māori, reversing guilt of colonisation, is it actually being curious about working with people from different backgrounds?

⁹ <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Our-Rights-Our-Voices2.pdf>

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

We have all these practices and all these protocols and, we are doing so much better than it was and we are making change but underlying a lot of that is just tokenism. And so, it becomes a lot more damaging when it's there for the wrong intentions

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Young people in Aotearoa find racism and the impacts of colonisation to be one of the biggest issues facing their generation,¹⁰ particularly affecting wellbeing outcomes for indigenous peoples and ethnic minority groups¹¹

Protesters attacked our marae when the Prime Minister visited, and they were really abusive and tamariki were scared.

- Māoriland

We understand that racism isn't going away but we need to see some consequences.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Negativity about rangatahi Māori is what's splashed online

- Māoriland

Rainbow (including sexual and gender minority) young people also report higher levels of discriminatory treatment, social exclusion, homelessness compared to cisgender (traditionally accepted male/female) youth, and consequently much higher rates of mental distress.

We're seeing the impacts of some of the conservative movements, particularly in the States and the UK, and the impact that that rhetoric and stories that young people have access to online around law changes or challenges to healthcare access or these kinds of things overseas

- Hui for rainbow young people

¹⁰ <https://raceunity.nz/youth-statement>

¹¹ <https://archive.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Social-Inclusion-and-Exclusion.pdf>

National conversations should celebrate diversity

We heard that it is not uncommon for young people to feel as if their identity is tokenised or weaponised against them. Young people expressed their hopes to see public debates that celebrate the rights and existence, of Māori and Rainbow communities (among others) in society.

Rangatahi Māori told us they are carrying the burden of public racism which was expressed simultaneously as shaming for existing and being exposed as unfair advantage through restitutive programmes.

You've got these two clashing points and it's constantly everywhere and you see it all the time and you got it all over social media, all in the news, all through parliament and these narratives of, you know, we can't have this because that's woke. Like we're making progress and you've just got people who are trying to bring that progress back constantly. It's gotta be tiring for those people who are suffering from that discrimination

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Similarly, rainbow young people felt that their health and wellbeing was weaponised in political debates about policy changes like conversion practices, and on some occasions experiences of distress caused by discrimination were minimised because of their identity. Some young people with disabilities talked about how their efforts to access services for mental health were ignored or attributed solely to their disability.

So with conversion practices, we saw some MPs using that as a platform to talk about trans kids and (American) Medicare, like gender affirming healthcare and puberty blockers, which was not even the issue at hand, but they were kind of using that as a platform to have conservative talking points around trans people, which is really disappointing.

- Hui for rainbow young people

I think for while we are making these changes and it's awesome and we are trying to make our society more equitable for those people who are kind of pushing in those spaces, it's really hard for us because we are

constantly having to prove ourselves for why we deserve to be here

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Young people need better access to support

There is ongoing and tangible impact of inequitable access to resources or support, particularly those who experience intersecting forms of discrimination such as rainbow young people and young people with disabilities. Young people with experience of State care spoke about the lack of support from the responsible agency, Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children.

I find that there's this massive gap for people 14 to early 20s, where if you are not [eligible to attend] special school, but you're not coping in a mainstream, once you leave school, there's nothing for you either. It's either below your ability or too hard for you.

- Complex Care Group

So there's that additional, I guess, challenge for our people who experience stigma and discrimination due to their mental health. So it's kind of layer, upon layer, upon layer. It's age, it's gender, it's race, and it's mental health, and disabilities as well

- Complex Care Group

There's a lack of resource for our Pasifika communities here. There's no resources that allow our [rainbow] kids obviously to give their pamphlets to their parents to say, "Look, there is some awahi here. You can look through this."

