

# Briefing

## COVID-19 Insights Paper for publication: Pacific connectedness and wellbeing in the pandemic

<b>Date due to MO:</b>	29/05/2023	<b>Action required by:</b>	08/06/2023
<b>Security level:</b>	UNCLASSIFIED	<b>Briefing number:</b>	BN2023-016
<b>To:</b>	Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister of Health		
<b>Copy to:</b>	Hon Peeni Henare, Associate Minister of Health (Māori Health) Hon Barbara Edmonds, Associate Minister of Health (Pacific Peoples) [REDACTED]		

## Contact for Telephone Discussion

Name	Position	[REDACTED]
Karen Orsborn	Chief Executive	[REDACTED]
Matthew Bloomer	Acting Director Wellbeing System Leadership	[REDACTED]

## Minister's Office to Complete

- |  |                                    |   |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved            | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline   | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change        | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen      | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by event |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's note | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |   |

Comment:

# COVID-19 Insights Paper for publication: Pacific connectedness and wellbeing in the pandemic

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<b>Security level:</b>	UNCLASSIFIED	<b>Date:</b>	29/05/2023
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<b>To:</b>	Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister of Health
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## Purpose

1. On 8 June 2023, Te Hiringa Mahara intends to publish the attached paper on Pacific peoples' wellbeing during the pandemic.

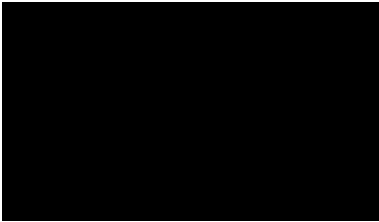
## Summary

2. On 8 June 2023, we will publish 'Pacific connectedness and wellbeing in the pandemic', the seventh of eight COVID-19 insights reports. This paper explores the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pacific wellbeing, with a focus on how connectedness was both impacted by the pandemic, and a key feature in Pacific communities' responses that served to support families and helped mitigate the challenges faced.
3. In short, Pacific peoples' connection – to family, community, culture and faith – has been a key source of strength and resilience in the pandemic.
  - Pacific peoples endured some of the worst impacts of the pandemic, and this included serious disruption to the ways they connect with family, community, church and culture.
  - Pacific peoples' connectedness enabled them to provide flexible and practical support to each other during the pandemic, and to support shared wellbeing.
  - Pacific peoples have shown that they know how to support their communities - we can support greater wellbeing by listening to Pacific peoples, involving them in decision-making, and trusting and resourcing them to support each other and their communities.
4. A media release and LinkedIn post will be made alongside publication. Te Hiringa Mahara will respond to media interest; no specific media appearances are planned.
5. The paper and a high-level communications plan are attached, for your information. The media release, key messages, and a Q&A will be shared with your office before the publication date.

## Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **note**, on 8 June 2023, subject to minor editing changes, Te Hiringa Mahara will publish the attached report on *Pacific connectedness and wellbeing in the pandemic* **Yes / No**
  
- b) **note** we intend to release this briefing under our proactive release policy **Yes / No**



Karen Orsborn  
**Chief Executive**  
Date: 29/05/2023

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall  
**Minister of Health**  
Date:



# COVID-19 Insights Paper for publication: Pacific connectedness and wellbeing in the pandemic

## Background

6. As noted in previous briefings [BN2023-014, and others], we have published six of eight reports to be produced as part of our Covid-19 Impacts Insights Programme.
7. The programme provides short, accessible, focused reports in an agile way. It cannot provide a comprehensive view of the impacts of Covid-19; it provides key insights on wellbeing areas or populations of focus.
8. This seventh report draws on academic and 'grey' literature, and engagement with communities and leaders, to describe and learn from Pacific peoples' wellbeing in the pandemic, with a focus on connectedness. MPP's Lalanga Fou and related work has been invaluable, and shaped the scope and the findings of this paper.

## Summary of findings

9. Being connected and valued is important to wellbeing. Connectedness, to family, community, faith and culture, is particularly inherent in the key values, beliefs and practices that shape Pacific peoples experience of wellbeing.
10. In Aotearoa, Pacific peoples are most affected by many inequities in social determinants of health, evident in education, employment, housing and health outcomes. Despite these challenges, Pacific peoples report high levels of wellbeing and survey data shows Pacific people hold stronger community connections, bonds of trust and religious identity than the population as a whole.
11. The COVID-19 pandemic completely disrupted the way of being for Pacific peoples.
  - Pre-existing inequities were magnified by COVID-19, and challenges for Pacific communities further entrenched. Families experienced increased stress and anxiety from fear of COVID-19, reduced income, food insecurity and caring for vulnerable family members.
  - They were unable to access their usual sources of support within the community, including extended families and church; and it was not possible to return to Pacific homelands or see relatives who live overseas.
12. In the face of these threats to wellbeing, families and communities drew on the values innate to Pacific culture and met challenges with the collective strength of Pacific relationships and connections.
  - During lockdown, the importance of family vā (relationships) and being part of a collective was reconfirmed, with a renewed appreciation for life and more time for relationships with family, friends and with God. Pacific people, along with Māori, reported higher life satisfaction and family wellbeing in 2021, than in 2018.



