

Te Tiratū Iwi Māori Partnership Board

Tuāki Tū *Position Statement*

Rangatahi Māori Mental Health

Tuhinga tīmatanga *Introduction*

Te Tiratū Iwi Māori Partnership Board serves as a crucial advocate for whānau and communities, with a statutory responsibility to understand and represent local hauora Māori needs and aspirations, influence regional strategies, and shape healthcare services accordingly. This statement highlights urgent concerns in rural Waikato, particularly Te Kuiti, Taumarunui, and Ōtorohanga though issues are relevant more broadly.

Horopaki *Context*

Rangatahi mental health in rural communities is a critical issue demanding immediate attention. Māori youth face disproportionate risks of self-harm, addictions, mental illness, and suicide. Takatāpuhi, / rainbow youth including Māori, experience especially high levels of distress. These challenges, compounded by intergenerational trauma and systemic inequities, threaten to create adverse lifelong consequences if not urgently addressed.

Geographic isolation, workforce shortages, stigma, poverty, and disconnection from cultural anchors further exacerbate rural challenges. The evidence is longstanding and consistent: Māori youth bear heavier mental health burdens, yet services remain under-resourced, inaccessible, or culturally misaligned.

Tuāki tū *Position Statement*

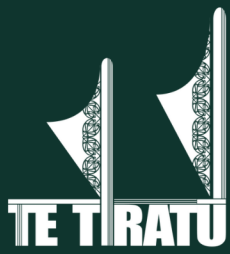
Māori youth mental health is in crisis. Rapid rises in psychological distress and suicide rates require urgent, targeted investment. Whānau, hapū, and iwi must be central to solutions. Intensive localised efforts will enable greater wellbeing and brighter futures for vulnerable rangatahi. Protecting and promoting youth mental wellbeing is now a matter of urgency.

Karanga kia mahi *Call to Action*

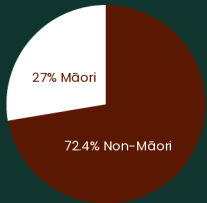


Government must prioritise early intervention, targeted funding, and culturally grounded approaches to transform a system currently exacerbating disadvantage. Locally led initiatives are essential - empowering communities to lead solutions that reflect rangatahi strengths, realities, and aspirations. Such efforts foster belonging, trust, and resilience, building pathways to healthier futures.





Ngā Tangata



Total Population
438,987
Non-Māori
317,664



Māori Descent
121,323

25

Māori Under 25yrs
in Waikato
~60,000

Māori Under 25yrs
in Greater Rural
Waikato
~36,000



Māori Population
south of Kihikihi to
National Park
~8,800

25

Māori Under 25yrs
in this southern area
~4,400

Ngā wā hanga matua *Priority Areas for Community Wellbeing and Support*

• Urgent Early Intervention

Expand services that build self-esteem, support healthy lifestyles, and provide proactive help before crises escalate.

• Mental Health Specialists in Rural Areas

Significantly increase psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, and social workers available to rangatahi and whānau. Currently, schools and providers rely on emergency services (Police, St John, Women's Refuge) for frequent crises roles beyond their scope.

• Pharmacy Access

Establish after-hours pharmacy solutions to ensure timely access to medication and advice.

• Dental Services for Youth

Expand affordable or free dental care up to age 25. Poor dental health undermines confidence, self-image, and wellbeing.

• Maternity Resource Centre – Te Kuiti

Prevent the closure of this vital service by January 2026. It is critical for young mums, pēpē, and whānau.

• Youth Services – Te Kuiti

Secure increased, sustained funding for wrap-around youth services tailored to rangatahi and whānau needs.

• St John Services in Rural Communities

Boost resourcing for timely emergency response in isolated areas.

• Kai Security

Expand culturally sensitive food security initiatives to support whānau dignity and health.

• Healthy, Affordable Housing

Increase availability of safe housing for rangatahi to provide stable foundations for wellbeing.

• Recreation and Sport Facilities – Taumarunui

Invest in more diverse and inclusive recreation opportunities beyond rugby and netball to build connection, belonging, and wellbeing.

Whakarā popototanga *Summary of Key Points*

- **Disproportionate risk:** Māori youth experience higher psychological distress, suicide, substance use, and barriers to care—especially in rural Waikato.
- **Cultural connection builds resilience:** Māori youth thrive when supported through identity, whakapapa, and whenua.
- **Te Tiriti obligations:** The Crown must uphold partnership, equity, and active protection in Māori youth mental health.
- **Local solutions:** Rangatahi and whānau voices must shape grassroots, kaupapa Māori solutions blending traditional knowledge with modern practice.
- **Community exemplars:** Initiatives like Hauora Waikato, Te Awhi Whānau, and the Puāwai Project show the power of local, culturally grounded services.
- **Alignment with policy:** This position aligns with Pae Ora and Te Manawa Taki, calling for culturally relevant, community-led care.
- **Systemic contributors:** Intergenerational trauma, poverty, access barriers, cultural loss, and racism intensify mental health inequities.

Ngā taunakitanga ki te Kāwanatanga *Recommendations for Government*

1. Increase rural funding and expand telehealth capacity.
2. Build and retain a rural mental health workforce.
3. Reduce stigma through education and professional training.
4. Address socioeconomic drivers of distress.
5. Resource Māori cultural perspectives and whānau involvement.
6. Support youth-led and community-based programmes.

Whakakapi *Conclusion*

Te Tiratū Iwi Māori Partnership Board is committed to whānau-centred, culturally grounded health solutions. With nearly half of the Māori population under 25, addressing youth mental health is urgent. Rising distress levels over the past decade demand immediate investment in equitable, locally led solutions. Without it, Aotearoa risks deeper social and health crises that will burden whānau, communities, and services for generations to come.