TIAKI WHAKAPAPA

Executive Summary

COVID-19 has created a window of opportunity for positive change to be made. Despite the negative impacts this global pandemic has had on our economy, it has also formed an opening for Māori leadership to excel in a time of need and uncertainty. In Taranaki, the iwi-led response to COVID-19 demonstrated how to successfully provide care and support to those in need during an emergency, with agility and speed.

Ethnicity is a risk factor for COVID-19

Today, Māori are at a greater risk of being more seriously impacted by COVID-19 than non-Māori. The prevalence of health conditions such as cardiovascular, respiratory and kidney diseases, diabetes and cancer is much higher in Māori populations than in non-Māori. Māori also tend to get these diseases at a younger age and are more likely to be living with multiple conditions, which further increase the risk of serious infection or death from COVID-19.

Crown Obligations

Ko Ō Tika , ko Tō Reo – Your Rights, Your Voice was released by the NZ Human Rights Commission in October 2020 and highlights the Crown's obligation to the Māori of Aotearoa through Te Tiriti O Waitangi. Together, Te Tiriti and the human rights as outlined provide for co-existing systems of governance and a shared knowledge base. It declares the role of our current government agencies to honour and implement the growing partnership between Kāwanatanga (Crown) and Rangatiratanga (hapū and iwi). Māori leadership is crucial in improving the negative health outcomes for our Māori communities.

Socioeconomic Status of Māori in Taranaki

Based on the 2018 Census, Taranaki has a young Māori population with a high level of unemployment. The Māori population is relatively young with the median age being 25 years old, compared to the general Taranaki population which is 40 years old. Unemployment for Māori (8.4%) is more than double that of non-Māori (4.0%), with almost one in every 12 Māori who are unemployed.

An awakening of racial injustice

The recent riots and protests breaking out around the world, including those surrounding the *Black Lives Matter* movement, are just one example of governments from across the world being forced to address racism in their existing legislation, institutions and systems. As a nation, we must acknowledge the ongoing impacts (social, economic, health) of colonisation on the Māori indigenous population of Aotearoa.

Understanding the COVID-19 response from a Taranaki Māori perspective

This research has been undertaken to better understand the COVID-19 response from a Taranaki Māori perspective. It aims to understand how supported Māori in the community felt throughout

the COVID-19 pandemic response in Taranaki, and identify successful interventions that supported Māori wellbeing.

Opportunity for change

The events of COVID-19 have created a window of opportunity to make change, for the public health system to bridge the gap of inequity for Māori in New Zealand. According to Graham & Masters-Awatere (2020), the existing public health system is experienced as hostile and alienating for many Māori. Furthermore, the health status of Māori is demonstrably poorer than other New Zealanders.

Findings: The Taranaki Māori response to COVID-19

Integrating tikanga and kaupapa Māori principles into mainstream response approaches

A great example of partnership was the iwi checkpoints, they monitored who was entering and leaving the region. We saw police (Crown) and Iwi (Māori) working side-by-side with the common goal of protecting life and preventing any further spread of COVID-19. We often ask ourselves in the health sector *what it looks like to operationalise Te Tiriti* – this is it.

Build trust between iwi/hapū and government agencies to co-design an emergency response plan

In order for partnership between Crown and Māori to occur, a high trust relationship needs to be built or further nurtured. Throughout the Taranaki response we saw iwi, Māori provider, DHB and large agencies like CDEM join together to unite against COVID-19. If power is distributed evenly then resources can be joined together to best help out those in need.

Empowering iwi-led response to provide "By-Māori-For-Māori" support

Māori leadership is unique in the fact they see the people in their communities as immediate or extended family, not strangers. That's what the value of whakapapa brings in the context of emergency response; the idea that everyone is interconnected and related somehow. Iwi feel a personal responsibility to care for their bloodlines, which is why free food parcels and care packages were personally delivered to kaumatua, and phone calls made to see what families need and to listen to their struggles.

Demonstrated strengths of the Māori response

In Te Ao Māori there is a cultural infrastructure and understanding where whānau, hapū and iwi know how to respond in the event of a disaster. Tangihanga for example, Māori are really good at coming together fast and joining resources, it is how we get through tough times. It's natural for Māori to tap into those pre-existing networks and rely on whakapapa to see them through a future that is unknown or uncertain. Tikanga core values enable whānau, hapu and iwi to get through.

