

Good Practice Guidelines

Supporting People With High and Complex Needs

Introduction

These good practice guidelines support the learning and development of community and non-profit organisations that provide services or activities for people with complex needs. Drawing on the 2025 Rātā Foundation Support Funding Area Review¹ they have been developed by MiMo Consulting for the Rātā Foundation.

Indicators of Good Practice

<p>Indicator #1: Approaches addressing root causes of inequity in access</p>	<p>Deeper drivers of inequity to access, such as persistent and intergenerational systemic and structural factors, shape need, barriers and access. To ensure practices are accessible and effective for people with complex needs, these should be acknowledged and addressed alongside service delivery.</p> <p>For example, support should be easy to access at the first point of need. This can be achieved through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low-threshold entry, such as minimal eligibility checks, no formal diagnosis required and walk-in or self-referral options.• Embedding access into places where people go anyway, such as schools, workplaces, marae.• Outreach models such as home visits or mobile health clinics in rural areas.
<p>Indicator #2: Integrated approaches</p>	<p>Many people have interconnected needs spanning across sectors. Integrated approaches, including multi-sector, one-stop-shops and wrap-around responses reduce duplication, support continuity and improve outcomes. Ideally, support should respond to a person's presenting issue and to their wider circumstances (for example economic pressure, social isolation, past trauma).</p>
<p>Indicator #3: Inclusive and participatory approaches</p>	<p>It is good practice to use inclusive and participatory approaches to address complex needs. These approaches enhance relevance, foster trust and increase accountability for the service provider, leading to better engagement and outcomes. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embedding people with lived experience in service design, delivery and governance. For example, through co-design and peer-led support.

¹ Moss M, Crocket A, Oakden J, and K Spee, 2025: Rātā Foundation Support Funding Area Review. Christchurch.

<p>Indicator #3: Inclusive and participatory approaches <i>(continued)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding supports in the worldviews of the people you serve. Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika models offer insights that can enhance effectiveness for these, and other, population groups. • Whānau and community centred approaches that recognise the interconnectedness between people. These are effective for Māori and Pasifika, and people who are navigating multiple needs or rely on extended support networks. • Intergenerational models, which involve learning from and supporting each other through cultural wisdom, family history and other experience, skills and knowledge.
<p>Indicator #4: Proactive and prevention focused approaches</p>	<p>Needs are not static, emerging and shifting throughout a person’s life. In adolescence, identity, mental wellbeing and social connection become more important, while older adults face challenges related to chronic conditions and access to care and housing. Early adversity can disrupt brain development and lead to negative long-term outcomes. Accumulated unmet needs can compound, increasing the risk of poorer outcomes and exacerbating inequities. Good practice recognises that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting people early in the life course, or at the onset of need, is more cost-effective and leads to better outcomes than late-stage or crisis-only responses. Developmental windows, such as early childhood and transitions to school and adolescence, are critical touchpoints. • Strength-based responses can enhance resilience and wellbeing before problems escalate. By identifying and building on peoples’ skills, abilities and resources they can help restore mana and support positive change. Culturally grounded, strengths-based models are particularly effective for Māori and Pasifika, as they affirm identity, promote belonging and build on intergenerational knowledge and capability. • Resilience, skill-building and self-mastery can foster protective factors through competencies such as communication, decision-making and cultural connectedness.
<p>Indicator #5: Tailored and flexible approaches</p>	<p>Good practice approaches are tailored and flexible. In particular, effective service delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises different regions and populations require tailored approaches to meet local needs. Services may need to be culturally specific, and/or demographically unique. • Considers factors like language, delivery hours, workforce, transport and digital tools, to enhance accessibility and effectiveness. • Offers flexibility in type, format and intensity, with tiered or modular options to accommodate individual and evolving needs, especially in mental health and addiction support. • Addresses both immediate needs such as food, safety, housing, and longer-term challenges by being responsive and adaptable to change. • Follows up and has re-engagement options to prevent disengagement and maintain effectiveness.

