

# Nau mai te ora



Far North  
He oranga whānau

**Understanding whānau  
experiences of health and  
wellbeing in the Mid-North**

# Mihi and acknowledgments

Kei ngā maramara o tēnā rohe, kei ngā huānga o tēnā moka, tēnā koutou katoa. Ko ngā mihi nui o te ngākau ki ngā whānau i koha mai i o rātou whakaaro, i o rātou taonga, i o rātou kōrero ki tēnei kaupapa motuhake mō te hapori, mā te hapori.

I ruia mātou ki ngā hua maha mō te anamata, he aha ngā painga i puta, he aha hoki ngā mea kāore i te pai. Katoa ēnei kōrero he kōrero hei whakarauora i te hauora ki roto pū i o tātou hapori. Nō reira, tēnā koutou katoa.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our community for their invaluable contributions to this report. Your insights and generosity have greatly enriched our work to guide us towards a brighter future.

Your insights and experiences will be essential to support our communities well-being and fostering discussion on how we address our challenges and seize opportunities for things to be different. Thank you for your unwavering dedication and commitment to our collective journey towards a healthier and more prosperous community.

## About us

Healthy Families Far North is part of a large scale prevention initiative that brings community leadership together in a united effort for better health in the places we live, learn, work and play. Healthy Families Far North is embedded inside of Te Rūnanga o Whaingaroa. Many of our own team, play, work and live in the epic mid-north.

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# Kia ora

## Introduction

### Background

In 2022 the Pae Ora Act was established to improve the health of all New Zealanders and achieve equity in health outcomes, particularly for Māori and others facing health disparities. The new health system is designed to strengthen the voice of people, whānau and communities - especially for those who need better health outcomes.

One of the key principles defined by Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora is to involve communities in both planning and improvement. This will enable people to become more than just passive recipients of healthcare, but active participants in the health system.

In response to this, iwi health and social service leaders from across the mid-north came together to drive and lead a process to understand the hauora experiences and needs of their communities. This collective approach was largely grounded in the strengthened relationships that had been built and grown during the iwi-led covid response in the mid-north.

Healthy Families Far North was asked to support this process alongside further research being conducted by Deloitte because of our connections to the community, and our practice in whānau centred design. This report is the documentation of our process and the learnings from whānau and community .

### What this document is

Nau mai te ora, is a welcoming of good health and wellbeing for the mid-north. It uncovers the key themes and insights based in people's lived realities and experiences of the health system. Nau mai te ora helps us to understand what hauora truly means to people, exploring the factors that both enable and hinder well-being.

We acknowledge that each person's experience is unique and complex and that we may not have captured every voice in the mid-north. However, we hope that this document will act as a catalyst for inclusive and collaborative conversations around hauora. We think of it as new starting place for people to come together around how we can achieve pae ora in the mid-north.

Bring it on. Nau mai te ora.

Healthy Families Far North



Approx. area of the Mid North

### Far North Data (2018 Census)

65,250 people living in the Far North

48.3% Māori (compared to 16.5% NZ)

15.8% Te reo Māori speakers (compared to 4% NZ)

Median age 28.6yrs  
39.4% employed full-time  
6.6% Unemployed

# Methodology

Healthy Families Far North took the lead on gathering insights from whānau. Together, our team explored how we might understand different voices, with a particular focus on hearing from people whose voices are usually not heard. We spent time thinking about what we knew already about the different groups in our community and how they interacted with the health system.

We identified the following groups of people that we would focus on in our learning journey:

- Rangatahi
- The rainbow community
- People experiencing high health needs (and their whānau)
- Whānau whare kore (unhoused families)
- Tamariki (including those in care)
- Older people

We also wanted to ensure that we were speaking to people from across the mid north and intentionally spent time talking to the different groups from across the region.

## Gathering deep insights

Our intent throughout this process was to gather rich and deep insights from the people that we spoke with. To do that we took a storytelling approach where we asked people to tell us stories about their experiences of health, hauora and the health system. We then adapted each interaction or conversation, depending on who we were speaking with and what their needs were. For example, we used pictures and playdough to help gather stories from tamariki, we took magazines to support rangatahi to create collages and we had many, many cups of tea with people.

We were also able to host two larger workshops with different communities across the mid north to gather large amounts of information.

Each conversation or interaction with people was aimed at uncovering some insight into the following key learning questions:

- What does hauora mean to people?
- How do people currently enable their hauora?
- What gets in the way of people having amazing hauora?
- What are people's current experiences of services?
- What works and what doesn't?
- What ideas do people have for enabling hauora for them and their community?

## Synthesis and theming

Each conversation was captured through rigorous note taking or voice recording and then placed onto a shared virtual whiteboard. The team then came together and collectively themed and synthesised what we heard.

Through that process, the key insights emerged along with a clear understanding about what was important to different groups.



