

Thriving families and whānau

Our position:

All mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, and throughout the world, have the right to grow up in safe, happy homes where families and whānau are thriving socially, culturally, economically, and environmentally.

What is a thriving whānau?

A thriving whānau is one where mokopuna feel safe, loved, and supported - where whānau have the resources they need to provide for their mokopuna. This includes traditional whānau structures as well as whānau of choice, recognising the diverse family forms that mokopuna may be part of.

This means nutritious food on the table, a warm, healthy, and secure place to live, access to inclusive and responsive healthcare and education, protection from harmful social influences, specialised support for whānau with disabilities, time to spend playing with and learning with mokopuna, and nested within a community that is caring, safe and supportive. It's a stable environment where mokopuna feel connected to their whakapapa and cultural roots, and an environment that is healthy and sustainable, nurturing body and soul.

A thriving whānau is one where every member feels secure, valued, connected, and supported - where mokopuna are nurtured emotionally, socially, physically, and culturally. In these environments, mokopuna are supported to be their most confident, healthy, and capable selves – they can flourish to their full potential. In thriving whānau, mokopuna learn important life skills, develop a strong sense of identity and belonging, and are inspired with hope and promise for the future – they can dream big, and whānau have the capacity and resource to support those dreams.

Why are thriving whānau critical for mokopuna?

Mokopuna tell us that what they need most is a loving and supportive whānau, and for their whānau to have enough resources – including income – to create this loving and supportive environment for them to grow up in. They thrive when they feel safe and valued, with loving and secure whānau relationships – especially from their parents or primary whānau caregivers. They need the comfort of knowing that someone is always there for them – this is crucial for everyone who is developing

through infancy, childhood, and adolescence. When whānau thrive, mokopuna are usually able to be happier, hopeful, safer and more confident. This is especially true for mokopuna in whānau with disabilities, who may require additional support and resources to enable them to thrive and pursue their dreams.

In a thriving whānau environment, mokopuna are more likely to develop their inherent right and ability to succeed as healthy and successful New Zealanders. They are less likely to face problems like poverty, poor health, or trouble with the law.

Mokopuna need emotional support and protection from harmful social influences to develop self-esteem and resilience. Thriving whānau provide a safe space for mokopuna to develop a strong emotional foundation. This foundation supports mokopuna to understand their place in the world, have confidence, hope, and feel loved and understood.

In a thriving whānau, mokopuna learn things like communication, empathy, cooperation, and what safe relationships look and feel like. These things help mokopuna to build healthy relationships outside the whānau.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, a thriving whānau instils cultural values in mokopuna, helping them to know their whakapapa, their languages, and to identify and understand what is important to them. This foundation shapes their behaviour, supporting them to make decisions that are important to them, and contribute to society in a way they want to.

A thriving whānau encourages a love for learning. Whānau have time and capacity to play, help with schoolwork, provide intellectual stimulation, and foster curiosity. This support is vital for mokopuna to live their best lives.

Whānau play a key role in maintaining the physical health of mokopuna by providing meals, encouraging physical activity, and ensuring regular medical and dental check-ups – and resourcing whānau to enable these things is crucial. A healthy body supports a healthy mind and wairua, enabling mokopuna to thrive in all areas of life.

A thriving whānau offers consistency in daily routines, which is crucial for mokopuna to develop a sense of security and stability. Regular routines help mokopuna feel safe and supported, providing a strong foundation for growth.

Thriving whānau know how and where they can access support if times get tough or unexpected changes happen. This includes through wider whānau, hapū, iwi and community relationships and networks, social and health services, and government support.

How do we know when whānau are thriving?

So, how do we know when whānau are thriving? We will see it when:

- All mokopuna feel loved, safe, and supported within their whānau and they are healthy and well-nourished across all sides of their Te Whare Tapa Whā.
- All whānau have safe and stable housing and enough income to meet their needs, plus a bit more.
- Whānau members and mokopuna have access to inclusive and responsive healthcare and education, including specialised services and support for disabilities.
- Cultural practices and languages are celebrated and preserved within the whānau.
- Whānau have time and capacity to spend with their mokopuna, including through play and supporting their development and learning - this includes ensuring that whānau of choice are recognised and supported.
- Communities are safe, supportive, and connected.

Why do thriving whānau matter for Aotearoa New Zealand?

All mokopuna have the right to grow up in a whānau environment that is safe and loving, with adequate resources to support their positive development and growth. This is made clear in both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Investing in whānau so they can thrive is not just the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do – when whānau thrive, mokopuna benefit, and everyone benefits.

Thriving whānau are healthier whānau. When whānau have the resources they need, they provide nutritious food, healthcare, and a safe living environment. This is particularly important for whānau with disabilities, who may require additional healthcare and support services to maintain their wellbeing. This leads to healthier mokopuna with fewer chronic illnesses like asthma, obesity, and diabetes, and preventable illnesses like rheumatic fever and skin infections. They get regular medical and dental check-ups, meaning a generation of healthy mokopuna, reducing hospital visits and easing the strain on our healthcare system. Healthy mokopuna have a better chance of growing into healthy adults, lowering long-term healthcare costs.

