

Primary mental health and addiction: Pacific focus groups.

Summary of key themes

Background

Expanding the access to, and choice of primary mental health and addiction support for Pacific peoples is a direct outcome of the government's response to *He Ara Oranga Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction*.

The Mental Health and Addictions Directorate within the Ministry of Health is currently implementing a programme to deliver on the Wellbeing Budget 2019 initiative: Expanding access to and choice of primary mental health and addiction services. The programme includes targeted funding for priority groups, including Māori, Pacific and youth populations. The intent of the 'Access & Choice' initiative is to ensure New Zealanders can access free advice, psychological and wellbeing supports, that meets their needs, where they live and at a time and place that suits them.

Pacific staff from the Mental Health and Addictions Directorate at the Ministry of Health facilitated and documented a series of Pacific community focus groups to engage and gain feedback that would inform the Directorate on important issues for Pacific primary mental health and addiction service provision from Pacific community perspectives.

This is a summary of the key themes arising from the Pacific focus groups.

Process

The 14 focus groups took place from December 2019 to February 2020 in Auckland (7 focus groups), Wellington (3), Christchurch (3) and Hawkes Bay (1).

Pacific participants in the focus groups included people with lived experience and/or their families, service providers, young people, parents, elders, mental health and addiction professionals, people with disabilities and a group of Mahu, Vakasalewalewa, Palopa Fa'afafine, Akava'ine, Fakaleiti and Fakafifine (Pasifika rainbow communities). Participants were mostly of Samoan, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, and Cook Islands ethnicity and the age ranged from 15 to 91 years.

The focus groups were facilitated by Pacific staff from the Mental Health and Addictions Directorate and followed a set agenda and question schedule (attached), including a power-point presentation and video explaining the Government's *He Ara Oranga* Inquiry, and the Access and Choice initiative.

Feedback was documented (anonymously) and qualitative data was analysed by the same staff members with research oversight provided along the process. Key themes were presented in a report¹ and are summarised below.

The Ministry would like to thank all the Pacific people, families, communities, organisations and service providers that have generously contributed their time and shared their personal and professional experiences to contribute to informing this initiative.

Key themes

A number of key themes emerged from discussions at the focus groups, with a high degree of consistency. The themes that emerged from the findings have strong interdependent links that reflect the characteristics that participants seek in services and underpins how services can be more responsive to Pacific peoples' needs. These are outlined below.

Family Connections

Participants articulated the importance of genuine relationships with authentic connections between a person, family or community, with service providers.

¹ The Pacific Access and Choice Report 2020 – Shortly to be released

Being family centred is important, including being responsive to Pacific family dynamics and enable families to connect with each other safely.

Cultural Connections

Narratives in the focus groups included the need to integrate Pacific cultural and spiritual values; enable Pacific peoples to connect to and strengthen their cultural identities; and facilitate inter-generational sharing of cultural knowledge and values.

Community Connections

Participants talked about how settings are important – to be culturally appropriate, physically safe, comfortable, inviting, non-judgemental, and trusted to maintain confidentiality and feel emotionally safe.

It was also important to be communicated to in first languages, access to pastoral care and that the importance of spirituality was acknowledged.

Connecting with Youth

Enabling Pacific youth to connect to and strengthen their cultural identities was a key theme. This included supporting conversations around mental health and addictions, facilitating inter-generational sharing of cultural and traditional knowledge, and supporting young people to navigate their lives.

Service Connections

Pacific voice in service design and delivery is critical. This would help meet the diverse needs of Pacific communities including appropriate communication with Pacific people, so they are suitably informed, and providing holistic, safe and connected care.

Other discussion themes

- Two key outcomes sought by participants as being pivotal to achieving greater access and sustained engagement between Pacific peoples and the primary mental health and addiction services were identified as having more responsive Pacific Services, and a strengthened Pacific workforce.

- Increasing the Pacific workforce and upskilling the Pacific communities in mental health and addiction literacy and suicide prevention training was also talked about.
- In terms of access, some participants reported that a family member or friend would be their first “go to” for help when they were experiencing mental health and addiction issues, but this didn’t always result in being given the right advice or being told to seek help from appropriate services.
- Both adult and youth participants shared that the stigma and negative beliefs and attitudes within Pacific communities regarding mental health and addictions, has prevented them (or others) from seeking the help they need.
- A large number of participants had little or no knowledge of the He Ara Oranga’ Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction Report and/or the recommendations made in the report

Staying in touch

The Ministry looks forward to continuing to engage with the sector to improve access and choice in relation to primary mental health and addiction services.

These Pacific focus groups, as well as the regional meetings and Māori hui are related to just one initiative within the Directorate’s wider work programme. They represent a first step in the Ministry’s efforts to connect more often and easily with organisations and communities across the motu to achieve our shared vision for change.

To stay in touch, keep up to date with the latest news and learn more about upcoming opportunities to get involved, [subscribe to the Directorate’s fortnightly e-newsletter](#) and share the link with your networks.

Question Schedule for Pacific focus groups

1. Have you heard of the *He Ara Oranga* Report?
2. When we refer to primary mental health and addiction services, what services do you think we are talking about?
3. Do you believe that your needs as a Pacific person are being reflected or met in the primary mental health and addiction services you use?
4. What are the barriers or challenges that you experience when accessing services or seeking support from services?
5. What do you want to see in the mental health and addiction services that will help you to better use these services?
6. What do you believe should be in primary mental health and addictions services today for Pacific?
7. What elements of service design and delivery could be effective for mental health and addiction services for your group?