



Hauora Taiwhenua

Rural Health Network

Rural Māori Health Summit 2025

Hauora Taiwhenua co-hosted a Rural Māori Health Summit, with its Te Tiriti partners, Te Rōpū Ārahi, on February 17th at Pipitea Marae in Wellington. The purpose of the Summit was to review the impact of the policies, strategies and activities of the Coalition Government, and its agencies, on the Hauora Taiwhenua strategic goal to:

Improve rural Māori health outcomes: so that whānau who live and work in rural communities live longer, healthier lives in the communities of their choice.

The minimal data that is available to us tells us the rural Māori rates of amenable death, suicide, smoking, and child immunization are the worst across any demographic in New Zealand. Of utmost concern to all, is the seven-year gap in life expectancy between Māori and other New Zealanders, with researchers certain that when more work on this is done, we will know that the gap is significantly worse for rural Māori.

In 2022, the Labour Government introduced the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act, prioritizing both rural and Māori populations for strategic and targeted approaches to improve their health outcomes. This led to the development of the Rural Health Strategy and Pae Tū: Hauora Māori Strategy, both of which promise increased access to appropriate health services. The Coalition Government's, Government Policy Statement on Health (GPS), released in 2024, sets the goal of "timely access to quality health care" to ensure "longer life expectancy and improved quality of life for all New Zealanders". It also directs Government's focus on priority populations, including rural and Māori.

Rural Māori whānau are central to the Pae Tū Hauora Māori Strategy, the Rural Health Strategy, and the Government Policy Statement on Health. The Summit set out to assess the impact these statements of Government intent have had and agree on immediate actions to improve the health of rural Māori.

A Summit is all About the People

Hauora Taiwhenua members, rural Māori health stakeholders, the Hauora Taiwhenua Board, Te Rōpū Ārahi and staff were joined by the Minister for Rural Health, Hon Matt Doocey, and the Minister for Rural Communities, Hon Mark Patterson. Several Members of Parliament from both government and opposition parties, Māori health leaders and senior staff involved in the implementation of health strategies from both Manatū Hauora (Ministry of Health) and Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) also participated.

The Ministers and agency leaders reiterated their commitment to the 25% of rural communities who are Māori and acknowledged the undisputed evidence of their poorer health outcomes. They conceded there had been little progress towards bridging the gap in life expectancy between rural Māori and all other New Zealanders. They spoke of the need for urgent action to turn this around.

Summit participants agreed that the nationwide health workforce crisis has a far greater impact on rural communities than it does in urban centres. Participants also agreed this is compounded by the significant underrepresentation of Māori health workers in relation to the population they serve (5% of GPs and 7% of nurses identify as being Māori compared to 25% of rural populations).

Rural Sector Participation in Strategic Planning and Service Reviews

The rural health sector's significant contribution to the development of the Pae Tū and Rural Health Strategies was acknowledged. More recently, we gave vast amounts of time and resources to the review and redesign of services particularly relevant to the rural communities we serve:

- Redesign Rural Urgent and Unplanned Care
- Review Rural Primary Care Funding
- Review the Sustainability of Rural Hospitals
- Review Section 88 Maternity funding
- Suicide Prevention Action Plan
- And most recently, provided input into the upcoming renewed Hauora Māori Strategy.

Despite an ongoing commitment to working with Government and its agencies on these projects, Summit participants spoke of their frustration at the lack of action to deliver on them. Without Government's commitment to implementation, these reviews and action plans will fail in their intention to improve the unacceptably poor state of rural Māori health outcomes.

Insights from Summit Discussions

- The rural health sector has contributed many ideas on how rural Māori health outcomes can be improved but the lack of follow through action and resourcing of proposed solutions is frustrating. We are eager to collaborate with the government to transform strategies, reviews, and plans into tangible results.
- It is essential to have sector-wide data about health outcomes and their relationship with rurality. The Government must require its agencies, especially the Ministry of Health, to embed the Geographic Classification for Health in all health system data. This will establish the foundation for monitoring and improving rural Māori health outcomes and is vital to tracking the impact that Government Health Targets have on the health of rural Māori.
- Long standing urban-centric commissioning models have done little to bridge the gap. Rural Māori need reliable, accessible services that honour Mātauranga Māori models of care and service provision.
- Distance and dispersed populations contribute to the higher costs and clinical challenges of delivering health services in rural communities. Rural and remote health providers require government commitment to adopt investment-based thinking, and commissioning that incorporates these realities and enables authentic service integration.

