



Te Taumata Hauora  
o Te Kahu o Taonui  
Te Tai Tokerau Iwi-Māori Partnership Board

# Whānau Voice Collection Te Āpōpōtanga

Volume 1 | 2025



*This is for our māmā.*







## Mihi Foreword

Ko te whaea te takere o te waka – the mother is the hull of the canoe. She is the foundation, the strength, and the stability that carries us forward on the journey of life. This whakataukī reminds us of a profound truth: mothers are not only central to the wellbeing of their whānau, they are integral to the health and future of our entire society.

Every effort given in the early years of a child's life is an investment in a lifetime of health and wellbeing. These first 1,000 days shape everything that follows, physical health, emotional resilience, cultural identity, and the ability to thrive. When we support Māmā, we are not just supporting one person; we are nurturing generations.

As I reflect on my own life, I acknowledge the many māmā and wāhine who have guided, protected, and uplifted me. Women, as whare tangata, are the source of all past and future generations. In te ao Māori, they are revered as extraordinarily precious, to be honoured, to be protected, and to be supported. Their role in growing, nurturing, and raising our tamariki is not only a personal responsibility, but a collective one. It is a responsibility that belongs to all of us.

This report amplifies the voices of Māmā who have shared their journeys with courage and honesty. Their kōrero reminds us that while motherhood is a source of immense joy and strength, it can also be a time of vulnerability and challenge. It calls us to act, to remove barriers, to provide culturally safe care, and to ensure that every Māmā feels seen, heard, and supported.

At Te Taumata Hauora o Te Kahu o Taonui, our commitment is clear: we will do all that we can to invest in the early years and to stand alongside Māmā who carry the load of growing, nurturing, and raising the next generation. When we honour and uphold the mana of Māmā, we strengthen the waka that carries us all.

Nāku iti nei, nā

*BBroughton*

Boyd Broughton

Tumu Whakarae *Chief Executive*

Te Taumata Hauora o Te Kahu o Taonui Iwi-Māori Trust Board

## Pipiri te Kōrero *Executive Summary*

Te Taumata Hauora o Te Kahu o Taonui presents this report as part of our ongoing commitment to advancing Māori health equity, strengthening whānau voice, and transforming systems to be culturally responsive and relational. Grounded in kaupapa Māori values and informed by lived experience across Te Tai Tokerau and Tāmaki Makaurau, this report outlines key challenges, recommendations, proposed timeframes, and collaborative actions to address systemic barriers and uplift whānau wellbeing.

The high-level insights from wānanga held with māmā and whānau across Tai Tokerau and Tāmaki enabled both rural and urban perspectives. These wānanga were a moment of connection, courage, and kōrero. Māmā shared their journeys openly, from the first flutter of hapūtanga to the everyday realities of raising tamariki today.

Through whanaungatanga and guided kōrero, we explored the “pinch points” in the māmā and pēpi journey: The places where the system feels hard to reach and where whānau feel most alone. We also uncovered powerful aspirations: Visions of wraparound support, culturally safe care, and communities where pēpi can thrive close to home. Their stories were raw, rich, and deeply insightful.

Their feedback was shared with Māori health providers who are delivering to Māmā and Pēpi as a means to consolidate further challenges experienced by their Māmā whom they serve. The provider feedback highlighted systemic barriers to equitable and culturally safe maternity and early childhood care, and supported whānau-led aspirations for transformation. The kōrero enhanced a collective call for relational, and culturally grounded systems that uphold the mana of māmā, pēpi, and whānau.

This report reflects those voices. It offers a pathway for providers, kaimahi, and communities to walk alongside Māmā, not to fix, but to co-design. Together, we can build systems that reflect mātauranga Māori, honour lived experience, and uplift the wellbeing of whānau.

Te Taumata Hauora o Te Kahu o Taonui reaffirms our commitment to transformative change that is led by iwi, centred on whānau, and grounded in Te Tiriti. We invite you to walk alongside us in this kaupapa, with courage, humility, and shared purpose.