Education is another critical area where thriving whānau make a difference. Stable homes, nutritious food, and emotional support help mokopuna excel in school, and contributes to nourishing a love for learning. They attend school regularly, flourish to

their full potential academically, and are more likely to pursue higher education or vocational training. This benefits mokopuna, but also wider society by creating a diversely equipped and stable workforce, leading to increased job prospects, higher earnings, more tax revenue, and less reliance on social welfare programmes.

Thriving whānau contribute to economic stability and growth. Stable whānau participate more in the workforce and voluntary sector. Whānau with access to childcare and support are more likely to be able to work and provide for their whānau, reducing poverty and the need for government assistance. Investments in whānau support, like affordable childcare and parental leave, increase workforce participation and economic contribution, reducing unemployment and poverty-related issues.

Thriving whānau reduce crime and social issues. Mokopuna in stable, supportive environments are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour. They develop a strong set of values and a sense of responsibility, grounded in the love and care of their whānau. In Aotearoa New Zealand, whānau intervention programs that provide parenting support and education significantly reduce child abuse and family violence, leading to safer communities and less burden on the justice system.

Thriving whānau support good mental health. Mokopuna in loving environments learn to identify and manage stress, build resilience, and develop healthy coping mechanisms. Preventing poor mental health in childhood reduces issues like depression, anxiety, and substance abuse in adulthood. In Aotearoa New Zealand, mental health services for whānau improve mental health outcomes and strengthen whānau bonds, reducing the need for mental health services later in life.

Thriving whānau strengthen cultural and community ties. For Māori and Pasifika whānau, and for resettled whānau, maintaining cultural heritage and identity is vital. With the right support, whānau pass on traditions, language, and values to their mokopuna, fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging. Programs supporting cultural education and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand foster pride and community involvement, enriching the entire community.

What should we do?

Let's understand, recognise, value and invest in our whānau. Investing in thriving whānau is not just about helping individual whānau. It's also about recognising and supporting whānau of choice, ensuring that all forms of family and support networks are valued and resourced. It's about building a stronger, healthier community for all of us, and investing in and recognising the relationships and networks that whānau

exist within – their hapū, iwi and communities, both within and beyond Aotearoa New Zealand. When whānau thrive, we all benefit. Our schools become better places for learning. Our neighbourhoods become safer and more vibrant. Our economy grows stronger with more skilled and healthy workers.

Imagine a future where every mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand has the chance to grow up in a thriving whānau. A future where no mokopuna goes to bed hungry, where every mokopuna wakes up knowing they are loved and cared for, where every whānau member feels supported, where cultural heritage is honoured and passed down, where whānau don't feel constant stress about how they will survive, but can focus on how they can thrive together, and can access timely, responsive support.

Let's make sure every mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand has the chance to thrive. Because when our whānau thrive, our future shines bright.

GLOSSARY

The explanations below are provided to support readers of this position statement, they are not intended to be interpreted as definitions.

Aotearoa	Term in Māori often adopted as a name for New Zealand
Hapū	The kinship clan, clan, sub-tribe. To be pregnant, conceived in the womb
Iwi	Strength, bone and the extended kinship group, the tribe
Kaupapa	Matter for discussion
Kupu	To talk, to speak, word
Mātauranga Māori	Traditional Māori knowledge, Māori epistemology
Mokopuna	When we use the kupu 'mokopuna' in our work, we are referring to all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand
Pasifika	Referring to people: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. from the islands of the South Pacific and their descendants 2. of or relating to these people or their culture
Resettled whānau	Families who have migrated and settled in Aotearoa, used in the context of refugees or immigrants
Te Whare Tapa Whā	A Māori health model developed by Tā Mason Durie that includes four dimensions: physical, mental/emotional, spiritual, and family health
Te Tiriti o Waitangi or Te Tiriti	The founding legal document of Aotearoa New Zealand, signed in 1840
Tikanga (or tikanga Māori)	Māori methodology or rules, the first law of Aotearoa
Wairua	Emotional, spiritual wellbeing
Whānau	Whānau is often translated as 'family', but its meaning is more complex. It includes physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions and is based on whakapapa. Whānau can be multi-layered, flexible, and dynamic. Whānau relationships include those with whāngai (foster children) and those who have passed on. There are roles and responsibilities for

individuals and for the collective. The structure of whānau can vary from immediate family to much broader collectives. The most important features of whānau that distinguish it from family and other social groupings are whakapapa, spirituality, and the responsibility to marae and hapū.

Whānau is also used as a metaphor for close friends or associates, intended to be inclusive and build a sense of group unity. Whānau begins with the individual. The relationship between the individual and the whānau is subtle and complex. Individuals have rights of their own, but they exist because of the whānau and have responsibilities to the whānau.

Whakapapa	The family lines of whānau that connect to ancestors and the natural world
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