## Who we spoke to at a glance

### In-depth interviews

40 people

### Gender



52% Women



12% Gender diverse



37% Men

### Age

11-24: 41%

25-54: 20%

55+: 39%

### Ethnicity

61% Māori

34% Pākehā

3% Pacifica

3% Asian

### Workshops

100 people

Moerewa

20 people

Whangaroa

### Cups of tea & kōrero



### Kōrero Māori



### Keeping it simple with tamariki



### Unleashing creativity

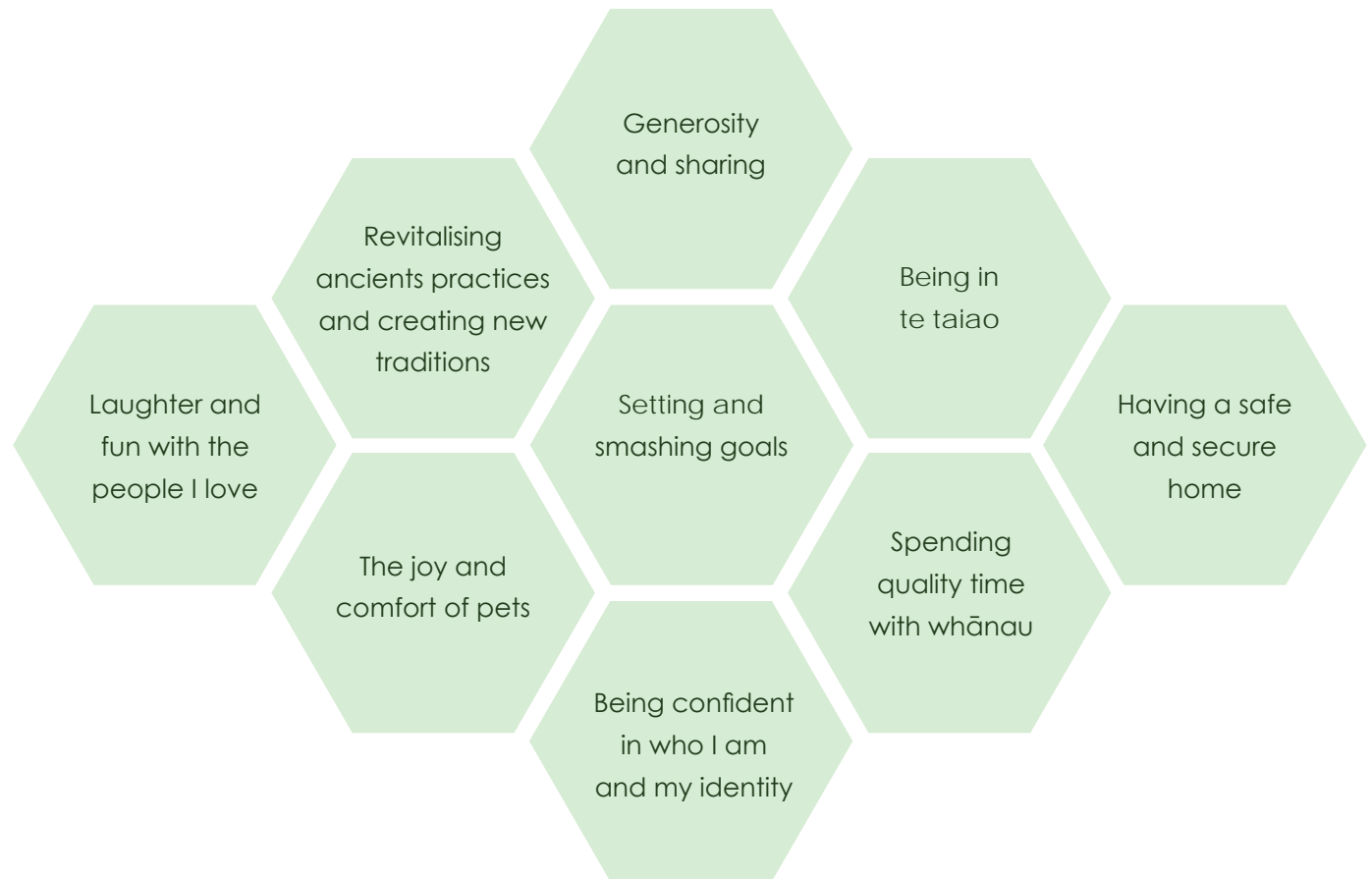






## What Hauora looks like in the Mid-North

During our storytelling process, we asked people to remember a time in their lives when hauora was in abundance. When all four walls of te whare tapa wha were up. We asked people to share that story with us. This image is an attempt to bring all those stories to life.







## Insights

# A snapshot

The following four insights illustrate what we heard and learnt from whānau residing across the mid-north. These insights provide an expansive view of people's experiences and help to describe what helps and what gets in the way of people's health and wellbeing.