# Te Kaupapa *The Context and Purpose*

Te Taumata Hauora o Te Kahu o Taonui represents the collective voice of iwi across Te Tai Tokerau and Tāmaki. Our role is to ensure that Māori health priorities are shaped by whānau, grounded in tikanga, and embedded in system-level decision-making.

This report synthesises insights from Hui ā-Kanohi held in Te Tai Tokerau and Tāmaki Makaurau with Mama, their whanau and Māori providers. It identifies shared challenges, region-specific nuances, and collective aspirations for transforming maternal and infant health services. The goal is to support regional integration, strengthen kaupapa Māori service delivery, and embed whānau-centred design across the motu.



**Māmā & Pēpi (Rural)**  
Kaītaia, supported by  
Te Hiku Hauora  
16th July 2025

**Māmā & Pēpi (Urban)**  
Glen Innes,  
supported by Ki Tua o  
Matariki  
7th August, 2025



**Provider Wānanga**  
Whāngarei  
12th August 2025



**Provider Wānanga**  
Tāmaki  
14th August 2025



## Stage 1 - Hapūtanga - Before Pēpi Arrives.

Before pēpi arrives, the journey begins with hope, uncertainty, and often, a quiet resilience. For many Māmā, conception was a miracle, a long-awaited blessing after years of infertility, miscarriage, or unexpected surprises. Yet, this stage is also marked by deep isolation and systemic gaps. Māmā spoke of driving themselves to hospital while miscarrying, receiving appointment letters too late to attend, and being told, not asked, how their birth would unfold. The lack of continuity in care, especially in rural areas near Kaitaia, left many feeling unseen and unheard.

From the very beginning, Māmā in Tamāki Makarau were left to fend for themselves, unable to find a midwife, forced to pay

hundreds for scans, and unaware of the free services that should have been their right. It wasn't until they encountered a Māori midwife that some finally felt seen, heard, and held. But the pain ran deeper than the pocket. It was in the trauma of stillbirths at home, in the sterile hospital rooms where their voices were dismissed, and in the quiet grief of babies lost or pregnancies complicated. Māmā experienced racism, they were questioned on their knowledge of their own bodies, and had medical professionals cast judgement on their whānau structures.

Despite this, Māmā held fast to their dreams, navigating hapūtanga with courage and a fierce love for their unborn pēpi.

ROHE	THEMES	BARRIERS
Taitokerau	Continuity of care, early access to support, and cultural safety.	Travel to Whangārei, poor communication, and lack of midwife aftercare.
Tamāki Makarau	Access to care, isolation, and maternal mental health.	Inadequate access to culturally safe, affordable, and timely maternity care; Trauma compounded by medical neglect and systemic racism; Emotional isolation, unstable housing, and lack of whānau or partner support.



“It gets lonely,  
doing it all by  
yourself”

MĀMĀ, KAITAIA



## Stage 2 - The Birth Experience

The moment of birth should be a time of unimaginable joy, dignity, choice, and whānau presence. Yet for many Māmā, this was a time of trauma and disempowerment.

Some were induced without consultation, others were questioned when they knew their waters had broken. One Māmā shared the heartbreak of a stillbirth at home after being discharged from hospital. The birth experience was often shaped by systemic racism, rushed decisions, and a lack of cultural safety. Still, Māmā found strength in their whānau, in midwives who advocated for them, and in their own intuition. They want birth to be a moment of mana, where their voices are central and their whānau are welcomed.

For many Māmā in Tamāki, it is a time of deep emotional labour, where the joy of carrying life is

