

Briefing

Publication – prevention and early intervention effectiveness review (rangatahi and young people)

Date due to MO:	20/04/2026	Action required by:	30/04/2026
Security level:	UNCLASSIFIED	Briefing number:	BN2026-006
To:	Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health		
Copy to:	Stephanie Buick, Principal Advisor System Planning & Accountability, Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora		

Contact for Telephone Discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
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Ella Cullen	Director – Wellbeing System Leadership & Insights	

Minister's Office to Complete

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Approved | ☐ Decline | ☐ Noted |
| ☐ Needs change | ☐ Seen | ☐ Overtaken by event |
| ☐ See Minister's note | ☐ Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Publication – prevention and early intervention effectiveness review and evidence brief

Security level:	UNCLASSIFIED	Date:	20/04/2026
To:	Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health		

Purpose of report

1. On 30 April 2026, Te Hīringa Mahara - Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission (the Commission) will publish a review and evidence brief on effective early intervention and prevention approaches. The publications are based on a commissioned research review of the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention approaches for rangatahi and young people experiencing early signs of distress. This briefing summarises the key points.

Summary

2. The Commission has a strategic outcome to promote prevention and early intervention approaches to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for young people with lived experience of mental distress. Through our work, we contribute to building the evidence base on what works for whom and in what circumstances to inform investment decisions.
3. Secondary prevention¹ and early intervention has been shown to be an effective and cost-effective way to support mental health and wellbeing. The research is clear that supporting young people earlier, before distress escalates, can reduce the long-term impacts on their mental health, wellbeing, education, employment, and whānau outcomes. It also reduces pressure on a mental health system that is already under pressure by getting support earlier.
4. We commissioned a review of effective secondary prevention and early intervention approaches for young people. The effectiveness review found that a wide range of supports show at least modest effectiveness in supporting mental health outcomes and wider wellbeing outcomes for young people experiencing distress and that light touch supports have evidence of effectiveness and are highly scalable. It also found that easy access, sustained engagement and youth co-design are critical enablers of effective service design that results in improved outcomes for young people.
5. The effectiveness review has three key service design implications to achieve improved mental health outcomes: young people need options and pathways;

¹ Secondary prevention focuses on the early detection and intervention for tāngata whaiora experiencing distress. It aims to halt or slow the progression of mental health conditions, prevent them from becoming more severe, and reduce their overall impact.

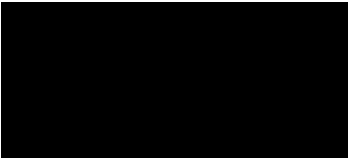
sustained engagement is needed for outcomes and youth co-design supports effectiveness. We will be using these to advocate for availability of prevention and early intervention approaches for young people before distress escalates further.

6. We will publish the full review and accompanying evidence brief, which provides an easy-to-read summary of the findings targeted at decision-makers, on our website on 30 April 2026.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------------|
| a) | Note the rangatahi and young people early intervention and prevention effectiveness review and evidence brief will be published on 30 April 2026. | Yes No |
| b) | Note we intend to release this briefing under our proactive release policy. | Yes No |



Karen Orsborn
Chief Executive
Date: 20/04/2026

Hon Matt Doocey
Minister for Mental Health
Date:



Discussion

Background

1. The 2024/25 New Zealand Health Survey found almost half of young people aged 15-24 years experienced moderate, high or very high levels of psychological distress. Primary and specialist services cannot not meet this scale of need. Prevention and early intervention are effective and scalable approaches to support the mental health and wellbeing of rangatahi and young people experiencing distress and reduce the need for more intensive support.
2. We commissioned an effectiveness review of secondary prevention and early intervention approaches for rangatahi and young people. This work aims to support us to advocate for evidence-based options to improve rangatahi and youth mental health.
3. This work fits within our wider programme of work to support rangatahi and youth mental health and wellbeing which includes a deep dive, advocacy and monitoring. Our 2026/27 deep dive on youth mental health and addiction services access will consider the access patterns and experiences of young people and rangatahi using primary and specialist mental health services.
4. Together this programme of work provides a fuller picture of the supports young people who experience distress or addiction need to realise good mental health and wellbeing.

Key messages

5. The key findings of the effectiveness review are:
 - A wide range of different types of secondary prevention and early intervention programmes show at least modest effectiveness for young's people's mental health and wellbeing.
 - Prevention and early intervention services designed for mild-to-moderate distress often still support young people with higher levels of need. This highlights the role of these services as accessible entry points into care and the importance of clear referral pathways to more intensive supports.
 - Accessibility and engagement are critical for effectiveness. Programmes that reduced barriers to entry and that young people were satisfied with tended to generate higher engagement and better outcomes.
 - Co-design with young people is important for improving acceptability and engagement. Co-design was associated with higher satisfaction and stronger engagement with supports in New Zealand and internationally.



- Digital and online mental health supports show promise as scalable early interventions. Digital tools, including apps, online therapy programmes, and chatbots, improved mental health and wellbeing, offering a relatively low-cost and accessible way to reach large numbers of young people.
- A larger and stronger evidence base is needed to better understand what works and for who. More rigorous and consistent evaluation is needed, particularly for culturally grounded approaches for indigenous populations and rangatahi Māori.

Publication of an evidence brief

6. Alongside the effectiveness review we plan to publish a shorter evidence brief. The purpose of the evidence brief is to provide an easy-to-read summary of the findings of the effectiveness review. It uses plain language and visual elements to present the findings and translate them into evidence that can inform policy.
7. The audience for the evidence brief is government policymakers with influence in youth mental health service design and commissioning. We aim to influence for increased investment in effective options for supporting rangatahi and young people with early signs of distress.

Consultation

8. The Commission has consulted with our Rangatahi and Youth Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on this work. This external advisory group comprises members with expertise in youth and rangatahi Māori mental health, wellbeing and lived experience.
9. We engaged a lived experience researcher and rangatahi and youth lived experience representatives to support contextualisation of the findings and the development of the evidence brief.
10. The effectiveness review has been peer reviewed by an academic, who also works as a clinician, with expertise in child and youth mental health.

Communications

11. A high-level communications plan is attached for your information. The focus is on continuing to raise awareness in gaps in support available to rangatahi and young people. We will issue a media release about the two documents, be available for media interviews, and distribute to stakeholders. A webinar will be held after the release.
12. Ella Cullen, Director – Wellbeing System Leadership and Insights, will be the spokesperson for any media interest. We will keep your office informed of media activity.



Next Steps

13. The final publication-ready effectiveness review and evidence brief will be shared with your office prior to publication.
14. Subject to minor editorial and design changes, the effectiveness review and evidence brief will be published on our website on 30 April 2026.

Appendix A Research review on the effectiveness of youth and rangatahi mental health early intervention and secondary prevention approaches (Effectiveness Review)

Appendix B Evidence Brief

Appendix C Comms and engagement plan – Minister’s office

ENDS