### Insight 1.

#### Ecology of Support

The natural, social and cultural supports in people's lives has the biggest and most direct impact on hauora. A thriving whānau is a healthy whānau.

### Insight 2.

#### Compounding stress vs. increased bandwidth

Many whānau are experiencing overwhelming stress from external factors that prevent them from being well. When people have an increased bandwidth they have more opportunity to thrive.

### Insight 3.

#### Access Challenges

Accessing health care can be difficult for many people. Money, distance and confusing services all play a part. However, there are bright sparks of accessibility across the mid-north that are making a difference.

### Insight 4.

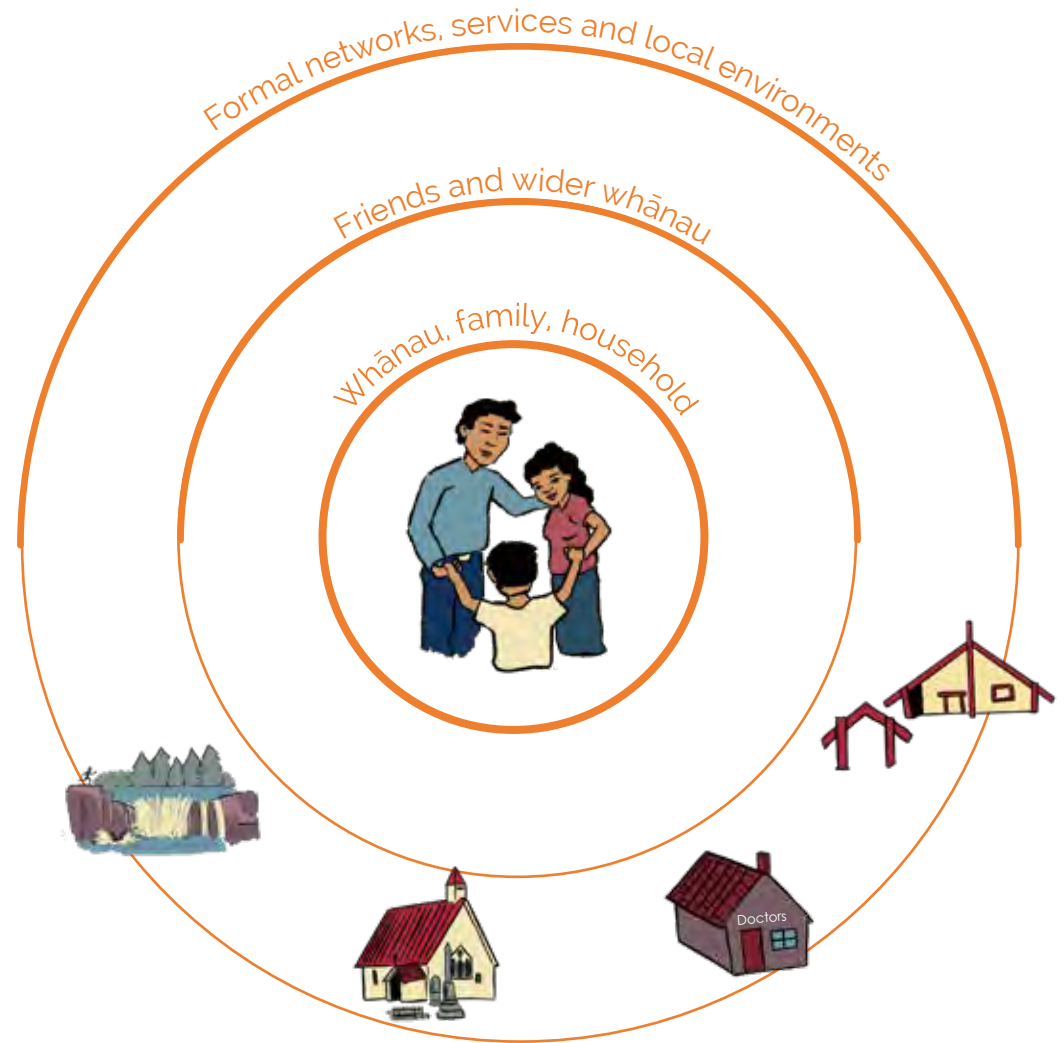
#### Responsive Services

The way in which our services support and respond to the needs of whānau have a significant impact on both their experiences of health care and on their health outcomes.

## Insight 1.

# Ecology of Support

People exist inside an ecology of support that includes whānau, friends and the wider community. This ecology of support is held together by the natural, social and cultural supports that exist inside and between those relationships. When those support systems are under stress or absent, people's health and wellbeing are affected. However, when those support systems are activated and thriving, so too are people and their families.



