

Mental health and wellbeing policy guide

2023 General Election
July 2023

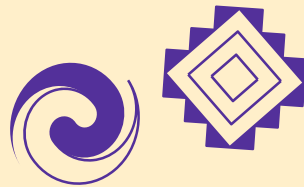


Who we are

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand is a leading mental health and wellbeing charity striving for a society where all people flourish. Our strategic mission is to grow positive mental wellbeing or mauri ora by promoting safe, strong, and supportive cultures within families and whānau, workplaces, schools, communities and wider society.

We do this by:

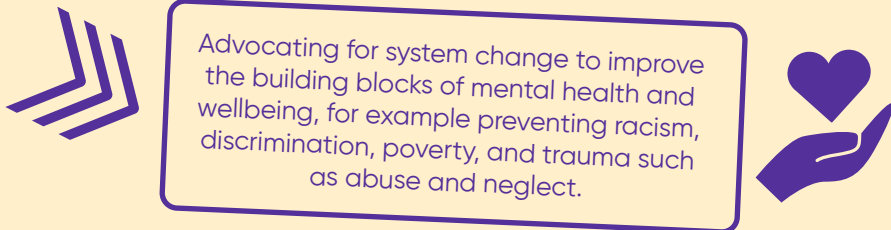
Actioning our commitment as a Te Tiriti o Waitangi partner.



Giving people the information and tools to boost their mental wellbeing.



Advocating for system change to improve the building blocks of mental health and wellbeing, for example preventing racism, discrimination, poverty, and trauma such as abuse and neglect.



Have any pātai (questions) about our work, or this guide?

Email policyandadvocacy@mentalhealth.org.nz

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand is proud to be politically neutral. We do not hold biases or preferences towards any political party.

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He taonga te hauora.

Value wellbeing. Better our future.

This election, people across Aotearoa want to know what your party will do differently to transform our mental health and addiction system, and better protect and improve the mental wellbeing of all New Zealanders in alignment with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, equity, and the lived experiences of people with mental distress or illness.

We need to do things differently.

Understanding the true scope of mental health and wellbeing need, and funding commensurate to that need, is doing things differently.

Investing in Te Tiriti-grounded supports, like kaupapa Māori programmes, that see mental health as one part of our wider wellbeing – is doing things differently.

Implementing population-based approaches that provide people with the tools to be well and stay well – fences at the top of the cliff, rather than ambulances at the bottom – is doing things differently.

This guide

This four-step guide is informed by the communities we engage with every day, and national and international evidence. It's designed to help your party create mental health policy that will win public confidence this election and make lasting, impactful change.

We thank your party for the time it has given to this important issue. As always, we are available to continue the kōrero and provide impartial support and advice.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Robinson'.

Shaun Robinson

Chief Executive

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

1 See the scope of need

Successive governments' mental health and wellbeing strategies haven't worked, because they haven't understood the true scope of need. Understanding that scope, and funding commensurate to it, will set your party up to create meaningful mental health policy.

In 2023, Aotearoa's scope of need is extensive and complex. The annual cost of serious mental health and addiction to society and the economy is \$12 billion per year, or 5% of GDP.¹ The mental health system has been deprioritised for decades, and the impacts of COVID-19 and natural disasters² have substantially impacted the wellbeing of many.

Mental distress and illness rates are high and increasing every year for most groups but especially for Māori, young people and people with disabilities.³



Despite some increased investment and service access, when New Zealanders need mental health or wellbeing support, they are often **unable to access** it.³

Māori, Pasifika and young people **experience significant inequities** of access.^{4,5} Wait times are long and growing.^{4,6} There are significant workforce gaps in a wide variety of services and supports.^{4,7,8}

When tāngata whaiora (people seeking wellness) do access supports, they **lack genuine choice** in them, including whether those supports are suited to their needs; located nearby; or aligned with their culture, worldview, human rights and preferences.

There is **minimal access to non-Western, non-biomedical** interventions, such as kaupapa Māori supports or peer-led options.⁴

Across the mental health system, Māori are subjected to higher rates of coercive practices;⁹ systemic racism; disregard for Te Tiriti o Waitangi;⁴ and other inequitable outcomes.

Transitioning between **different levels of care**, such as between primary and secondary services, is notoriously difficult.⁴

Supports are often siloed, and confusing to navigate.