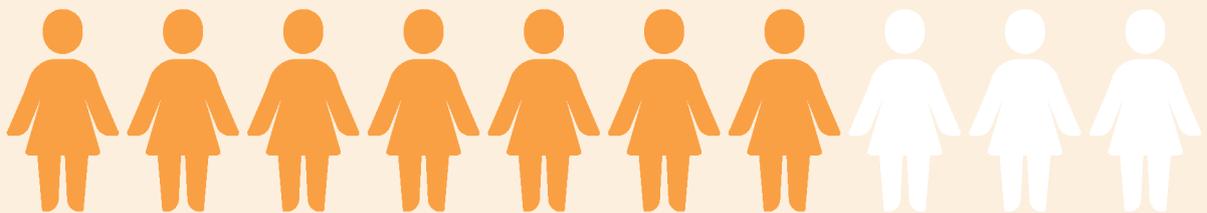
entangled with the weight of survival. Most of the Māmā present faced housing instability, some moving from couch to couch, others returning to unsafe homes. Several Māmā faced domestic violence, their bodies carrying both pēpi and harm. Majority of Māmā encountered bias when seeking care, judged for age, appearance, or whakapapa.

Amid these challenges, some found moments of support through whānau, a caring midwife, Te Ao Māori, or a steady partner. Yet the journey stayed complex, marked by loneliness in later trimesters, unsupported births, and the strain of work, relationships, and emotional self-management for young Māmā.

ROHE	THEMES	BARRIERS
Taitokerau	Dignity in care, informed choice, and whānau inclusion.	Disrespectful treatment, stereotyping, and exclusion of whānau.
Tamāki Makarau	Resilience in the face of adversity, the power of relationships, cultural disconnection, and discrimination.	Housing instability and unsafe environments, discrimination and lack of culturally safe care, isolation, and emotional hardship.



72% of Māmā  
interviewed said that  
they have experienced  
racism in the healthcare  
system





## Stage 3 - The First Year

The first year with pēpi is a whirlwind of love, learning, and exhaustion. Māmā described the joy of watching milestones, donating breast milk, and bonding deeply with their pēpi. But alongside this joy was a heavy mental load. Many felt shame around breastfeeding struggles, confusion navigating health systems, and isolation from adult connection. Some were diagnosed with postnatal depression but offered only medication, without a Māori lens or wraparound support. The system often failed to follow up, leaving Māmā to chase appointments and advocate alone. Yet, they persisted, seeking what was best for their pēpi, even when it meant sacrificing their own wellbeing.

For many Māmā in urban Tāmaki, the journey into motherhood is one of deep resilience, with

ne Māmā sharing that she was “trying to learn how to be a daughter, while learning to be a Mum”.

Beneath the joy of new life lies a quiet battle against isolation, judgement, and a system that too often fails to care. Mental health support was scarce, and the fear of being judged kept many silent. Without transport, whānau or trusted services, Māmā were left to navigate the most vulnerable time of their lives alone.

And yet, they endured. Some found strength in their pēpi’s milestones, in the ease of a second hapūtanga, or in the pride of parenting solo. These Māmā are holding the line for their tamariki, even when the world around them does not.

ROHE	THEMES	BARRIERS
Taitokerau	Wraparound services, mental health support, connection to community.	Fragmented care, slow communication, lack of mental health support.
Tamāki Makarau	Mental and emotional load of motherhood, systemic gaps in health and social services, parenting in isolation.	Lack of access to health services, mental health neglect, whānau discrimination and social isolation.



“I want to be the  
creator of new  
cycles.”

MĀMĀ, TĀMAKI



## Stage 4 - Growing Together

As pēpi grows, so too does the complexity of parenting. Māmā spoke of the joy in teaching their tamariki to cook, hearing new kupu, and watching personalities blossom. But they also faced judgment, being told their child was obese at a school check or struggling to access kura that aligned with their values.

Financial stress intensified, and many felt the pressure of returning to work while still navigating early childhood. The lack of whānau support and culturally safe services made this stage feel like a balancing act. Still, Māmā held onto their vision: raising confident, connected tamariki in environments that uplift their whakapapa.

In urban Tāmaki, Māmā are doing the mahi of raising tamariki while navigating systems that often feel cold, slow, and disconnected. Some found strength in supportive kōhanga, in setting boundaries with whānau, or in the presence of a loving pāpā. But for many, the path was steep. This included waiting over a year for kōhanga, battling for diagnoses, and being judged for using rongoā instead of antibiotics. The hospital felt lifeless. Ministry of Social Development (MSD) scrutinised their finances, personal lives, and relationships. Plunket pushed immunisations without offering real kōrero. With this, Māmā were left to figure it out, often alone, but resourceful, and determined to do right by their pēpi.