### Whānau as first responders

We heard that for many people, whānau are often the first place people get support around their health and wellbeing. Strong intergenerational connections, particularly between grandparents and their mokopuna was important for enabling strong bonds inside of families. However, when a family dynamic is under external stress or absent altogether, this first line of support falls away. This not only impacts people's ability to stay well, but also impacts how people are supported if they become unwell.

We bake for our nan who's got dementia when she's having a bad day. She likes to eat it and tell us about her childhood. She always calms down after that.

We want to create the best life for our family. I recognise how much my other kids have to sacrifice because our baby has a disability.

Having family able to come to hospital with me, visit me, and support me with my questions makes it a lot easier for me to rest and get well.

### Whānau to whānau support

Some community members come together to share their experiences and knowledge around a common topic or health issue. This might include more formalised support groups with a facilitator, or people who meet in informal settings to share what they know. This whānau to whānau approach fosters a strong sense of unity and helps the community to get their needs met outside of the formal system.

We've all been through the system here, that means we can help someone else who's going through it too. We become each other's advocates here at the puna.

Because we had spent so much time in the ICU with our son, we were able to awhi new families coming into the space and let them know the ropes.

### The role of community

We heard that our communities' physical, social and cultural infrastructure act as enablers of good health and wellbeing. Some people talked about their communities providing a korowai of support around them. They identified a range of supports within their community that helped them to be well. We heard about businesses that act as places of wellbeing, as well as churches and marae that act as spaces to enable connection and provide practical support. People also discussed the role that the environment itself plays in supporting people to be well. In contrast, we heard that when communities are collectively under stress, these same support systems can be destructive and unhelpful.

Our town has manaakitanga in abundance. My dad smokes tuna then all the neighbourhood kids come and devour it.

Our local opshop funds people to maintain the community garden, and the kai is free for everyone!

It's the 'small town, small minds' trap. Everytime I try to do something good - people just make fun of me and pull me down.

## Insight 2.

# Compounding stress vs. increased bandwidth

Many whānau are experiencing overwhelming stress from external factors such as low income, ongoing health issues, challenging family dynamics or traumatic experiences. This means that their energy is often spent just on surviving. For these people, there is little room to think beyond the immediate crisis right in front of them.

In contrast, when people have space and bandwidth in their lives, they can think expansively and can spend time and energy in doing the things that enable their hauora.



## Financial Stress

We heard from people that are often unable to meet their most basic needs. Some people attributed this to a lack of good job opportunities in their communities. This has negative impacts on people's health because they have less ability and time to do the things they need to stay well. It can also prevent people seeking help when they are unwell. Health and wellbeing is often low down on people's priorities.

Sometimes I pray that I have enough gas just to get to work. Once I'm there, my second prayer is that someone will loan me \$20 to see me through till payday.

You go to college, then the university of Affco. It's a family tradition - there's no other choice.

Mum's always too tired to play with us after she finishes work.

### Stress from pain and trauma

We heard from people with experiences of pain or trauma. For some, these experiences are ongoing and play a major part in how they live their daily lives. Ongoing pain or chronic illnesses can leave people feeling debilitated, immobile and disconnected from the world around them. Experiences of childhood trauma such as violence or grief, can also affect people's lives long after the events themselves. Others described experiences of discrimination that impacts the way people live their lives.

Both my physical and mental health problems get in the way of my everyday life. You start to get isolated physically and then slowly but surely you become isolated in your whole mind and attitude.

Meth is destroying our whānau.  
It's ugly and I hate it.

I feel afraid of advocating for other trans people because I'm worried that someone will hurt me or my partner.

### Sense of purpose

Having a sense of purpose was critical for many people's wellbeing. Being able to make and achieve personal goals, participate in creative pursuits or give back to the community were seen as critical to fostering wellbeing and resilience.

My main stimulation in life is getting involved in the community. Without it, I'd just shrivel up in a corner.

My job as a teacher is so important to me keeping well. I really like knowing that I am helping the tamariki.

### Mana Motuhake

We heard that many people want to have more agency over the way they live their lives. Self-sufficiency and sustainability were seen as pathways to hauora, with people focusing on building skills, cultivating the land, and living off the resources provided by the environment.

I've taught my kids to live off the land. They can all dive and hunt and that is important to us.

We want to live off grid on our whenua, but the whole process can be really hard. I don't even know where to start.

### Drawing on internal strengths

Some people, even when facing major adversity, were able to draw on a deep inner strength and resilience. People described being able to draw on their core values and positive mindset during difficult times.

I've always had a good sense of who I am and what's important to me. Even with everything I've been through, I'm still at the heart of it, a happy, active and healthy person.

Unless you have a really positive attitude about life, it can make you really depressed because you can't get out and about and connect with other people. And that's the most important thing for your wellbeing.