Rural Māori Health Meets Government Health Targets

- The Government's focus on achieving timely access to quality health care, and monitoring of the 5 health targets, and 5 mental health and addiction targets, will only become relevant to rural Māori health outcomes when ethnicity and rurality are integrated into the reporting framework.

- Our Ten Point Action Plan will improve the clinical and financial sustainability of health services for rural Māori whānau. Implementation of the Action Plan will significantly contribute to improving several of the Government’s health targets for this priority population:
 - More rural Māori children will be immunised
 - Improved access to rural primary care services will:
 - reduce the number, and acuity of rural Māori whānau presentations to emergency departments
 - improve rural Māori whānau access to primary mental health and addiction services
 - enable better support for rural Māori whānau who present to an emergency department for mental health and addiction related episodes
 - enable rural health providers to focus on the prevention of, or early intervention, for those at risk of mental health and addiction challenges.

The Rural Māori Health Summit Recommendation to the Minister of Rural Health

Improving the health of rural Māori must not be compromised by changes in sector leadership or changes in Government. Implementation plans must be actioned with appropriate funding and accountability. Their implementation must not be reliant on the goodwill of the sector to provide unfunded time and resources from already overstretched budgets and already stretched staff.

Improving the health of rural Māori must be prioritised by all Government agencies as mandated in the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Legislation and the Government Policy Statement on Health and clearly evidenced by the stark reality that the life expectancy of rural Māori is almost 7 years less than other New Zealanders.

Te Rōpū Ārahi and the Board of Hauora Taiwhenua recommend our **Ten Point Rural Māori Health Action Plan - Bridging the Gap** to the Minister for Rural Health for immediate action. We are confident that the benefits of implementing our plan will be evidenced through improvements to the Government Health Targets.

Signed by



Dr Fiona Bolden
Chair
Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network



Margareth Broodkoorn
Chair
Te Rōpū Ārahi



Hauora Taiwhenua
Rural Health Network

Rural Māori Health Summit Ten Point Action Plan

Bridging the Gap of Rural Māori Health Outcomes

The Rural Māori Health Summit accepted a challenge from the Minister for Rural Health, the Hon Matt Doocey, to compile a list of ten actions that will contribute to improving rural Māori health outcomes and can be achieved over the next 18 months.

- 1.** Prioritise and fund pathways for rural Māori health workers of all professions to train while living and/or working in their local area (to avoid higher travel and accommodation costs and disconnect with whānau support).
- 2.** Commit to pay parity for all health professions working outside of Health NZ services.
- 3.** Implement rural interprofessional training hubs, as proposed by the sector, with at least one of these being in an area of high Māori population.
- 4.** Immediately establish a specialised team of rural workforce experts to oversee the delivery of the rural and Māori action streams of the New Zealand Health Workforce Plan 2024.
- 5.** Provide community and iwi owned and operated rural hospitals with annual funding increases that align with cost pressures and uplifts allocated to Health NZ owned and operated hospitals.
- 6.** Ensure the Ministry of Health applies the Geographic Classification for Health to all health data sets so that health outcome data for Rural, Māori and Rural Māori populations is integrated into all accountability documents and reports.
- 7.** Require the Capitation funding formula to include weightings for rurality and ethnicity, reflecting the heightened cost of delivering services in rural areas and their Māori populations.
- 8.** Develop nationally consistent, contemporary methodology for allocating rural primary care funding.
- 9.** Fund the implementation of recommendations from the Redesign of Rural Unplanned and Urgent Care Report. Ensure a minimum of 30% of any pilot or trial areas are selected from remote rural areas with high Māori populations.
- 10.** Replace commissioning based on price and volume with evidence-based funding for health services essential to the vibrancy of rural Māori communities e.g. urgent and emergency care, inpatient and primary maternity services.

WHAT IS GOOD FOR RURAL MĀORI, WILL BE GOOD FOR ALL RURAL COMMUNITIES!