- The connectedness of Pacific communities enabled them to come together to both receive and provide support to one another and remain strong during times of social distancing and physical isolation.
13. Pacific communities, churches and providers used connections and networks to rapidly meet the needs of Pacific families and developed new ways of maintaining connectedness.
- Faith and spirituality are key components of Pacific wellbeing, and communities are connected through faith-based networks. Church leaders supported the work of government agencies during the pandemic and were key partners in ensuring community resilience and recovery after the first lockdown.
  - Many churches were well prepared to respond, and lockdown provided an opportunity to transform how they did things to further support families, such as adapting digital platforms for service delivery. From the outset of the lockdowns, church, community and social events swiftly moved to online platforms, enabling people to stay connected.
  - Innovation flourished as Pacific providers worked collaboratively with agencies, DHBs and public health units. Pacific providers' level of preparedness prior to COVID-19 taking hold in Aotearoa and the factors inherent within Pacific organisations, created the conditions to respond to community needs quickly, effectively and holistically.
  - Pacific providers became a bridge between the community and government agencies. High trust models enabled providers to establish flexible, adaptive responses that allowed them to better meet the needs of their communities.
14. Pacific communities are well connected, flexible and supportive. The pandemic highlighted that connectedness, to culture and community, is critical to Pacific wellbeing, and should be recognised and supported.
- Understanding and supporting pan-Pacific approaches is valuable, given shared values, common interests, and cultural similarities. In the regions, and other locations where the Pacific population is lower, this is particularly helpful. However, each Pacific community is different, and where they are can identify their own needs and are supported to respond appropriately, wellbeing is even better supported.
15. Pacific peoples need to be involved in decision-making that affects them. Pacific communities used the knowledge, resources and networks available to them to support their own wellbeing through the pandemic.
- It is important that government agencies recognise this, and learn from it, in designing future policies and responses. This will mean ensuring the Pacific communities and expertise are better involved in government decision-making.
  - Trusting and supporting Pacific organisations who know their communities will support wellbeing. Pacific peoples trust the Pacific providers that are embedded in their communities – and this trust is key to providing support.
  - During the pandemic, we saw how a high-trust model worked, including to support households with necessities and food, digital technology to enable connectivity,



and accommodation. These high-trust models will work outside of the pandemic too, enabling communities and providers to spend more time and energy supporting local wellbeing, in a way that works for them.

16. More research and data is needed to better understand wellbeing. Recently, steps have been taken to address this, with the publication of reports or strategies drawing on Pacific voices and experiences, including from the Health Promotion Agency, Ministries of Health and Pacific Peoples, and the Treasury. Much of what we do know, however, is from a pan-Pacific, rather than ethnic perspective.
  - We need a comprehensive understanding of Pacific wellbeing to better inform policy, including collecting social survey data with greater granularity to understand and reflect different experiences of unique cultural and ethnic Pacific populations.
  - Further exploring the wellbeing impacts of the pandemic for Pacific peoples will be necessary to support ongoing wellbeing now, and to plan for future challenges to wellbeing.

## Communications Plan

17. A high-level communications plan is attached for your information. Key points are:
  - A media release will support publication of the reports, and a LinkedIn post will be made alongside publication.
  - Te Hiringa Mahara will front any media interest. No media appearances are planned, but Te Hiringa Mahara Chief Executive Karen Orsborn will be the primary spokesperson for any media interest.

## Consultation

18. The attached paper has been informed by talanoa with a range of Pacific community leaders and representatives of Pacific service providers, and reviewed by two external reviewers. It has been informed, including on the scale and shape of government engagement with Pacific providers, by consultation with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples.

## Next Steps

19. The media release, key messages, and a Q&A will be shared with your office before the publication date.
20. Subject to minor editorial changes, on 8 June 2023, the report will be published to the Te Hiringa Mahara website, the media release will be sent to news media, and an announcement posted to LinkedIn.

