

Mental Health and the Treaty of Waitangi:

Professor Mason Durie has used the image of a house to describe overall health and wellbeing.

The house is held up by the four cornerstones of health: mental health, physical health, spiritual health and environmental health. Each cornerstone relies on the others to support the house. If one fails, the house will fall.

Mental health is an inseparable component of total wellbeing. The protection and promotion of mental health is as important as the promotion and protection of physical, environmental and spiritual health.

The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's constitutional document. The Government recognises Maori as both a social group and as Tangata Whenua, the indigenous people of New Zealand/ Aotearoa.

The Government is committed to fulfilling its obligations as a Treaty partner. This special relationship is ongoing and is based on the underlying premise that Maori should continue to live in Aotearoa as Maori, while being able to participate fully within the wider society.

The nature of this relationship has been confirmed through interpretations of the Treaty of Waitangi, which stem from decisions of the Waitangi Tribunal, the Courts of appeal and the Privy Council.

Central to the Treaty relationship and implementation of Treaty principles is a shared understanding that 'health is a taonga'. Based on this understanding, Maori and the Crown (including Crown entities such as District Health Boards and many Non Government Organisations (NGOs)) will have a shared role in implementing health strategies for Maori, and will relate to each other in good faith with mutual respect, co-operation and trust.

While the Treaty of Waitangi is primarily about the relationship between Maori and the Crown, it also embodies much of the spirit of health promotion. Not only does it represent an important part of the constitutional context within which all health programmes unfold, but its principles have particular meaning for mental health promotion for Maori, if not all New Zealanders.

Building on Strengths has the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi – partnership, participation and protection at the heart of the New Zealand Health strategy.

Partnership:

refers to the Crown working together with iwi, Hapu, whanau and Maori communities to develop strategies for Maori health gain and appropriate health and disability services.

Participation:

emphasises Maori involvement at all levels of the sector in planning, development and delivery of health and disability services relevant to Maori.

Protection:

recognises that the Crown needs to be proactive in health promotion and the development of preventive strategies to ensure Maori enjoy at least the same level of health as non-Maori while safeguarding Maori cultural concepts, values and practices (Ministry of Health 2001a).

Like the Ottawa Charter, which is about the relationship between individuals, communities and governments, the Treaty of Waitangi is also about relationships especially the Crown's relationship with Maori, the balance between state control and autonomy, and the opportunity for co-operative action so that mutual benefits might be realised. Building on Strengths reflects the key messages of both documents.

Embracing Maori holistic health models are fundamental to Maori aspirations underlying a Treaty of Waitangi commitment to Maori Mental Health and wellbeing. (adapted from Ministry of Health publication "Building on Strengths" 2002)