Wraparound community support is unlikely.

Tāngata whaiora also experience physical health inequities, sometimes because of **discrimination in services**.¹⁰

Tāngata whaiora are **twice as likely as others to die before the age of 65**, including from preventable and treatable health issues.¹⁰

This election, we recommend:

1. Publicly acknowledging the scale of mental health need;
2. Taking the time to understand the scale of need, including how many people require support; current choice and access levels; service transitions; and inequitable outcomes;
3. Allocating funding commensurate to the need.

2 Resource the right solutions

We all want Aotearoa to be a place where people enjoy good mental wellbeing; where people who experience mental distress or illness, or addiction or substance harm are treated with dignity and given the choice of safe, holistic, culturally-appropriate and effective supports, when and where they need it; and where family and whānau have the support and information, and services have the flexibility and resourcing, to meet these needs.

To achieve these aims, the right solutions need to be resourced. **We recommend your party's mental health policy commits to an investment approach spread wisely across preventing mental health challenges, promoting positive mental wellbeing and increasing effective, Te Tiriti-grounded services and supports.**

Identifying the causes of distress; what keeps people well; what prevents people from accessing supports early; why people stay in inpatient services longer than they need to; and what community support is lacking are also key considerations for any investment approach.

3 Commit to a clear long-term plan

The report from the 2018 Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, *He Ara Oranga*, presented a way forward informed by thousands of individuals and communities. Four years on, we're still waiting on an implementation plan for many recommendations.

To win the public's confidence this election, it's critical your party commits to a timeline for meaningful change. Your plan should be long-term, have a staged implementation and name the people in charge of delivering work.

We recommend your plan:

Upholds **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**, and the **voices of tāngata whaiora**.

Builds and maintains the infrastructure needed to **produce consistent and robust data** and reporting on mental health conditions; the scale of need across populations; and how needs change over time (with the aid of a comprehensive national survey).

Prioritises holistic wellbeing, including increased funding for services and supports that reflect whānau, hapū and iwi aspirations; build connections and behaviours based on wellbeing science, mātauranga Māori healing and treatment options; and targeted efforts to improve the physical health of tāngata whaiora.

Focuses on **equitable outcomes** for Māori, Pasifika, Asian peoples, migrants, people with a background as refugees, people with disabilities, rainbow communities, children and youth, rural populations, and those that experience intersecting discrimination or disadvantage.

Sets targets to expand and develop a strong, community-driven and culturally safe **workforce** effective for our diverse communities, including:

- resourcing **peer support** in every service, and
- ensuring **diversity** in the mental health workforce, and that workers reflect the communities they work with.

Sets clear and coordinated actions for whole-of-government approaches to prevent **mental distress and wellbeing inequities** (such as poverty, discrimination, family violence and racism).

Continually **promotes mental health and wellbeing** across schools, workplaces and communities.

Resources and supports the culture and practice evolutions necessary to allow the Mental Health Act to be repealed and replaced, and a **shift away from coercion to occur**.

4 Grab the quick wins to drive lasting change

To make a difference to the mental health system and people who engage with it, we recommend your mental health policy commits to a small number of tangible and evidence-based actions pre-election – and commits to making them happen in the first year post-election. This will build trust with the many New Zealanders who need change now.

We've recommended 12 actions you can take to create meaningful change, that could form part of your long-term mental health plan. To find out more read our [General Election statement at valuewellbeing.nz](#)

Action area			
Prevention, early intervention, and mental wellbeing promotion	Effective crisis response and supports	Support recovery and wellness	Change our mental health laws
Suggested actions			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant support for mental wellbeing in schools and kura • Invest in community suicide prevention initiatives • Prioritise Māori and community-led initiatives to better support whānau • More youth-focused supports, such as youth one-stop shops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund new crisis responses • Fund child and adolescent services • Better supports and options for eating disorders • More alcohol and other drug harm reduction education, supports and detox facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign traditional mental health services to include culturally safe supports that provide homes, education and jobs • Prioritise tāngata whaiora for cancer screening and treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace the Mental Health Act • End solitary confinement in mental health units

Found this guide helpful? Our door is always open for any questions, thoughts or whakaaro you may have. Email: policyandadvocacy@mentalhealth.org.nz



This document is available at
www.mentalhealth.org.nz.

