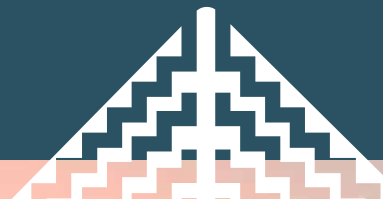


Mental Health and Addiction System Performance 2026

June 2026



Our latest monitoring shows that improvements to the mental health and addiction system are happening in pockets, but it has been inconsistent across six key system shifts. In particular, rising need for young people and Māori is not being met.

Area	Progress rating	Findings	What we would like to see next
Population level outcomes		Increased psychological distress. Suicide rates are too high. Some decreases in intentional self-harm measures. Disparities across most measures for Māori, Pacific Peoples, young people, disabled people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health in all policies. Cross-government action on drivers of mental distress.
Shift 1 - Realising the potential of lived and living experience		Peer support expanding. Investment trends unclear. Lived experience leadership supporting structures underdeveloped.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained investment in peer support. More support for lived experience leadership. Career pathways for lived experience.
Shift 2 - Prioritising effective services for people with the highest needs		High unmet need for Māori. Static funding for kaupapa Māori services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased access to kaupapa Māori services. Better outcome data to understand effectiveness.
Shift 3 - Effective primary prevention and early interventions		Government focus on early intervention, leaving primary prevention underleveraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased priority for whole-of-population primary prevention. Cross-agency commitment to address key risk and protective factors for tāngata whaiora wellbeing. Co-designed services with young people.
Shift 4 - Equitable access to services and supports that improve outcomes for people		Access improving overall. Inequities for young people in access and timeliness. Increasing unmet need for Māori.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved access to services. Youth-specific solutions.
Shift 5 - Upholding human rights-based practices		Coercive practice too high and inequitable. Human rights for young people need further investigation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faster progress to end 'seclusion'. No young people admitted into adult inpatient units. Fewer coercive practices used.
Shift 6 - Workforce with the capability, competencies, and capacity to meet needs now and in the future		Workforce growing and strengthening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued strengthening and growth, especially lived experience.

Good progress Some progress At risk

Our recommendations for mental health and addiction system improvement:

- 1 That Health New Zealand publishes a national seclusion plan by 2027, outlining the pathway to eliminate seclusion.
- 2 That the Ministry of Health includes actions for collection of outcomes and experience data from people engaging with mental health and addiction services in the first three-year implementation plan of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Actions should include specific data collection for high-needs populations by June 2027.

Renewed recommendation*

That Health New Zealand develops an action plan by June 2027 to meet the needs of Māori and whānau accessing specialist mental health and addiction services.

* This recommendation was first made in June 2024 but because this has not been realised, we are making a renewed recommendation.

As an independent Commission, we have a system oversight role to contribute to better and equitable mental health and wellbeing outcomes for all people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A robust mental health and addiction system should provide timely, accessible, age and culturally appropriate services when there is a need.

We are concerned at the widening gaps for some, which ultimately cost everyone. We want to see better and equitable outcomes for Māori at all levels of the system, and more focus on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people. We are also concerned about the system's capacity to uphold human-rights based practices. A system needs to be fair, caring, responsive and effective.

Our six shifts, developed in 2025, provide a pathway toward a mental health and addiction system that delivers better and equitable experience and outcomes for tāngata whaiora and whānau. We need to see faster progress across all six shifts to realise a system that improves outcomes for all.

Towards an ideal mental health and addiction system that:

Shift 1

realises the potential of **lived and living experience**

Shift 2

prioritises **effective services** for people with the **highest need**

Shift 3

provides effective **primary prevention** and **early interventions**

Shift 4

provides **equitable access** to services and supports that **improve outcomes** for people

Shift 5

upholds **human-rights** based practices

Shift 6

is supported by a **workforce** with the capability, competencies, and capacity to meet needs now and in the future

What needs to change

Renewed effort is required by leaders of the mental health and addiction system across all six shifts to improve system performance and address inequities. Improving system performance will result in fairer outcomes for all and a better experience for tāngata whaiora as they move through the mental health and addiction system.

We are also calling for cross-agency commitment to address the factors that influence mental health and wellbeing at a population level. Addressing the drivers of distress will reduce demand on the mental health and addiction system and have wide-ranging benefits for people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

System change requires commitment at all levels from Government, agencies and services. Alongside efforts to improve the mental health and addiction system, we want to see mental health and wellbeing as a key policy issue.

Aotearoa New Zealand needs a system that supports young people before distress escalates, ensures equitable access to help early, responds effectively in crisis, and centres people with lived experience and their whānau. This underpins the direction of change we call for through our six shifts.

Find out more:

www.mhwc.govt.nz/
system-performance