<p>Indicator #6: Relational and responsive practice</p>	<p>Effective support starts with trust and connection. Without it, people are less likely to open up, especially those who have faced prior judgement or harm. This principle is central to kaupapa Māori and Pasifika models, peer and whānau-centred practice, and youth, trauma-informed and outreach services.</p> <p>Young people often seek help from those they trust, so it is important to empower communities, like peers, families and schools, to know how to respond.</p> <p>Responsive practice means going at the person's pace, which helps them feel more in control and promotes long-term success. It also involves understanding their full situation through appropriate assessments (including cultural) and allowing staff time and flexibility to explore wider circumstances.</p> <p>Continuous reflection and learning support understanding of what works and doesn't work, enabling ongoing improvements to service delivery.</p>
<p>Indicator #7: Strong governance and internal systems</p>	<p>Strong governance and internal systems underpin good practice. Getting your governance right, puts you in a better place to achieve organisational goals and provide effective services to your community. Good boards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are strong leaders • Understand the importance of relationships and connections • Are diverse as their communities • Understand the importance of accountability • Are trusted by the communities they serve • Have good processes and policies in place so they can operate effectively.

Demonstrating Good Practice

When seeking funding for supporting people with complex needs, community organisations should describe how the proposed initiatives align with the seven indicators of good practice. Many funders expect to see evidence of:

- how lived experience has influenced service design and delivery, and what the opportunities are for ongoing participation in decision-making
- how the service will address diverse and interconnected needs, and their causes
- the accessibility of the service
- how the service will work alongside others to ensure a coordinated approach
- how the service will keep people engaged and measure effectiveness
- how the organisation's systems, processes and governance will facilitate success.

Key Questions:

Can we strengthen our ability to meet complex needs?

- Does our practice enable us to fully understand a person's needs and circumstances?
- Are we able to build the relationships and trust we need for people to engage?
- Are we sufficiently tailored and flexible to meet people's needs even when they change?
- To what extent is our approach inclusive of diversity?
- Are we providing enough opportunities for family/whānau involvement, intergenerational and community connection?
- Is the timing of our support right – in terms of the life course or a person's onset of need?
- Are we building confidence, capability and resilience for sustained change?
- Do we have effective feedback mechanisms and are there sufficient opportunities for reflection and improvement?

Key Resources for More Information

1. Families with Complex Needs: International approaches (Superu, 2015)
<https://thehub.sia.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Families-with-complex-needs.pdf>
2. Skills for integration in primary and community health settings – Resources and guidance (Te Pou)
<https://www.tepou.co.nz/initiatives/integrated-primary-mental-health-and-addiction/skills-for-integration-in-primary-and-community-health-settings>
3. Consumer, peer support and lived experience workforce development - Resources (Te Pou)
<https://www.tepou.co.nz/our-work/lived-experience>
4. Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children – Practice Centre
<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/assessment-and-planning/assessments/specialist-topics/understanding-and-working-with-complex-needs>
5. World Health Organization: Guidance and technical packages on community mental health services
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/guidance-and-technical-packages-on-community-mental-health-services>
6. Framework to implement a life course approach in practice (WHO, 2025)
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240112575>
7. Community Governance – Resources (including Good Governance Code Waehere Whakahaere Tika)
<https://communitygovernance.org.nz/board-resources/>

Case Study

He Waka Tapu



He Waka Tapu is a kaupapa Māori organisation located in Ōtautahi (Christchurch), Hakatere (Ashburton) and Wharekauri (Chatham Islands). They use tikanga Māori to help people identify what they really want out of life, working closely with their community, other service providers and government agencies to meet the needs of whānau. He Waka Tapu demonstrates good practice by:

- Emphasising authentic and mana enhancing engagement to ensure whānau feel valued respected, validated and not judged.
- Using strengths-based approaches, that focus on what people are good at rather than trying to “fix” them.
- Offering open and no-cost groups that anyone can attend without referral.
- The ability to pivot and flex to support sudden

needs (e.g., quickly deploy a team).

- Appropriately matching allocation of resource to need (e.g., amount of resource, the ‘right’ kaimahi).
- Taking services to the community through outreach and pop-up clinics.
- Collecting whānau voices to understand what’s working and what isn’t.
- Using Māori wellbeing frameworks to assess outcomes.
- Using a client management system that tracks whānau progress toward their goals.
- Ensuring that governance and internal processes are forward-looking, realistic and designed to achieve strategic priorities.

For more information, visit:
<https://www.hewakatapu.org.nz>

This good practice resource was developed in 2025 by:



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