

Tikanga in practice

A guide to culturally competent care

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Timatanga – Introduction

"Mā te rongo, ka mōhio; mā te mōhio, ka mārama; mā te mārama, ka mātau; mā te mātau, ka ora."

Through listening, comes knowledge; through knowledge, comes understanding; through understanding, comes wisdom; through wisdom, comes wellbeing.

Great primary care changes lives for the better. Pinnacle Midlands Health Network (MHN) exists to get the best outcomes for people and their communities. We do this by supporting sustainable general practice to deliver high quality care.

Growing Māori population

- As of 30 June 2023, New Zealand's estimated Māori population was 911,200, up 11.6 per cent from the previous census in 2018 (816,500).¹
- The Māori population is projected to grow in all regions from 2024 to 2038, with the greatest increases in the Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions, with North Island continuing to have the majority of the Māori population.²
- Pinnacle has the largest Māori population enrolled within its general practices.³

Using this guide

Generally speaking, tikanga are Māori customary behaviours or practices. The concept is derived from the Māori word 'tika' which means 'right' or 'correct'. To act in accordance with tikanga is to behave in a way that is culturally safe or appropriate for Māori people.

The basic principles underpinning these tikanga best practice guidelines are familiar throughout Māori culture. However, different iwi (tribes), hapū (sub-tribes) and marae (Māori community meeting places) may have their own variations.

The tikanga best practice guidelines have been adapted from various sources and Māori knowledge to further support Pinnacle MHN general practices in their endeavours to improve Māori health outcomes.

Founded on Māori concepts, views of health, tikanga (Māori values/practices) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, this booklet aims to contribute to providing services and understanding that is responsive to Māori rights/rites, needs and interests.

¹ Stats NZ, 2023 Census.

² Te Puni Kokiri, *Future Demographic Trends for Māori, Part One: Population Size, Growth and Age Structure*.

³ <https://www.pinnacle.co.nz/assets/News-Files/Pinnacle-Annual-Performance-Report-2024-Final.pdf>

Whakawhanaungatanga me te manaakitanga – Relationships and hospitality

The most effective way to engage and understand your tūroro Māori (Māori patients) is through whakawhanaungatanga (engagement/relationship building process). Establishing authentic and meaningful relationships with tūroro through whakawhanaungatanga, is a common expectation, as it is a typical first step in Māori culture. This process, infused with manaakitanga (hospitality, kindness, care), helps tūroro feel safe and respected, fostering trust between patients and their healthcare providers. Authentic relationships are also key to understanding tūroro and their communities. Active engagement at hui, sports, and Marae events also fosters whakawhanaungatanga strengthening patient bonds.

Tikanga – Guidelines

- Where possible, it is important to allow time in the earliest stages of engagement and consultation process to whakawhanaungatanga, and an opportunity to demonstrate manaakitanga.
- Ask questions that show a genuine interest in ‘who they are’ or ‘where they’re from’ and ‘what is important to them’. Asking these types of questions demonstrates respect for them as a person and manaakitanga, with an opportunity to discuss their cultural preferences.
- Greet any whānau members that tūroro bring with them to a consultation. In addition to providing manaaki (care) and comfort, the presence of other whānau members at consultations can lead to improved care, while helping tūroro to understand your instructions. Additionally, they may provide historical medical information and assist tūroro in understanding and carrying out treatment plans.
- Training staff in the use of te reo Māori (Māori language) should be encouraged, as an effective gesture to demonstrate manaakitanga. The appropriate use of basic te reo also contributes to the development of doctor-patient relationship and their feelings of being valued within a primary health care practice.
- In Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), a person’s name is deeply significant, often carrying ancestral meaning, lineage (whakapapa), and cultural identity. Pronouncing a patient’s name correctly, especially for tūroro Māori, is not simply a matter of linguistic accuracy; it is a fundamental act of respect and validation.
- Providing manaakitanga should be of utmost importance during times of grief. In sensitive situations like a death, it is essential to seek the appropriate advice. Early engagement with whānau about their preferences in these situations is vital for culturally appropriate care. Tangihanga (mourning and funeral rites) is a very delicate process, and often a complex area in Māori culture. Ignorance of Māori practices could unintentionally make an already difficult time, infinitely harder for the whānau.

Wairuatanga me te karakia – Spirituality and prayer

For many Māori, karakia (blessings, incantations, or prayers) are essential in protecting and maintaining their spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health, particularly in a healthcare setting. In Te Ao Māori, wairuatanga (spirituality) plays a critical role in wellbeing, and many tikanga processes are deeply connected to the nurture and protection of wairua. Understanding this connection helps healthcare providers to provide a holistic form of care that builds on trust.

Supporting patients' spiritual needs through karakia and respect for wairua may require support from a chaplain or kaumātua until staff become confident.