ROHE	THEMES	BARRIERS
Taitokerau	Ongoing wellbeing, safe environments, and empowerment.	School readiness concerns, lack of whānau support, and financial stress.
Tamāki Makarau	Navigating systems with limited support, whānau dynamics, and resilience.	Access to ECE, inconsistent and culturally unsafe care, institutional scrutiny and lack of trust.



“Being with  
whānau made  
parenting easier”

MĀMĀ, TĀMAKI



## Stage 5 - Transitions and Next Tamariki

For some Māmā, the journey circles back: a new pēpi on the way, or a child starting school. These transitions bring both excitement and anxiety. Māmā shared stories of starting again, of navigating mainstream schools that missed diagnoses, and of struggling to access before and after school care. The cost of living, housing instability, and lack of support from agencies like MSD added layers of stress. Yet, their aspirations remained clear: they want their tamariki to be free, to express themselves, and to grow up in safe, loving environments. They want to break cycles and build futures rooted in mana and whānau.

For the Māmā we spoke to in urban Tāmaki, the journey of raising tamariki is marked by long waits, closed doors, and a constant need to prove themselves. One waited three years for care for her daughter. Another travelled monthly to visit her child’s father in prison. Many felt unheard, often dismissed when raising concerns about their babies’ health, mistrusted by MSD, and frustrated by Plunket’s one-size-fits-all approach. Even getting back to work came with no wraparound support. These Māmā are doing it alone, often without the care, trust, or consistency they deserve.

ROHE	THEMES		BARRIERS
Taitokerau	Continuity, equity, and future planning.		Repeating cycles of poor access and support, housing and financial instability.
Tamāki Makarau	Being unheard and unseen, isolation, and systemic failures across multiple organisations.		Long wait times, lack of trust and cultural safety in services, inconsistent and fragmented care.

# “Hapū Wānanga have been game changers”

MĀORI MIDWIFE, WHANGĀREI



# Ngā Ara Whakawhanake *Cross-Cutting Themes*

Across every stage of the māmā and pēpi journey, certain themes echoed repeatedly, like the steady beat of a pūtātara calling us to listen more deeply. These themes are not isolated. They are interwoven, shaping the entire experience of motherhood.

## Trust

Trust in services was a constant thread. Māmā spoke of being dismissed, judged, or simply not believed, whether in the birthing suite, the GP clinic, or the MSD office. Yet, when they encountered kaimahi who listened, who followed up, who treated them with mana, the entire experience shifted. Trust isn't built through policy, it's built through relationships.

## Safety

**Cultural safety** was not a nice-to-have, it was a need. Māmā shared how being seen as Māori, being supported in Te Ao Māori, and having their whakapapa respected made all the difference. When services lacked this, it created an unsafe space for both Māmā and pēpi.

## Load

And perhaps most powerfully, the **mental load** carried by Māmā was present in every kōrero. From navigating systems alone to making decisions about pēpi's health, to balancing work, study, and whānau, Māmā are doing the mahi of many, often without the support they deserve.

## Access

**Access to care** was another recurring challenge. Whether it was travelling hours for a 10-minute appointment, struggling to find a midwife, or being placed on a waitlist for kohanga, Māmā consistently faced barriers that made basic support feel out of reach. These barriers weren't just logistical, they were emotional, financial, and cultural.

## Lonely

**Isolation** was a quiet but powerful undercurrent. Many Māmā walked this journey alone without partners, without whānau, and without the village both Māmā and Pēpi needed. This disconnection shaped their hauora and their confidence as parents.





The truth was clear,  
when we design  
with Māmā, when  
we listen and  
respond with  
integrity, we can  
transform lives.



## Provider Wānanga Summary

Across both provider wānanga, a single truth rang clear: the system was never designed with whānau Māori at its centre. Providers spoke not just of gaps, but of deep fractures where racism, disconnection, and bureaucracy collide to create a system that is not only unfit for purpose, but actively harmful.

