

# WHAT RANGATAHI WANT

Aotearoa's young people want the mental health system to change, and they have good reason to – they will face long-term consequences of a system not suited to their needs.

## The facts and stats

Rangatahi (aged 13-24 years) believe mental health is the biggest issue facing their generation,<sup>1</sup> and we agree:

Rangatahi have some of the highest rates of mental distress in Aotearoa.<sup>2</sup>

Suicide is the leading cause of death for rangatahi aged 15-24.<sup>3</sup>

Rangatahi Māori are more than twice as likely to die by suicide than non-Māori.<sup>3</sup>

Three-quarters of lifelong mental health challenges begin by age 25, and most rangatahi who experience poor mental health will experience further challenges in adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

## What's behind the statistics?

Rangatahi today experience unique stressors<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> such as:

Climate change and eco-anxiety

**Economic insecurity**

Inequality, racism and discrimination

Growing up through a **series of crises**, such as terrorism, natural disasters and COVID-19

The 'age of outrage', polarised opinions and cancel culture

**Physical isolation** from others, digital and COVID-19-related

When rangatahi need help they often can't access it.

**47%** of rangatahi in Aotearoa don't feel they have positive ways to cope with their problems (up 10% since 2019).<sup>1</sup>



Over **16% of 15-24 year-olds** have an unmet need for mental health support.<sup>2</sup>



Service **wait times are longer** for rangatahi than other groups.<sup>9,10</sup>












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# What do rangatahi want?

Our young people want Aotearoa to be a place where people with mental distress or illness aren't judged or discriminated against. A place where it's okay to ask for tautoko/support. A place where mental wellbeing is valued and promoted.

They also want holistic supports and services that are:

INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE	EASY TO ACCESS	SUPPORT HOLISTIC WELLBEING
<p> <b>Use whakawhānau-tanga</b> to build meaningful relationships between staff and rangatahi, their whānau, social circles and communities</p> <p> Are non-judgemental - <b>a safe space</b> for all cultures, genders and communities</p> <p> Employ staff from all walks of life, who <b>role model positive identities</b></p> <p> Are <b>youth-led</b>, or have rangatahi working within them</p>	<p> <b>Offer a range of communication options</b> (kanohi ki te kanohi, online, calls or texts, and home visits)</p> <p> <b>Are located</b> in or near areas where rangatahi live, study and work</p> <p> <b>Are free</b>, don't have wait times and <b>are easy to navigate</b></p> <p> <b>Form a hub with other health and welfare services</b>, such as peer, study, life skill and cultural supports; social workers; and sports programmes</p>	<p> <b>Incorporate the natural environment</b>, such as a garden, indoor plants, skylights or paintings of the natural world</p> <p> <b>Are strengths-based</b> – don't see the young person as broken, but instead help them to rediscover wellness through their strengths</p> <p> <b>Offer alternatives to medication</b> – talk therapies, sensory modulation or peer support – and understand holistic wellbeing</p>

The insights above are mostly drawn from Whāraurau's [2019](#) and [2021](#) DMC ('deep and meaningful conversation') reports.

<h2>How mental health policy can achieve change</h2> <p>Our recommendations for developing mental health and wellbeing policy for rangatahi</p>		
1. Invest	2. Develop the workforce	3. Change practice and design
In more mental health supports and promotion initiatives led by rangatahi, for rangatahi	By increasing representation of Māori, Pacific and rangatahi	By developing a national strategy, grounded in te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, for mental health and wellbeing promotion programmes in communities, schools, kura and workplaces
Sustainably in more local youth hubs where rangatahi can access mental health services alongside social, cultural and life skill supports	By removing barriers to mental health training for rangatahi, including by increasing student acceptance numbers and financial assistance	By creating an 'ecosystem of care' where all services are well-connected and transitioned
In providing therapeutic, nature-filled services which include whānau and social networks	By making mental health services safe for all people to work in	By prioritising early intervention and specific supports to boost perinatal and whānau mental wellbeing
In free counselling services for children and rangatahi across the motu	By involving rangatahi in recruitment processes – both as candidates and in the process of hiring others	By co-producing youth services with rangatahi, to better meet their needs
In more specialist mental health services and positions (such as psychiatrists and cultural advisors)	By improving staff retention through providing better pay and wellbeing support	By targeting mental health supports for specific populations, such as rainbow communities and young people with disabilities

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