Tikanga – Guidelines

- Staff will support requests for karakia during tūroro care, acknowledging that this supports the patient's wairua and overall wellbeing.
- Karakia can be offered at the beginning and end of a consultation with the tūroro and whānau. This practice helps to create a spiritually safe and respectful environment for all.
- Karakia is particularly important to offer for serious health procedures or heightened situations, e.g., before and after surgery, after psychotic incidents, or a death. In these moments, karakia can help protect and comfort one's wairua.
- Karakia will be appropriate for the occasion. Seeking guidance on specific karakia or practices is recommended to ensure cultural sensitivity and respect for the diverse expressions of Māori spirituality.
- Karakia is typically not to be interrupted. Please avoid any form of distracting noises to honour the sacredness of the moment and the focus on wairua during this spiritual practice.
- Karakia may not be appropriate in some extreme circumstances. In these rare cases, staff must patiently and sensitively explain the situation and, where possible, offer culturally appropriate alternatives to support the patient's wairua and spiritual needs.
- In some instances, tūroro or whānau may request a blessing (spiritual cleansing, anointing). Access to fresh water will be available for the purpose of spiritual cleansing if requested and provided for in a culturally appropriate way, supporting the integrity and balance of one's wairua

Kaihāpai – Family support

Family and extended family is of fundamental importance to Māori. Whānau support can be crucial to tūroro wellbeing. The concept of family extends beyond the nuclear or biological family concept.

Tikanga – Guidelines

- Ask tūroro if they would like to share a copy of their care plan with whānau.
- Ask tūroro and/or whānau if they wish to nominate a person to speak on behalf of the whānau.
- Acknowledge and involve their nominated person.
- Where possible include appropriate Māori staff throughout the care process and communication.
- Where applicable find a private space and adequate time when consulting with whānau about suitable appointment times and their needs.

Ngā taonga – Valuables

Taonga (valuables/whakapapa heirlooms) have importance to Māori extending beyond sentiment to spiritual value. A taonga worn on the body has protective significance. Any requirement to touch taonga is discussed first with the tūroro and whānau. Respect for taonga should be adhered to.

Tikanga – Guidelines

- Only remove taonga if leaving them on poses a risk to tūroro; wherever possible tape the taonga to the tūroro – if this cannot be done ensure you explain the reason(s) why.
- If any risk is involved, obtain consent from tūroro or whānau before removing taonga.

- Tūroro and whānau should be given the option of removing taonga themselves.
- Whānau should always be given the option of caring for taonga.
- If whānau are not caring for the taonga, it will be kept in a safe or locked cupboard where provided.
- Inform tūroro and whānau of any potential risks in storing taonga, for example theft, misplaced or damaged items.

Tapu noa – Sacred and safe

Tapu and noa are key concepts that underpin many Māori health practices. Tapu (sacred) things are kept separate from things that are noa (not restricted). In many cases, these align with good health and safety procedures that should be practiced by staff.

Tikanga – Guidelines

Staff need to be familiar that for Māori the body and bodily substances are tapu and food is noa. When caring for Māori patients, staff can observe the principles of tapu and noa by:

- refraining from passing food over a person's head
- refraining from using pillows for any purpose other than placement under the head
- using different wash cloths for washing the head and washing the body
- being especially vigilant about the normal order of body washing from neck to genital to anal area
- separating certain items from contact with the body or body substances such as:
 - combs and brushes are not placed on a surface where food may be placed
 - surfaces where food or medication may be placed are not used as seating
 - ensuring glasses and jugs used for drinking water are used solely for that purpose
 - ensuring tea towels are only used for drying dishes and they are separated and washed separately from other used linen at collection points
 - ensuring receptacles for excreta are not placed near food, food trays or food containers, nor on tables or other surfaces used for eating such as bedside tables
 - ensuring bodily fluids (such as blood samples) are placed in appropriate storage areas and not in a fridge where food is kept.

Whakawhiti kōrero – Communication

When health care information is communicated in a way perceived by Māori as sensitive to their cultural beliefs and values, there is a better likelihood of understanding, treatment adherence and improved outcomes.

Tūroro and their whānau should understand what is being done for them and why, as well as the most appropriate information at the time. Ideally, tūroro should receive timely information about the support resources available to assist their understanding.

Māori in the 50-65, 16-18 and 19-24 years age groups have the poorest health literacy compared to the rest of the population. This is particularly concerning because almost half of the Māori population (47 per cent) was less than 25 years of age, and another 14 per cent between 50-65 at the 2023 census. Pinnacle MHN data shows around 45 per cent of our enrolled Māori population (21 per cent) is less than 25 years of age. Also, older age groups have high levels of health needs and are generally high users of health services.

