



The Royal New Zealand  
College of General Practitioners  
Te Whare Tohu Rata o Aotearoa

## POSITION STATEMENT

# Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori health equity

### Summary of position

Irrespective of political and societal contexts at any given time in Aotearoa New Zealand, the College is committed<sup>1</sup> to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori health rights. We do this by recognising and upholding Waitangi Tribunal identified Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles which guide the work of the College and help ensure the provision of a culturally safe and responsive educational environment.

The College proactively seeks to partner with Māori to improve health outcomes through health education, research and increasing Māori participation in the workforce. Priority is given to initiatives and actions that seek to increase the Māori general practice workforce, support the ongoing development of Māori leadership across primary health care, and ensure a culturally safe and responsive general practice workforce in the pursuit of health equity for Māori. We are committed to centring Te Tiriti o Waitangi across all our work to ensure responsiveness to Māori. This includes maintaining genuine and transparent partnerships with Māori to co-govern and co-design our strategic priorities and actions into the future.

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## Māori health rights

*The College formally acknowledges the enduring affirmation of Māori rights encapsulated within He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (1835) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840).*

Within Aotearoa New Zealand key founding documents include:

- **He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni** (Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand; 1835 – ‘He Whakaputanga’), which affirms mana motuhake and tino rangatiratanga (ultimate sovereignty) among northern iwi Māori.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**, an agreement between Māori and the Crown, builds on He Whakaputanga through the provision of Crown obligations and recognition of Māori rights.
  - **Article 1:** Kāwanatanga provides a guarantee of fair and just governance by the Crown. If this guarantee were realised, at a minimum, equity for Māori would be observed.
  - **Article 2:** Tino rangatiratanga re-affirms Māori rights to tino rangatiratanga and the protection of all taonga (treasures), including land, resources, te reo Māori and cultural practices. Importantly, Article 2 emphasises the Crown’s obligation to safeguard Māori rights and interests, thereby ensuring Māori rights to exercise their authority and maintain their cultural identity.
  - **Article 3:** Ōritetanga guarantees Māori the right to equity through the provision of equal rights and privileges as those afforded the British subjects. Article 3 thus provides a guarantee that Māori will have access to the same opportunities and protections under the law as non-Māori citizens. If upheld, equity for Māori across all health and social indicators would be observed.
  - The **Ritenga Māori Declaration** provides a guarantee to Māori of their right to live and flourish as Māori within Aotearoa.

Internationally these rights are supported via the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**,<sup>2</sup> which affirms Māori rights to experience, at a minimum, the provision of equitable access to health services, quality of health care experiences and health outcomes.

## Māori health inequities

*The significant and persistent health inequities experienced by Māori are unacceptable and must be addressed as a matter of priority across the health system.*

Health inequities are “differences in health that are not only avoidable but unfair and unjust.”<sup>3</sup> These inequities have arisen from complex and interconnected causes, including the profound and ongoing impact of colonisation and subsequent racism, power imbalances, cultural subjugation and dispossession among Māori (root causes), as highlighted in the Waitangi Tribunal’s WAI 2575 Report.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Māori health inequities reflect broad health system failures across strategy and policy, service design and delivery, and provision of care that does not respond to Māori health needs.



There is a body of evidence highlighting extensive and persistent Māori health inequities, including differential access to the social determinants of health (e.g. housing, education, income and access to quality health care) as well as to protective health factors (e.g. connection to community, cultural identity, social capital and social cohesion). Māori health inequities are observed across nearly every measure of health, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, chronic respiratory disease and mental health.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most compelling is that over half of Māori deaths are attributed to avoidable causes<sup>6</sup> and there was a 6.6-year gap in life expectancy between Māori and non-Māori/non-Pacific in 2023.

**“The health system performs worse for Māori in virtually every domain measured.”<sup>7</sup>**

## The College’s commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to achieving Māori health equity

### *The College recognises its role and responsibilities in honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, upholding Māori health rights and prioritising the pursuit of Māori health equity.*

In recognition of the fundamental role Te Tiriti o Waitangi has in achieving Māori health equity, the College unreservedly supports initiatives and advocates for a health system that seeks to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi via the principles of tino rangatiratanga, equity, active protection, options and partnership (WAI 2575). This includes:

- advocating for whānau, hapu, iwi and hāpori Māori voice to determine the priorities, outcomes and measurements by which health and wellbeing are measured and understood
- supporting investment in hauora Māori, te ao Māori and kaupapa Māori solutions to addressing current health needs
- unequivocally acknowledging ethnicity as a key marker of health outcomes.

More broadly, the College recognises that achieving health equity is a critical component of its ethical and moral obligations and reflects a broader commitment to a more just and accessible health system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our commitment to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori rights and achieving Māori health equity is explicitly reflected across the College via:

- our College purpose, which includes:
  - partnering with Māori
  - improving health outcomes for Māori
  - increasing Māori participation in health education and research
  - increasing Māori participation in the health workforce.
- the College Rules, which:
  - acknowledge Māori as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners
  - explicitly commit to “promote Māori... health and associated models and awareness of practices, tikanga and kawa... promote solutions to health inequities... [and] promote comprehensive person-centred care, that takes into account the roles of whānau, community and equity in achieving health gains.”<sup>1</sup>



- the College's strategic documents *Te Rautaki, Statement of Strategic Intent (2019–2024)*<sup>8</sup> and *He Ihu Waka, He Ihu Whenua, He Ihu Tangata, He Rautaki Māori – Māori Strategy*,<sup>9</sup> which reiterate the College's vision and aspirations for Māori health advancement.
- partnership between the College and its Māori representative group Te Akoranga a Māui, which provides governance and leadership across the College.

Further, the College recognises the importance of:

- nurturing genuine and trusted partnerships with Māori, which may be reflected in co-governance and co-design approaches
- strengthening our relationships with whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori Māori to develop health policies and programmes that more clearly reflect Māori needs and aspirations
- prioritising Māori capacity and capability development across the College to collectively build our understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori perspectives of health and wellbeing as well as the provision of kaupapa Māori solutions
- incorporating culturally safe and responsive education for our members through te ao Māori approaches to understanding health and wellbeing, as well as kaupapa Māori solutions to addressing Māori health needs within medical training and ongoing professional development
- prioritising and investing in strategies and initiatives that target Māori health needs
- promoting whānau-centred health care and services that reflects the needs of whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori Māori
- continuing our efforts to increase awareness of the root causes of health inequities for Māori
- systematic collection of robust and comprehensive data that is disaggregated by ethnicity to enable clear monitoring of the College's impact and progress towards Māori health advancement and health equity
- produce evidence-based insights to inform recommendations and illustrate our collective impact in the pursuit of Māori health equity.

## Concluding statement

The College wholeheartedly acknowledges the mana and intent of He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (1835) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840), including the enduring rights re-affirmed to Māori. Māori health inequities are unacceptable and reflect ongoing failures by successive Governments to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The College is committed to contributing to the changes required in health and education to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, uphold Māori health rights and prioritise the elimination of Māori health inequities.

*This is the first in a series of statements on health equity and aligns with the views and values of the College.*



## REFERENCES

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