- Hui for rainbow young people

It takes a huge toll on [rainbow youth] wellbeing if you also either come from a country, or from a heritage, where it's still illegal in their countries, So for young people of these heritages. they find themselves kind of repeating these narratives and make them feel really bad or otherwise, anything other than what's normalised

- Hui for rainbow young people

Honest conversations are required to challenge structural discrimination and accountability from people with power to change it, including government agencies, the justice system, businesses and the media.¹²

I think it goes back to power structure and hierarchy. Respectful curiosity is missing because there's a feeling of 'I don't need this', but also because of shame or embarrassment [discussing racism] might bring up for people.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Perpetual ingrained racism from people who are white, unwilling to give up power. Power should be given back to the people so we can change things

- Māoriland

There are those who think racism and discrimination is just the way it is, and this is the way they think. We can't change that, but we can change young people not having invalidating experiences when accessing services due to their ethnicity or culture

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Calls to action

- 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.

¹² <https://multiethnicyoungleaders.org.nz/opinion-fixing-the-broken-leadership-pipeline/>

Whānau wellbeing and intergenerational connection

Connection to whānau and to culture is crucial for wellbeing, which develops cultural resilience.

I find strength in connections with mum and dad. They genuinely listen to me. They are someone who will hear me

- Māoriland

There is a need to connect with whakapapa – whatever this means for youth. Many young people don't have this opportunity, because their parents are immigrants, lost ancestral knowledge

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Social connections and whānau give you identity. We know who we are

- Māoriland

There needs to be more holistic data as whānau support and the impact on a young person's wellness cannot be measured by numbers alone

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Community support,¹³ ongoing mentorship and guidance was discussed by young people to be pillars in equipping them to navigate life, particularly from important kaiārahi in their lives.¹⁴

They want to come to the events ... they have these needs for peer connection, shared experience, but then they can't because mum's in hospital. With COVID-19 we moved to telehealth, but then that meant people in rural areas that didn't have wifi or reception couldn't connect with us. Similarly, they couldn't join our online events, which were the peer connection substitutes during that time.

¹³https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youthline.co.nz%2Fuploads%2F2%2F9%2F8%2F1%2F29818351%2Fcolmar_brunton.ppt&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

¹⁴ <https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz/waikato-rangatahi-opportunity/>

- Youthline Advisory Committee

In our engagement with young people with disabilities, the desire to lead independent and purposeful lives is met with discriminatory behaviour regardless of whether their disability is visible or not.¹⁵

A lot of challenges with support workers and ‘mentors’ minimising people – by offering or encouraging young people with disabilities to take easy jobs with low barriers, “lowering your expectations” because the alternative requires more effort and connection

- Yes Disability

Reduce barriers for connection and belonging

Attempts by young people to achieve connectedness and belonging are met with varied obstacles. A particular issue faced by urban rangatahi Māori is the lack of access to a stable home.¹⁶ Without stability at home, young people seek belonging and connectedness through significant relationships in the community; whilst navigating stigmatisation and external scrutiny from groups such as police and gangs.

Community connections hold strong importance for young people, when there is a lack of stability at home. However, frequent relocation of housing experienced by rangatahi and their whānau erodes opportunities to meaningfully connect within local neighbourhoods. Pacific youth find connection to their cultural and identity as integral to their wellbeing, however their sense of belonging in Aotearoa is impacted due to conflicting cultural values, traditions and settings.

I think if I was grounded in my culture that I think I would like to know myself a bit more.

- Youthline Advisory Committee

I feel responsible to advocate for my people even if don’t connect to the culture as much.

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

Young people from rainbow communities agreed that connection to others and culture was integral to wellbeing, although this was sometimes problematic.

¹⁵ <https://www.occ.org.nz/documents/147/Disabled-Children-and-Young-People-Report.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://doi.org/10.26686/wgtn.17060876.v1>

One of the biggest factors for rainbow young people in terms of what impacts their mental health and suicidality, if somebody is accepted by at least one adult in their whānau, that's a massive protective factor. And, if they're rejected or if they're not accepted, that's a massive risk factor.

