

# Better Maori health living in a healthy environment

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There has been very little attention given to environmental health issues and Maori health. At a recent meeting of the Pakuranga Rotary Club, a paper was delivered on the topic 'A viewpoint on Maori health'. The key issues discussed were on the potential benefits to improve Maori health by addressing environmental issues.

The WHO defines 'Health' as 'A complete state of the mental, physical and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease' and 'Maori Health' as 'The spirituality interacting with the mental, physical and social well-being of the Maori'.

The well-being of the Maori has strong relationships with the environment from a classical point of view.

The incorporation of European values over the past 200 years has seen tremendous changes to the natural environment at the expense of economic development. These values have had a significant impact on Maori Health. The current ways and means that the 'health care system'

have addressed Maori health have been service-orientated complemented by intervention programmes.

In general medical practice about 50–60% of consultations can be attributed to the nature of the environment, for instance: respiratory illnesses (asthma), nutrition-related disorders (diabetes, hypertension), osteoarthritis, accidents, skin disorders and mental illness.

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There has been some very good work undertaken by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) in monitoring pollution (atmospheric, motor vehicle emissions); the Green House effect. One study showed how introducing better insulation to their houses reduced increases of admissions to Middle-

more Hospital for respiratory illnesses affecting the elderly.

The nation's economy is dependent on productivity for overseas markets from the primary industries, such as beef, dairy and horticulture. New Zealanders have a high consumption of red meat in their diets and many

would like to include fish in their diets.

The issue here is one of elevated LDL

and or TGs largely from red meat. In the Rotary presentation it was suggested that Maori ought to have more fish in their diets compared with red meat. More specifically, there ought to be greater monitoring of the primary industries especially in agriculture, with restrictions in the over-use of agricultural chemicals.

Government should consider in its health strategy for Maori that a more co-ordinated economic programme be established involving the Primary Industry Sectors, Ministry of Conservation, the Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Local Government, Work and Income and the Department of Labour.

The measurable outcome of such a programme may not only see a reduction in hospital admissions and general practice consultations but also an increase in employment opportunities and greater productivity, which will also benefit non-Maori.