

Whakamōhiotanga whānui | Overall summary

In this report, we shine a light on the practice of admitting young people (aged 12 to 17 years) to adult inpatient mental health services (adult services) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The 2018 Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction heard concerns about the practice of admitting young people to adult services. Yet at that time, there was limited information about how this practice affects young people, whānau, and families. Through our discussions with young people, whānau, and families, we have heard that this practice may be harmful, causes a loss of hope, and does not uphold the rights of young people. We are also concerned that, with respect to rangatahi Māori, the practice does not reflect the Crown's commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The following are among our key findings:

- The admission of young people into adult mental health inpatient services has decreased over the last decade, however, one in four young people who are admitted to inpatient care is admitted to an adult service.
- Admitting young people to adult services may cause harm and reduce their sense of hope.
- The negative impacts of this practice outweigh any potential positives, and young people and their whānau and family should not have to choose between age-appropriate services, and services close to home.
- Young people want to be involved in co-designing youth-specific acute response services across Aotearoa.

This report states our call to action: reduce the number of young people admitted to adult inpatient mental health services to zero. To achieve this, we need committed leadership and a detailed action plan. The Government should consider the following as part of that plan:

- Conduct a thorough investigation of the practice of using adult mental health services for young people, including the reasons why this occurs.
- Develop youth-specific acute options within communities to address the needs of young people experiencing acute distress. Options should include residential alternatives to hospital-based inpatient mental health care.
- Develop kaupapa Māori services as part of the network of acute options for rangatahi Māori.

We will monitor progress that Government, commissioners, and services make in addressing our call to action detailed above.