## Insight 3.

# Access Challenges

Accessing health care can be difficult for many people. Geography, a lack of good infrastructure and resources, plus a confusing service landscape all play a part. However, there are also bright sparks of accessibility across the mid-north that we heard are making a difference.



### Geographic challenges

The mid-north covers a significant geographic area that is mostly rural in nature. People described that even accessing the most basic of primary health care services requires a car journey and all the costs associated. Accessing specialist health-care, often in Whangārei, creates an even more difficult task. A four-hour round trip for some people was not uncommon. The costs associated can impact the whole whānau and are more than just financial. We also heard of the value of mobile health services that travel to where people are. These services make a significant difference to those communities.

I have to go to Whangārei twice a month for my eye specialist. That means both me and mum have to take time off work so she can drive me. Sometimes we have to take my son because there wouldn't be anyone to pick him up from school otherwise.

When the ear and eye people come to us, it makes it so much easier. I can get all my things done at once and don't have to go anywhere.

### Infrastructure challenges

We heard that poor infrastructure, like footpaths, roads, and a lack of transport options can have a significant impact on people being able to access the services they need when they are unwell. These same infrastructure challenges also make it difficult for people to stay well, especially when trying to eat well, and keep active.

Our driveway is so long and so bad, that the ambulance couldn't come up it when my nan got sick. I'm worried that will happen again.

If you want to walk anywhere, you have to do it on dangerous gravel roads or on a state highway. I'm not letting my kids do that.

### Resource shortages

We heard that people sometimes have to wait a long time to access health-care. In some parts of the mid-north, general practitioners are not taking on new patients, while current patients might have to wait weeks to get an appointment. These shortages are not just restricted to general practitioners, but also to other health services, like the dentist.

I was sitting in the waiting room for half an hour when the receptionist told me there was an emergency happening. My appointment would be pushed out by another week. I almost burst into tears. It had taken 2 weeks to get this one.

I've been trying to get my daughter an appointment with the dental nurse through the website - but it takes months. And I can't even get her one at the local dentist. I feel like a terrible parent.

It feels like when you go to the doctor it is too rushed. They've become neglectful for us whānau.

### Confusing services

We heard that people often found navigating the service system really difficult. Sometimes people didn't know where to go, what the criteria is, or who to talk to. This confusing landscape was reflected across the wider system and not just those of the health system. This is largely because people often have to navigate across different government organisations and systems when experiencing poor health. Often, people tap into their own networks to help them navigate the system.

They even came into our whare to do an assessment of what we need. Then they turned on us and said we didn't meet the criteria. What criteria? I was so angry.

The hospital didn't even tell me about the travel reimbursement. My mum told me. She know heaps about that stuff.

Child disability services suck! We have to go to four different locations for one assessment. And there are always communication breakdowns from one provider to the next. I hate having to retell my story again and again.

## Insight 4.

# Responsive Services

The way in which our services support and respond to the needs of whānau have a significant impact on both their experiences of health care and on their health outcomes. We heard that people want trusting, supportive relationships alongside sound clinical or technical advice. We also heard that people want to have more input into how services are delivered with people expressing a desire to utilise their own experiences into the process.





### Empathy and understanding

We heard from people who had both good and bad experiences when accessing services. When a service experience was good, it was usually because people felt heard and understood or because the service went above and beyond to meet the person's needs. When a service experience was not so good, it was the opposite - people felt misunderstood, judged and dehumanised.

I can rely on them and that they have our backs. My GP visited me in hospital to make sure that I was feeling well and supported.

When I went to the doctors, you got given a number like at the fish and chip shop. It's awful.

I kept taking my husband to the doctors. I knew there was something wrong, but they wouldn't listen to us.

### Ahuatanga – Welcoming spaces

The ahua or the way a space looks and feels can make a difference to the way that people interact with their health services. People talked about the need for places to feel warm and welcoming and to enable a sense of belonging and connection. The front facing staff also play a key role in helping to create the space.

All I want is a nicer receptionist.

Being in hospital is a rowdy place, it makes it hard to settle and rest.

Our kaupapa marae is a place for us all, no matter what ethnicity. It's the people that makes this space so comfortable and safe for us all, that's important to me.

### Opportunities to participate

Many people expressed their desire to participate more fully in their health and wellbeing experiences. Some people discussed the value they received from participating in groups that brought people together around a shared need. Others wanted to take this a step further and expressed a willingness to use their own experiences of health or disability to shape the way that services are received.

My wife and I; we set up a support group for others experiencing my disability. People say it really helps as they all get to learn from others going through the exact same thing.

The people in power, they try to understand what it's like for us, but they only do whatever the bare minimum is. We could do a lot better than that if we worked together.



What's important to me

## Rangatahi (Young people)

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### Having a network

That I have a network of reliable support around me.

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### Connected to nature

Being connected to taiao to heal, to feel free and to lift my wairua.

