

Clinical Leadership in Manatū Hauora

December 2023

Introduction

We know that clinical leadership within health care organisations is an essential element to delivering safe, high-quality health services. Less is known, however, about how clinical leadership within government organisations can positively affect and influence the broader health system. This document is the result of a project a multidisciplinary group of clinical advisors recently undertook which aimed to describe the value of clinical leadership within Manatū Hauora. The group developed a definition of clinical leadership and related principles for the government context of Manatū Hauora.

This article introduces that definition and those principles and outlines the application of clinical leadership within the context of Manatū Hauora. Our group of advisors is developing a second publication, which will provide a more detailed explanation of the work we undertook to understand the value of clinical leadership for Manatū Hauora, and our findings.

Context

Pae Ora – examining our roles after the health reforms

The introduction of the Pae Ora (Health Futures) Act in 2022 created an imperative to examine how Manatū Hauora, in its refreshed role of steward of the health system, can best harness clinical leadership to enhance its decision-making so that policy, legislation, system monitoring and regulation are best placed to improve health care to achieve higher quality, more equitable outcomes.

In October 2023, Manatū Hauora implemented a new operating model with a vision of creating a highly collaborative working environment. This model recognises clinical leadership as a systems priority that should span Manatū Hauora's work. Our definition and principles of clinical leadership for Manatū Hauora support strong collaboration and the integration of clinical leadership throughout the work of the organisation.

The purpose of clinical leadership in Manatū Hauora

Manatū Hauora is the chief strategic advisor and steward of the health and disability system within Aotearoa New Zealand. It advises the Government on policy, sets direction, and regulates and monitors the health system's performance with the aim of achieving pae ora (healthy futures for all New Zealanders). Clinical leadership provides essential support to the core functions of Manatū Hauora in that it provides reliable, well-informed clinical advice across strategy, policy and regulation settings. The focus of clinical leadership is the delivery of safe, high-quality health services throughout Aotearoa.

Clinical leadership in different contexts

Within the context of organisations providing direct health services, clinical leaders are often involved in the direct delivery of care. They may draw frequently on their expertise in a specialty area to inform practice or standards within their organisation. In these settings, clinical leaders are advocates for patient outcomes and for their profession.

The role of clinical leaders within the context of a government organisation differs. Within Manatū Hauora, clinical leaders do not deliver direct services to the population. Rather, they provide advice and insights based on their experience of delivering services. They draw on their broader understanding of the system and the impact that government policy and decision-making have on service delivery and patient outcomes.

Within Manatū Hauora, clinical leaders work to bring together clinical expertise from all health professions and disciplines. They draw on clinical research, insights and leading practice locally and globally, informed by their sector-wide clinical network. Clinical leaders also offer a deep understanding of clinical service delivery and performance.

While clinical leadership roles may differ between government and health care provider settings, the two roles have a similar aim: ensuring that the health care system provides safe, quality services to our population.

How this work was undertaken

We first undertook a literature review of over 120 articles. This revealed few publications on clinical leadership within government agencies. To address the lack of published evidence on this topic, we then undertook over 40 interviews and group discussions to gain perspectives from clinical leaders within and outside of Manatū Hauora. This included those with roles in directorates within Manatū Hauora, academics, international health system leaders and those with expertise and lived experience in Māori health and clinical leadership.

Published literature highlighted the difficulty of defining clinical leadership. No definition existed for clinical leadership in government; we therefore developed a definition of clinical leadership in Manatū Hauora, in consultation with internal staff and the Executive Leadership Team.

We used the same process to develop principles of clinical leadership within Manatū Hauora, drawing on our findings from both literature and interviews. The principles were aligned to those specified in the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 and the principles in Tikanga Whakahaere, the operating model for Manatū Hauora.

The Executive Leadership Team formally agreed on our definition and principles of clinical leadership in June 2023.

Definition

Our definition for clinical leadership in Manatū Hauora is as follows.

A clinical leader is a health and disability systems level expert providing clinical input and strategic professional leadership across Manatū Hauora priorities and work programmes and the wider health sector. A Manatū Hauora clinical leader is employed in a recognised (or designated) Ministry role. They have clinical and professional leadership experience and generally hold an annual practising certificate.

We acknowledge that there is a range of clinical roles in Manatū Hauora and that some may not meet all aspects of this definition. For example, regulatory functions and roles may be filled by someone with clinical experience, but the role itself may not require a clinical background.

Principles

The principles that inform how Manatū Hauora uses clinical leadership are as follows.

Principle 1: Collaborative leadership

- Manatū Hauora works with clinical leaders throughout all stages of key work and enables them to exercise decision-making authority.
- Manatū Hauora collaborates with clinical leaders to build and maintain high trust relationships with Māori and with health sector stakeholders.
- Manatū Hauora harnesses a variety of clinical perspectives by supporting interdisciplinary collaboration and a network of clinical leadership across the organisation.

Principle 2: System quality

- Manatū Hauora uses clinical leadership and expertise to assist in monitoring and holding the system to account, with a focus on continuous improvement to achieve meaningful health and equitable outcomes for people and whānau.
- Manatū Hauora relies on clinical leadership to advise it on what constitutes appropriate clinical practice, to inform regulatory decision making.
- Manatū Hauora depends on clinical leadership to influence and help mitigate risk and issues as these are identified in the health System.

Principle 3: Enacting Te Tiriti

- Manatū Hauora draws on clinical leadership to continuously improve services, and to actively protect health and wellbeing, access to services and health outcomes so they are equitable for Māori and priority populations.
- Manatū Hauora partners with Māori clinical leaders to seek guidance early and enable them to exercise decision-making authority on matters of importance to Māori, or where there is an unfair and disproportionate impact on hauora Māori.
- Manatū Hauora requires clinical leaders to integrate and promote Māori perspectives, taking into account mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and practices), as appropriate, in key work.

Principle 4: Capability building

- Manatū Hauora intentionally builds clinical leadership capability, making a commitment that all clinical leaders will strengthen and enact cultural safety and intentionally grow Māori clinical leadership capacity and capability.

Next steps

Operationalising the principles

The new organisational structure of Manatū Hauora provides an ideal opportunity for us to put our principles of clinical leadership into practice. Clinical leaders will work with workstream leaders within the Transformation Programme to embed the principles of clinical leadership into the culture of Manatū Hauora, to strengthen its role as system steward.

While this work specifically focused on clinical leadership within Manatū Hauora, it may also be applicable to other health organisations.



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