



Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi for Health Equity

PHANZ Waitangi Day Statement

6th February 2024

On this Waitangi Day, the Public Health Association (PHA) reaffirms our commitment to honouring and implementing Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the key to achieving health equity. We acknowledge the paramount importance of this foundational document, that details the exchange of promises between sovereign entities (1). Te Tiriti is designed to foster kotahitanga and unity and is pivotal in achieving Aotearoa New Zealand's collective aspirations (2).

A Legacy of Struggle:

For 184 years, Māori have resisted those who have sought to leverage the Treaty to justify their colonial endeavours. The profound impact of the colonial project on Māori health is undeniable, resulting in enduring inequities across nearly all health measures (3). International consensus is clear that these health inequities are unfair, unjust, and preventable, constituting a breach of human, indigenous and Māori rights as promised under Te Tiriti and in national and international agreements (3).

Progress and Setbacks

In recent years, Aotearoa New Zealand has made significant progress towards embracing Te Tiriti, celebrating Te Reo and Te Ao Māori, and acknowledging our colonial history – of note - the recent health sector reforms and a refreshed commitment to health equity and Te Tiriti (2, 4). However, the coalition government announcements in late 2023, pose a significant threat to decades of progress in health sector development, the livelihood of Māori, and wider New Zealand. Policies such as the disestablishment of the Māori Health Authority jeopardise Māori interests, hindering accountability to Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments. Imposed mandates favouring English, and 'demoting' te reo, undermine the mana of te ao Māori. Moreover, proposed amendments to Oranga Tamariki, the Resource Management Act, elimination of the need for Māori consultation regarding Māori taonga, and the repeal of world-leading Smoke-free legislation further compromise the determinants of health and exacerbate health inequities.

Most recently, the Treaty Principles bill signals an attempt to undermine the positions guaranteed to Māori under Te Tiriti, putting into question decades of work that has repeatedly found that Māori never ceded sovereignty. These actions raise concerns around the spirit of partnership outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, bringing instability to New Zealand's cultural identity and the principles of justice and fairness that our nation aspires to uphold. We advocate for a collective approach that continues to promote the rights, dignity, and well-being of all New Zealanders.



A United Call to Action

A unified response from Māori and the wider public of New Zealand has voiced clear concerns to the recent policy announcements, urging the government to consider critical aspects of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Waitangi Day 2024 witnessed unprecedented numbers at the week-long events, underlining the gravity of the voices of Māori and Aotearoa in support of Te Tiriti, Māori, kotahitanga, and unity for a better New Zealand.

In the pursuit of Health Equity for all, PHANZ recognises the critical nature of upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a key determinant of health equity and hauora for all in Aotearoa. Our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the cornerstone of our approach, providing a firm tūāpapa for decision-making that maintains Māori health equity as a key priority.

Māori health equity and human rights

We acknowledge that Article 3 of Te Tiriti guarantees Māori the same rights as other citizens, including the right to health. Ethnic inequities in health are rooted in historical injustices, systemic racism, and unequal distribution of the broader determinants of health (5). The clearly evident inequities in health borne by Māori today indicate the need for the recognition and prioritisation of Māori rights to health, in alignment with national and international indigenous and human rights agreements.

The PHANZ urges the government to honour its own definition of Health Equity, acknowledging that different approaches are required for different groups to achieve health equity (6, 7). This recognition underscores the need for an unequal distribution of resources and power (i.e., the broader determinants of health) to achieve equitable health outcomes. We also seek reconsideration of the argument that Māori-specific initiatives are designed to privilege Māori over others. Contrarily, we recognise that Māori rights to the determinants of health have been breached, resulting in higher needs, and that Māori-specific pro-equity measures are required to rectify that (7).

Māori Tino Rangatiratanga and Mana Motuhake

In accordance with Article 2 of Te Tiriti, the PHA acknowledges Māori tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake and recognise that Māori never ceded sovereignty. We consider the honouring and implementing of Māori leadership, decision-making and control in healthcare is crucial for achieving health equity and broader health sector goals. This includes the critical importance of Māori rangatiratanga over te reo Māori, mātauranga Māori, and Māori ancestral lands, resources and taonga – as core determinants of Māori health and wellbeing. Moreover, to actualise Te Tiriti o Waitangi, this requires the rebalancing of power and control between Tiriti partners, and the need to address historical causes of health inequities (3).

Cultural safety and protection from Racism

The PHA underscores the importance of cultural safety in healthcare and the elimination of racism in both health sector settings and wider systemic institutions, aligning with the promises of protection in Article 1 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The PHA continues to support the government and key organisations to address racism as a key determinant of health inequities (8, 9).



Ensuring all healthcare is culturally safe is of critical importance to eliminating racism and prejudice, providing high quality healthcare, and achieving health equity. To achieve this, we need to ensure that healthcare providers are critically conscious, understand and respect Māori culture, values, and practices. This involves examining the interplay of power, privilege and authority and is honoured in open and creative forms of relationship - whanaungatanga, grounded in accountability to whānau and communities (9). This includes incorporating Māori cultural perspectives into healthcare delivery, providing access to Māori traditional healing systems, involving Māori communities in decision-making and healthcare design processes, and ensuring that healthcare services are culturally appropriate, safe, and accessible.

A Commitment to a Better Aotearoa

In conclusion, the PHA stands firmly with Māori, upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We remain committed to advancing health equity, cultural safety, and fostering a society that values and celebrates the rich diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand. The time for collective action is now, and together, we can build a healthier, more equitable future for all.

References

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