



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TE NIHO: Te Hiku dental initiative bites down on oral healthcare reform in the Far North

The critical needs of tamariki and taitamariki are taking centre stage in a dental initiative designed to reset oral health in Te Hiku.

The Te Niho initiative is one of 13 supported by Te Whatu Ora through the Taikorihī Locality – a prototype set up under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 to influence and inform the future of public health investment in the area extending from Hokianga to Te Rerenga Wairua.

Led out by Te Hiku Hauora, Te Niho is an initiative that launched last year to relieve inaccessibility issues in the Far North and gain insights into the prevalence of oral-related non-communicable diseases.

Te Hiku Hauora CEO Dr Maria Baker says the Māori health provider commissioned Dr Natalie Burkhardt to steam through a dental health blitz that saw over 200 whānau receive free treatment for a variety of dental health needs and ailments.

Maria says Dr Burkhardt's tireless dedication saw her provide life changing care to hundreds of whānau over a demanding month.

She adds the toll of whānau of not being able to access dental services in Te Hiku rests heaviest on its most vulnerable – children aged up to 12 years old.

“There are huge issues in Te Tai Tokerau around the oral caries for kids and our babies. The responsibility on Te Whatu Ora is massive, if you think about where the resource needs to come for that younger age group.

If we think about all the school-based and hospital-based oral healthcare services in place, our babies are still the ones that are going to go under anesthetic and all the rest of it to get their teeth pulled out. Something needs to shift around Te Whatu Ora's responsibilities,” she says.

She adds that Te Hiku Hauora has access to funding through ACC for wāhine requiring dental treatment following any kind of trauma, including family harm. “This is something that we've just started, and we've seen 30 wāhine so far,” she says.

A comprehensive assessment report of the current landscape in dental care – including challenges, barriers to access, current investment levels and identification of current system gaps – is currently in development for release this year.

Pivot Consulting Director Dr Anna Sutton, who has undertaken the research and literature review for the report, describes the current state of service availability in the Far North as “depressing.”

“We did a stock take of dental services and there are a number, but they are all inundated. I think it will take three to five years to achieve capacity in Te Hiku, even if we start to train our own today,” she says.

Key recommendations to government from the Te Niho report include more community-based initiatives targeting tamariki and taitamariki Māori, coordinated approaches between existing dental health services to address equity gaps, the development of a Te Tai Tokerau-wide oral health workforce strategy, and a review of the choice, access and efficiency of oral healthcare service delivery to Māori in Te Hiku.

Taikorihi Programme Manager JJ Ripikoi says dental health was a feature of a considerable number of Localities across New Zealand when they were initially set up to help redesign their local health systems.

He says the data and insights from the Te Niho initiative will be combined with evidence from the other 12 Taikorihi initiatives to produce a social impact report of the Taikorihi Locality on health investment in Te Hiku.

For more information on the Taikorihi Locality, visit www.taikorihi.co.nz.

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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.

The Taikorihī Innovation Fund initiatives for 2024 are:

- **Kia Taurima:** A.N.T. (Aupōuri, Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa) Trust delivers a programme focusing on Māmā and pēpi health and wellbeing, including whānau engagement, advocacy, and support, quarterly wānanga, and service provider / sector co-ordination.
- **Te Niho:** A drop-in dental clinic coordinated by Te Hiku Hauora to reset oral health and prevent non-communicable diseases in Te Hiku.
- **Wāhine Hauora:** Uplifting women's health in Te Hiku with a hauora and wellbeing programme based on Te Whare Tapa Whā model and mātauranga Māori, delivered by a collaboration led by StrongHer.
- **Te Hiku Rongoā Māori Collective:** Addressing health equity for rongoā Māori and increasing access to and availability of traditional medicine across a hub headed by Tuia Maara.
- **Rangatahi Sports and Wellbeing Programme:** Increasing the participation rates of young people in sports throughout Te Hiku through a programme designed and delivered by Native Sports.
- **He Whare Āhuru: Te Hiku Housing Forum:** A fully comprehensive initiative led by North Studios to build the platform for a shared housing strategy across Te Hiku through provider collaboration, while connecting Te Hiku whānau with providers via a bespoke, online digital hub.
- **He Taura:** Building up Te Hiku taitamariki to step confidently into their future worlds, providing opportunities for networking, leadership development and mentorship with The Moko Foundation.
- **Rākau Ora:** Providing after-hours access to spaces for Te Hiku adults and rangatahi needing immediate mental health support.
- **Tāngata Whai Kaha:** Te Houtaewa Māori Charitable Trust offering innovative support systems based in Rongoā Māori that nurture quality of life for whānau experiencing disability in Te Hiku.
- **Te Papa o Tāne:** A fitness and wellbeing kaupapa aimed at empowering tāne, delivered by a collaboration led by Mauri Services, that brings forward a realisation and consciousness around Mana Tāne for men in Te Hiku.
- **Teen Parenting Programme:** Specialising in awhi and parenting education for young parents and their whānau living in Te Hiku, led by Te Rarawa Anga Mua.
- **Muriwhenua Wellbeing Festivals:** One-stop-shop health and wellbeing events to celebrate hauora in Te Hiku and strengthen direct connections between health and wellbeing providers and whānau, delivered by Te Hiku Hauora.
- **iMoko:** Ensuring tamariki are empowered with sovereignty over their oranga and choices by providing health education and peer supports across kura kaupapa Māori and mainstream kura in Te Hiku with Navilluso Medical.