Kayla Manuirirangi
Contact: kayla.manuirirangi@tdhb.org.nz
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Partnership in Emergency Response Planning

There is a lot to be learned from the way iwi and Māori health providers responded to the events of COVID-19; they were prepared and able to provide equitable, needs-based care for the community amidst a very precarious time. The reason behind the successful response for the iwi and Māori provider wasn't just in their pandemic preparedness, but the pre-existing relationships they have.

Indigenous Knowledge is under utilised

Māori knowledge has great value, but there is a lack of kaupapa Māori research available. Evidence-based research is a vital step for implementing any new approach or initiative, yet Māori knowledge is passed down orally from generation to generation through stories and artwork. In a society that values evidence based research and published literature, not knowledge passed down through the generations, the value of implementing indigenous knowledge and opportunities presented by it are underutilised.

Fears and Scaremongering

Many of the respondents talked of their concerns about scaremongering, conspiracy theories and false information. This exposes the increasing need for credible, quality, accurate and reliable Māori communications. Mistrust of the government, based on the historical experiences of indigenous peoples, and lower education levels (e.g. lower scientific literacy) may make people more susceptible to believing false information.

Future Concerns

With the increased financial and economic pressure on our nation because of COVID-19, New Zealand may see increases in unemployment, poverty and the number of people on welfare.

Psychosocial response

Originally, this project was designed to help with "Māori Response" for the Taranaki DHB Pandemic Response Plan for COVID-19. However, the lack of Māori input to the Taranaki DHB Pandemic Response Plan reveals a need to engage with important members of the Māori community around Taranaki who know how to respond and support their people in times of disaster.

Conclusion

The findings from the stakeholder interviews strongly support the existing literature surrounding Māori and emergency responses. Key findings from the stakeholder interviews aligned with the three key themes found in the literature review:

- Integrate tikanga and kaupapa Māori principles into mainstream approaches
- Build trust between iwi/hapū and government agencies to co-design
- Empowering iwi-led response to provide "by-Māori for-Māori" support

The stakeholder interviews reinforced the value of whakapapa and relationships as the most important part of a successful COVID-19 response in Taranaki, in 2020. The recommendations are made based on the findings from the literature review and stakeholder interviews, with the goal of honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and achieving a more equitable future for Māori.

Kayla Manuirirangi   Date: 30/11/2020
Contact: kayla.manuirirangi@tdhb.org.nz

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Application of Te Tiriti o Waitangi Articles and Principles

It is recommended that Taranaki PHU/DHB enacts the Taranaki DHB position statement acknowledging and ensuring that the lessons learned from COVID-19 are taken forward into Te Ao Hou, the new world, in particular, a commitment to enabling the full implementation of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Kawau Mārō, 2020, p 24).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi describes the role of government agencies in honouring and implementing the intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in a growing partnership between Kāwanatanga (Crown) and Rangatiratanga (Iwi). Partnership and the implementation of Māori solutions should be recognised as a fundamental human right for Māori.

2. Mahi Tahi – Develop a Taranaki Wide Pandemic Plan

It is recommended that Taranaki DHB implements the recommendations from the Health Equity Assessment Tool (HEAT) of the Taranaki DHB Pandemic Response Plan completed by Dr Greg Evans in 2018.

A group involving Māori stakeholders, either from iwi or Māori health providers, could develop an action plan. This should be formulated with the purpose of revising the plan to provide greater support for and partnership with, the Māori community.

3. Whānaungatanga – Building stronger relationships with Iwi and Māori Health Organisations

It is recommended that Taranaki PHU/DHB further strengthens its relationships with Māori in the community (specifically hapū, iwi and Māori health providers), particularly regarding emergency responses.

Therefore, when a disaster or emergency happens, both parties are ready and can join resources to provide a better response for the community. Working members from the DHB should take the initiative to reach out to Māori in the community as it is a responsibility that lies with the Crown.

4. Oranga Hinengaro / Resilience

It is recommended that use of the word "psychosocial" by Taranaki PHU/DHB during emergency responses, including pandemics, be reconsidered.

Reo and tikanga Māori approaches should be encouraged and communicated to demonstrate a value of indigenous knowledge that sustains a healthy lifestyle for Māori.

5. Tiaki Whakapapa

It is recommended that Taranaki PHU/DHB find ways to better utilise mātauranga Māori approaches in the design and delivery of its emergency responses.

Actively acknowledge the positive impact that this way of thinking could improve the services provided to the community in the event of a pandemic, emergency or natural disaster.

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