- Hui for rainbow young people

And I think one of the issues there for rainbow communities ... intergenerational connection, is that sometimes that can be kind of stigmatised or difficult ... Sometimes older people relating to younger people can be kind of seen as predatory, like it's kind of sexualized.

- Hui for rainbow young people

People of colour, young people of colour, LGBTQIA+ persons definitely have spoken about intergenerational connections, and they definitely need it and the support given that their social and cultural kinship networks are tightly knit and still plays a big, big, big role in their lives.

- Hui for rainbow young people

So often, a deaf child grows up in a hearing family where everyone speaks. They don't really understand their identity as a deaf person until they see the wider deaf community. And it's similar in the rainbow community as well being accepted within their family and not wanting to be seen within your own family for me as a deaf person, someone who is hearing impaired or is not quite the same as the others in your family

- Complex Care Group

Whānau need support

Young people are aware of challenges for their whānau and the need for them to be supported, which in turn contributes to young people's wellbeing. Young people also explained that their connection to older generations today and future generations to

come was a driver in their decision-making.¹⁷ The role of young people as contributors to the wellbeing of the whānau was an important consideration in discussions about intergenerational connection.¹⁸

If people don't have parents who know how to look after themselves, it's very hard to teach rangatahi, how to look after themselves from a mental health point of view. And then also from a cultural point of view, cuz they are, they're the ones who look after us and they pass on the knowledge, but if the knowledge is not there, then how can they pass it on?

- Youthline Advisory Committee

Caregivers and OT staff who work with some of our most vulnerable people – need more training and trauma informed approaches when engaging with young people

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

[The] Goal of no children in care requires more support for whānau

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

Caregivers or parents don't know a lot about mental health. And so, when their child comes to them with concerns about their own mental health, I feel like it's a really big fear of 'what have I done wrong' kind of a thing, as opposed to 'what can I do to help my child'. ...

- Voyce Whakarongo Mai

Young people with disabilities also expressed frustration at economic instability, and how it erodes quality time for intergenerational connection. Additionally, they have also repeatedly called for support agencies to evolve their approaches to better direct resources at them.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/research/our-research/what-makes-a-good-life/>

¹⁸ <https://www.occ.org.nz/documents/148/English-Tamariki-Rangatahi-Maori-Summary-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/disabled-children-young-people-summary-report/>

The mental health of a young person can impact their family - do services consider this? What resources are there for whānau to support themselves without feeling like they need to see a psychologist?

- Whāraurau Youth Advisors

I also think there needs to be more support for the siblings of the disabled person as well as they struggle with so many things and they often go unnoticed and unrecognised with their needs as well

- Complex Care Group

How to create those safe spaces so that they can have their educational needs and opportunities for the future. Community connection for pro-social opportunities, connection to their environment, connection to the different cultures

- Complex Care Group

When we can create a safe space for them, then their social capital's going to be increased because they're going to be making more connections because they feel safer. And then hopefully, by doing that, they end up with stronger social determinants, which will give them more opportunities

- Complex Care Group

Calls to action

- 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.

Conclusion

This report is the culmination of years of self-advocacy on the part of rangatahi Māori and young people. The voices of rangatahi Māori and young people were heard through previous government and media reports, academic literature and the generous time given by a community of young people from a range of organisations.

We acknowledge the contributions of everyone who has given their time and trust to share their experiences of distress to help us gain these valuable insights.

This report is a call to action for agencies whose work forms part of the wellbeing system in Aotearoa. Te Hiringa Mahara will take the insights learned from this project and will share this with a range of government agencies, whose work will, if influenced by the calls made by rangatahi Māori and young people in this report and other resources, enhance the wellbeing of rangatahi Māori and young people in Aotearoa.

We will share this in direct conversation with agency executives, in Ministerial advice and mentoring agencies to embed [He Ara Oranga wellbeing outcomes framework](#) as a mechanism to fulfil the calls made in this report.

We will also track progress against the calls made in this report. Where rangatahi Māori and young people have asked for resources to help them and their caregivers, we will check periodically to see if resources exist, and that they are relevant.

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