



MEDIA RELEASE

Mutuwhenua, 5 July 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rongoā Māori - healing the people and the health system in Te Hiku ō Te Ika

There is a clinking of glass, a pause, a 'mauri ora' or two, and a bottoms up as a group of keen rongoā Māori practitioners test out their fresh batch of pātētē infusion on a typical Friday morning in Kaitiāia.

They are Tuia Maara Whenua, one of four rongoā Māori hubs that form the Te Hiku Rongoā Māori Collective, and they are at the forefront of redressing health equity for traditional hauora Māori practices on the incoming tide of current health system reforms.

The Te Hiku Rongoā Māori Collective is a Te Hiku-wide network of traditional rongoā Māori practitioners with clinics that span across north Hokianga, west, central, and eastern communities, that provides Māori-based health and wellbeing services to rural whānau.

Individually, each hub has been holding space on the ground for access to rongoā Māori for a long time. Now, they have received boost in support to collectively continue their work under the Taikorihī locality, one of 12 national prototypes set up under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 to influence and inform the future investment of public health in New Zealand.

The collective has received funding via Te Whatu Ora through the Taikorihī innovation fund to collaborate and collectivise services and approaches to inform what future investment in rongoā Māori in Te Hiku could look like.

"A lot of whānau have been asking for options to access traditional rongoā Māori. We need to be seen at the forefront, just as much as any other hauora service provision.

Our whānau are screaming for it and still want it. We just want to be able to do it and get resourcing because we all know the deficit kōrero around our whānau. We can work with our own, in our communities, to address those inequities within the health sector," she says.

And it works.

Soul Within's Bernie Brophy operates from Mitimiti to cover the north Hokianga catchment area. She says demand for her services in romiromi and wairua work from birth to death to aftercare is high.

"We've found a lot more grief, loss, and stress on top of the cost of living. For our whānau accessing healthcare, what that looks like is they can't get in to see doctors for two weeks to a month in some situations.

There is lots of desperation, because there isn't that immediate medical care available, when kānohi ki te kānohi is where our people connect from," she says.

She says the advent of COVID enabled many practitioners to move into a digital space to continue to provide services.

"We still work online today because of the accessibility. We call it the eight-minute lifeline. If someone needs to talk, we just ring, connect and do what we've got to do, and do it fast, and let it go because people are in such dire straits. It only takes eight minutes of somebody listening for them to be able to move and shift their psyche from the darkest of places," she says.

Joanne adds that witnessing time and again the impact of rongoā Māori to heal whānau firsthand is validating and supports the evidential data being gathered by the collective on health stressors from their observations working with whānau.

"The stories are just as important as the data. In fact, they are probably more important. I've seen people come into clinic with wheelchairs and with walkers and walk out without them," she says.

The current central hub hosts wānanga under the tutelage of kuia and kaumātua who Joanne says are critical in sharing the intergenerational transmission of rongoā Māori knowledge alive in contemporary times.

"It's around that retention of mātauranga rongoā. If we don't share it, we'll lose it. It is not just about providing the rongoā, but also providing the opportunity to learn how to harvest, how to prep it, and how to make it. It's that whole idea around gifting the fish or gifting the fishing rod," she says.

Joanne says that the 2024 Taikorihī innovation funding has provided a valuable boost to what rongoā Māori practitioners have been accustomed to operating on, the equivalent of the "smell of an oily rag" and there is a high need for services.

"We have also contributed to the local pātaka in town for some time with whānau rongoā packs because the struggle is real up here right now, and some people just don't even have kai, let alone money to go to the chemist and doctors," she says,

The collective has already helped organise a number of wānanga and is getting ready for the upcoming Te Tai Tokerau Rongoā Māori Hui-ā-Rohe being hosted at Otiria Marae in Moerewa from 3 to 4 August, as they are also part of a wider Te Tai Tokerau Rongoā Māori Collective.

They are working with a number of kura running workshops, and the Hokianga hub has extended services into their local kura with students and whānau.

Collaboration with other health service providers is also underway, including Te Hiku Hauora - who have provided critical support with additional overheads, resourcing and training - and The Moko Foundation, who have provided access to future innovation and research for rongoā Māori with the Mātauranga Hub.

Joanne says they are all working together to achieve a common goal - to address equity to access for quality primary health care services across different populations throughout Te Hiku o Te Ika.

"For me, it's about us working smarter together so that our whānau know they can get optimum resourcing and service that we can provide as a collective because each one of us can provide a different part that the whānau wouldn't have been able to access from just one," she says.

Taikorihi Programme Manager JJ Ripikoi says rongoā Māori is a priority focus area for the Taikorihi locality because it addresses one of the key issues about barriers to access and availability of healthcare in the Far North.

He adds that the data and insights gathered from the Te Hiku Rongoā Māori Collective initiative, alongside 12 other initiatives rolling out across Te Hiku, will be combined over the next 12 months to influence recommendations for future public health investment in Te Hiku.

The Tuia Maara Whenua meets each 'Fabulous Friday' from 10am to 2pm for rongoā preparation, workshops and shared kai at 168 Commerce Street, Kaitāia. All are welcome and for more information, visit <https://www.facebook.com/tuia.maarawhenua>.

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About the Taikorihi Locality:

The Taikorihi Locality is the vehicle for change in Te Hiku ō Te Ika, set up under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 health reforms.

Taikorihi is a population health initiative that aims to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for all Te Hiku ō Te Ika whānau, focusing on Māori, Pacific peoples and people who experience disability.

The Taikorihi Locality area extends from north Hokianga over to Mangonui, north to Te Rerenga Wairua and includes approximately 25,000 people living in its borders.

Taikorihi is supported by Te Whatu Ora under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022.

For more information on Taikorihi and the Pae Ora health reforms taking place in Te Hiku, visit www.taikorihi.co.nz.