

Te Ngākau Kahukura submission to the Ministry of Health on:

**COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Recovery Plan**

**Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa.**

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1. Do the vision, principles and focus areas in the plan resonate with you?

Yes, in general the vision, principles and focus areas seem logical. However in order for these to apply equitably to rainbow communities, and to ensure rainbow human rights are protected, this framework will only be effective if it is interpreted through a rainbow lens. Two examples: references to whānau must be interpreted more broadly than birth or whakapapa whānau; primary and specialist mental health support services must be rainbow competent.

2. In what ways does your organisation see itself contributing to the focus areas in the plan?

Te Ngākau Kahukura works towards an Aotearoa where rainbow young people feel safe, valued, and that they belong. We work for systems change, targeting key leverage points including funders, political decision makers, researchers, training providers, sector bodies and large agencies supporting young people.

We have a potential role to play in supporting the Ministry of Health's overall design of workstreams arising from the plan to ensure that they consider rainbow populations and connect effectively with community leaders.

Further, we have a potential role to play in supporting primary and specialist mental health support services, and community-based groups, to develop their practice so that they can work safely and effectively with rainbow people. To be effective in this role, the plan would need to specifically name rainbow populations, and resource this work to be done (for example, by requiring every funded mental health service in Aotearoa to demonstrate rainbow competence).

3. What do you think the critical factors to ensure success of this plan?

For rainbow communities, the critical factor is having our population and population-specific issues recognised and named in this plan. This would enable providers and communities to design responses for and with rainbow communities, and ensure we have equitable access to support. Without being named, the plan will not provide a mandate, resourcing or sense of connection for people and organisations wishing to work towards psychosocial recovery for rainbow communities.

4. What positive examples of actions to support mental and social wellbeing are you aware of?

Rainbow peer support, for example the services provided by organisations like OUTLine, RainbowYOUTH, QTopia, InsideOUT and Gender Minorities Aotearoa. These services were highly effective at pivoting to online delivery during the time of lockdown, and are crucial in providing a sense of community, support and affirmation for people navigating hostile social environments.

#### 5. Do you think there is anything missing from the plan?

Rainbow communities are not named within the document. As a population group, rainbow (LGBTI+, or sexuality, gender and sex characteristic minorities) experience higher rates of mental distress than most other demographic groups in Aotearoa. These higher rates are connected with specific drivers of poor mental wellbeing – social exclusion and discrimination - which are unique to rainbow populations while having some similarities to drivers faced by other groups (for example, ethnic minorities and disabled people). Rainbow populations face specific stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and face specific challenges accessing support services for mental health, employment and housing. A response that is not designed for and with rainbow communities will not meet rainbow needs. The plan outlines a framework that could be effective for rainbow communities, but will not be if rainbow people and issues are not specifically recognised and named.

We are happy to provide further information, research and guidance about what this could look like, and to detail where rainbow communities could be effectively named in the plan. As an initial reference, an overview of mental health issues faced by rainbow communities was provided in a collective submission to the Mental Health and Addictions Inquiry:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/policy-advocacy/Rainbow-communities-and-mental-health-submission-to-the-Inquiry-into-Mental-Health-and-Addiction-08062018.pdf>