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### Being with family

Spending time with my whānau where I feel safe and loved and that they have the time, energy and resource to spend with me.

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### Having fun

Having spaces and places where I can have fun with my whānau and friends.

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### Acknowledge achievements

To be celebrated and acknowledged when we are succeeding.

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The only time we really connect properly as a whānau is near the moana, like truly connect. Most times it's surface.

It's frowned upon to try hard to be successful. People want to keep you down.

RANGATAHI



I love travelling, but there's nothing like being home. My whānau know how to keep me grounded.

Tino pai ki ahau te haere tahi atu ki te taka moana me toku whānau. Ka tino ora taku wairua i te wa ka mahi pera.



# What's important to me

## Whānau whare kore (Unhoused families)

### Permanent housing

That I have a place to rest my head that is mine and permanent. The temporary solutions are draining for our whole whānau.

### Fair treatment

To be treated fairly when applying for rental properties, especially if I am Māori or part of a big family.

### Unconditional support

Knowing I have whānau to support me, not only in times of crisis but whenever I need them.

### Simpler processes

Having an easier process to access my tupuna whenua so we can build a house on it and live sustainably.

### Sharing knowledge

To be able to connect with people who are on a similar journey to me, especially when thinking about how to live more sustainably.

### Mātauranga ā taiao

That my tamariki and moko have a deep understanding of te taiao, because we know that if we look after te taiao, the taiao will look after us.

We were living in transitional housing with my last baby. I wasn't allowed to have a home birth there. That plays on my mind everyday.

The whenua is our cupboard! I know that if I plant this tree, one day it will feed my moko.



We know where our land is it's just hard trying to follow procedures in order to access it. We just want to put something on it to live on our whenua.

I get frustrated applying for rentals, they see a Māori name or how many people you have in your family and don't want to bother with you.



What's important to me

## Whānau with high needs

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### Connected with others

Support networks that connect us with others on the same journey.

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### Accessible spaces

Environments that are built and designed in a way that support us to be connected to our community.

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### Being involved

Having our experience of high health needs valued and used to understand how to best support us.

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### Being resilient

Staying positive and optimistic in the face of challenges.

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### Recognise our whole whānau

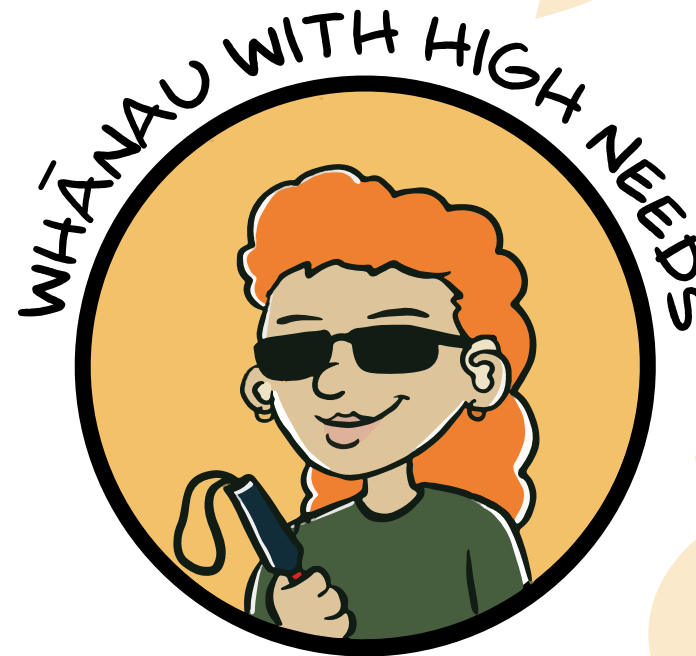
Recognition that my wider whānau are the first level of support and that they have to sacrifice so much too.

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There is a lot to be learnt from working with us as a whānau faced with disabilities.

It's the way we conduct ourselves. Unless you have a really positive attitude about life, you can become depressed and isolated. I say this as much to my fellow disabled people as I do to able bodied people.



We are running a support group for people who are losing their sight, it is really important for me to be helping my community.

It's hard to think about how much time you have to put into your tamariki that have extra needs, and that sometimes the other tamariki miss out.

I am scared of asking for help, because I am scared my independence will be taken away before it needs to be.

# What's important to me

## Older people

### Supportive community

Having whānau, friends and community around me to support me to do things that my body can't do anymore.

### Accessible services

Having all the health services that I use regularly all in one place. Or better yet, that they come to me.

### Connecting with others

Being able to connect to others who have shared experiences and challenges as me.

### Honour who I am

Having opportunities to remember and honour things in my past that keep me connected to who I was (and still am).

### Enabling environments

It's important that I feel confident to get around and that my physical environment supports me to do that.

### Independence

I might want help but I want it in a way that works for me.

I've talked to others about having vertigo and eventually talked to someone who had an answer that worked for me.