Māori and non-Māori with a tertiary education are more likely to have good health literacy skills compared to those with lower levels of education, which is consistent with international evidence.

Māori communities also often have lower rates of literacy in English than non-Māori. Case studies have highlighted where elderly tūroro have agreed to understand the messages conveyed by doctors only to realise it has contributed to non-compliance of medication.

Tūroro and their whānau should understand what is being done for them and why, as well as the most appropriate information at the time. Ideally, tūroro should receive timely information about the support resources available to assist their understanding.

Tikanga – Guidelines

- Understand in Māori tradition there is preference for kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) communication.
- Be aware of assumptions based on skin colour or appearance can be misleading; therefore, check the enrolment form for each new patient arriving in the practice to ascertain those identifying as Māori.
- Offer a practice information brochure to patients identifying as Māori.
- Understand Māori may broadly interpret the concept of 'next of kin' (whānau whānui) as extended family.
- The use of plain simple language is vital in helping tūroro Māori understand the information they need to know. Confirm with tūroro they understand your instructions by asking them to repeat what you have instructed.
- When information is to be communicated, particularly if there is potentially distressing news or a significant change of plan, suggest the presence of a Māori advocate where possible, especially if whānau are also unsure of what the next process may be.
- Check tūroro and whānau understanding of what is being communicated, asking them to confirm and repeat what has been communicated can help. The delivery of information in several ways can help with compliance and adherence to medication.
- Be sensitive to the concept of waiora (total health) and know how to make a referral to Māori health providers and other Māori health services when requested by tūroro and/or whānau.
- Seek advice from Māori health providers in the community who may be able to work alongside your practice to provide additional support.
- Ensure the practice has or is developing relationships with their local Māori health provider and health services.

Whakakapi – Conclusion

This is a guide to best practice, however the advice is not mandatory for every situation.

Most people prefer not to act in ways that are offensive to others, especially when dealing with people in close vicinity. These best practice guidelines have been compiled in an effort to increase awareness of Māori culture within primary care, and to avoid confusion or uncomfortable moments when health professionals may be unsure of what to do.

While focused on Māori in the primary health care setting, the guidelines can be adapted and applied to both secondary health services and/or other ethnicities as they include best practice standards of care suitable for various situations, circumstances, and health environments.

Ultimately, these guidelines are a call to action: to move beyond discomfort, embrace cultural humility, and actively cultivate a healthcare environment where every interaction is an opportunity to build trust, affirm people's cultural identity, and contribute to a healthcare system where all people feel truly safe and valued.

Mauri ora.

Glossary

Aotearoa	Land of the long white cloud – New Zealand.
Hinengaro	Psychological realm.
Hapū	Sub-tribe of a large tribe. It also means pregnancy or to be pregnant.
Iwi	Tribe.
Kaitakawaenga	Designated person (Māori) who offers advocacy and cultural support to tūroro (patients) and their whanau (family).
Kaitiaki	Protector, caretaker.
Karakia	Blessings, incantations, prayer.
Karakia tuku i te wairua	Prayer/incantation for the safe departure of the spirit from the deceased.
Kaupapa	Policy, protocol, rule, topic. It also means a fleet (of ships).
Kawa	Protocol, dedication, ceremony. It also means sour/ bitter.
Marae	A Marae is a fenced-in complex of carved buildings and grounds belonging to a particular iwi (tribe), hapū (sub tribe) or whānau (family). Māori people see their marae as tūrangawaewae – their place to stand and belong.
Mana	Power, influence. The spiritual power/authority to enhance and restore tapu.
Noa	Free from tapu. Tapu and noa are terms used to describe a state or condition affecting both the animate and inanimate. Tapu denotes a state of restriction or sacredness. Noa is free from tapu.
Pōwhiri	Māori process of welcoming.
Tangihanga	The mourning process before burial.
Tūroro	Patients.
Tapu	Sacred. Tapu and noa are terms used to describe a state or condition, affecting the animate and inanimate. Tapu denotes a state of restriction or sacredness. Noa is free from tapu.
Te reo	Language – commonly used to refer to the Māori language.
Taonga	Treasure, valuables. Taonga is interpreted to mean in its broadest sense an object or resource which is highly valued. Children and future generations are also regarded as taonga.
Tikanga	Issues of principle/integrity of intent. Tikanga is used as a guide to moral behaviour and within a health context it indicates the way resources, guardianship, responsibilities, obligations and future generations will be protected.
Tinana	The physical body.
Tūpāpaku	Deceased person.
Waiora	Total wellbeing.
Wairua	Spirit. Wairua refers to the spiritual element and is an integral part of tapu and noa.
Whānau	Family. It also means to be born/give birth. Whānau in this document refers to Māori patients and their families, and can include groups regarded as extended family as well as groups outside the traditional family structure.
Whenua	Placenta. Also means land.