I feel so proud when I think about my late husband and all of his achievements.



# OLDER PEOPLE



I am always worried about falling when I walk to town - once you fall it really shakes your confidence.

Being able to be in the garden to grow food that I can share helps me feel a part of the community.

I kept going back to my GP because I knew something wasn't right. I know my body and when things aren't right.



# What's important to me

## Rainbow Rangatahi

### Connecting with others

Safe places I belong where I can be with others on a similar journey.

### Take me seriously

Health professionals who take me seriously and who know what they are talking about.

### Having fun

Laughter and fun with my family and friends.

### Self-assured

Being confident in who I am without fear of being bullied, hurt or worse.

### Opportunities to heal

An opportunity to heal from past trauma.

### Gender affirmed

Having my gender affirmed by others.

### Unconditional support

Friends and family that support my journey even if sometimes they don't understand it.

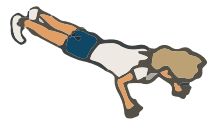
I always try to help people in my community cause it's a lot to navigate on your own. That's why this rainbow group is so good.

It makes me feel like a freak when my doctor has to google stuff.

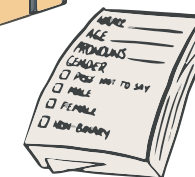


38  
PRESSUPS

38  
PRESSUPS



There's a website 'Gender Diversities' and it tells you everything you need to know. I've used it a lot.



I hate disappointing my whānau by just being me. But I don't think there is any support for them, not that I'd think they would seek it out anyway.

## Opportunities

# Two big ideas – Rethinking when, where and how we respond

Throughout this journey, there are two big ideas sitting at the heart of the stories, and insights from our community in the mid-north.

These two big ideas can help us to think and respond differently in our health system to enable pae ora.

### 1. Activating across all layers of our ecology

People don't usually think of themselves in relation to services or healthcare. Rather, they think of themselves in relation to the world around them, the people they love, the places they go and the things that they do. In this report, we have started to describe this as an ecology of support. Other groups in New Zealand describe this ecology of support as a framework that highlights the structures, places and spaces that have the biggest influence on the wellbeing of communities.<sup>1</sup>

In the past, we tend to focus on our organisational response to these needs or to 'fixing whānau'. We now have an opportunity to intentionally locate our responses across all layers of the ecology of support and in relation to what's important for whānau. Flipping the model on its head, from a system that whānau need to navigate in order to receive services and support, to a system that is outcome driven and builds on the existing network of supports of whānau and communities.

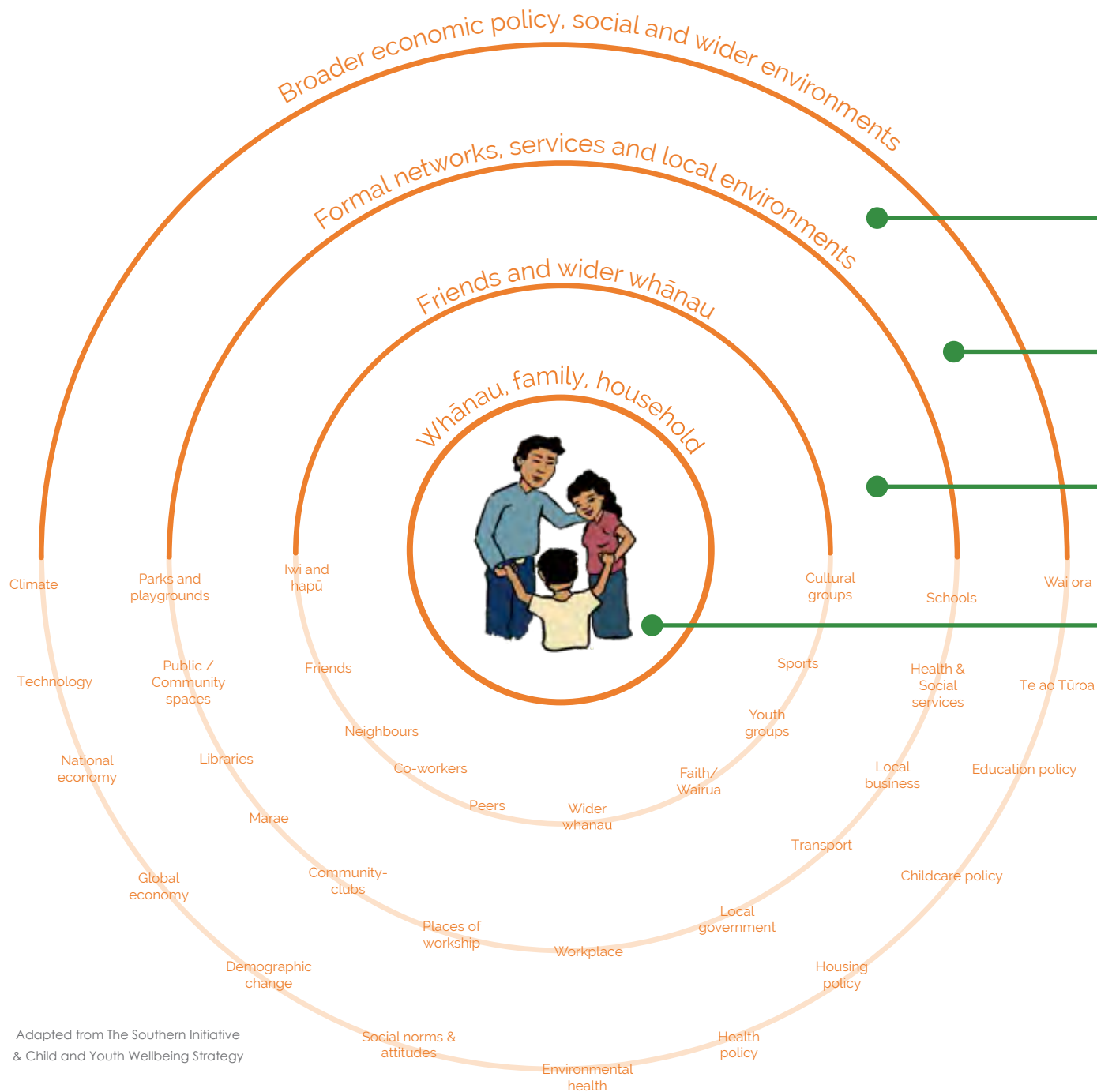
### 2. Creating a balanced response

The second big idea is that people in the mid-north instinctively merge and weave their understanding of hauora using both a prevention lens as well as a response lens. For whānau, the two are intrinsically entwined. For too long, our health system response has poured much of its energy into supporting people once they are already unwell.

We now have an opportunity to intentionally pour energy and resource toward the strengthening and enabling all of the things that support people to stay well, in a way that is centred around the needs and aspirations of whānau.

<sup>1</sup> Auckland Co-Design Lab and The Southern Initiative (2020) Activating an Ecology of Support.





How might we find ways to decrease discrimination and foster mindset shifts?

How might we support a cross agency, outcome driven system of hauora?

How might we leverage the role of public spaces to enable hauora?

How might we grow & enable a sense of purpose in people's lives?

Examples of how we respond across the different layers of our ecology of support

Adapted from The Southern Initiative & Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy

## Opportunities

# Next steps

The following 'How Might We' statements take the key learnings from within this report and transforms them into potential design challenges or opportunities. These questions can be used as a tool to base conversations and problem solving around.

We wanted to provide an exhaustive list, to give the people in our community the opportunity to decide what's important to them, and where we should start.

Some suggestions for the use of these questions could look like:

- What statement, if resolved, would make the biggest difference to increasing people's hauora?
- What statement could we address quickly to give us momentum and energy as a community?
- What statement work across each layer of ecology?
- What's most important to us?
- What statement already has people working on it, that we can get behind and support?

### How might we strengthen and enable more of the things that keep people well?

How might we...

- strengthen and leverage the people and places that support people to keep well?
- better support whānau to whānau support services?
- activate the wider community (people and infastructure) to support hauora?
- strengthen and increase opportunities for intergenerational connection?
- create spaces and opportunities to reduce social isolation and loneliness?
- find ways to reduce stress in people's everyday lives?
- support economic prosperity to enable better, higher paying jobs in the mid-north?
- support people to live self sufficiently (especially on their own whenua)?
- support and strengthen people's sense of purpose?
- strengthen the infrastructure that supports people to stay well?
- explore the role of public spaces in people's hauora?
- recognise and improve access to healthy kai for whānau?
- find ways for people to be active participants in the design and delivery of healthcare services?

## How might we rethink the way that we respond when people are unwell?

How might we...

- strengthen and leverage the people and places that support people when they are unwell?
- find ways to reduce stress for whānau when accessing health services?
- find ways for whānau to see themselves reflected in health services?
- recognise and respond to the full cost (not just financial) of accessing services?
- create more opportunities to deliver health services to places where people already are?
- be innovative when recruiting and retaining healthcare staff?
- easier for people to navigate across the service landscape when accessing care?
- ensure that both empathy and technical expertise are provided during every interaction?
- ensure that manaakitanga and welcoming spaces are prioritised in healthcare services?
- cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement within healthcare systems to enhance the quality and effectiveness of services?
- foster multi-agency collaboration between healthcare, social service agencies, and NGO organisations to create integrated support networks?
- support a cross-agency, outcome driven system of hauora?



#### Suggested citation

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Understanding whānau experiences of health and  
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Illustrations by James Nicholls

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If you would like to learn more, please visit  
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