Cultural safety was not a side note, it was the heartbeat of every conversation. Providers described a health system where tikanga is misunderstood, where clinicians violate tapu, and where māmā are judged instead of supported. Racism, both overt and systemic, was named as a daily reality. And yet, when care was grounded in kaupapa Māori, when whānau were seen and heard, the entire experience transformed.

Access and equity were also constant struggles. From the Far North to South Auckland, whānau face long waitlists, unaffordable scans, and services that are either too far away or too hard to qualify for. Costs associated with travel, parking, and kai continue to constrain access to

care, particularly for rural whānau who face the absence of nearby services and therefore disengage entirely. Trust, its presence or absence, was a unifying thread throughout all kōrero. Providers described tensions within the very systems they navigate, while whānau expressed reluctance to seek help due to concerns about judgement, dismissal, or shame.

These experiences suggest a system that prioritises its own preservation over the wellbeing of the communities it serves. Nonetheless, participants articulated a strong and coherent vision. They emphasised the importance of whānau-centred, culturally grounded, and integrated care, including marae-based services, kaupapa Māori birthing models, and holistic, wraparound support that honours whakapapa and wairua. They also called for legislative reform, enduring funding arrangements, and approaches that favour collaboration. Collectively, this kōrero presents a blueprint for transformative, community-led change.

THEMES	BARRIERS
Cultural safety is non-negotiable, whānau-centred, integrated care is the future, and trust is the foundation.	Access and affordability, workforce shortages and burnout, and a fragmented and inflexible system.

# Te Wero *The Challenge*

## Health

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Invest in the creation of a kaupapa Māori maternity hub that consolidates wraparound maternity and whānau support services within a single, culturally anchored model of care.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Short term
Pilot two post-natal parenting wānanga, one in an urban setting and one in a rural setting, to assess feasibility, accessibility, and whānau outcomes across diverse contexts.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Short term
Embed 1 FTE Māori maternal mental health practitioner per district – Northland, Waitemata and Auckland	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Short term
Adopt 10-year commissioning approaches for kaupapa Māori providers to support sustained service delivery, improve workforce surety, and ensure uninterrupted, culturally anchored care for whānau.	Provider Wānanga	Short term
Review and strengthen the National Transport Assistance policy to ensure equitable, reliable transport access for whānau engaging with health services.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Short term
Provide universal, fully funded maternity ultrasound scans for Māori māmā as part of equitable access to antenatal care.	Urban & Rural Māmā	Medium term
Co-design a continuity-of-care pathway for the Northern region in partnership with providers and whānau to ensure seamless, culturally grounded maternity care.	Māmā lived experience	Medium term
Design, resource, and implement a recruitment strategy that increases Māori workforce across clinical, managerial, and support roles	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Long term
Implement a system-wide cultural safety strategy across maternity care that includes expanding culturally appropriate antenatal services, mandating annual cultural safety training for all maternity providers, and embedding cultural safety within all clinical safety and health policy frameworks.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Long Term

## Housing

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Review and amend housing allocation settings to elevate the needs of Māmā and Pēpi, ensuring timely access to appropriate, safe, and stable housing.	Urban Māmā	Short term
Prioritise the allocation of emergency accommodation for women and children, recognising their heightened vulnerability and need for safe, immediate housing options.	Urban Māmā	Short term
Strengthen investment in kaupapa Māori housing models, including papakāinga, that promote safe, supportive, and culturally aligned environments for Māmā, Pēpi, and their wider whānau.	Provider Wānanga	Medium term
Invest in housing solutions that facilitate intergenerational living arrangements, strengthening whānau support networks and improving long-term housing stability.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Medium term

## Oranga Tamariki

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Resource 3FTE whānau navigator positions in each district to enhance early intervention pathways and ensure whānau receive timely, coordinated support.	Māmā aspirations	Short term
Mandate annual cultural safety development for all registered social workers to strengthen cultural competence, equity, and whānau-centred practice.	Provider Wānanga	Short term
Develop a whānau-centred engagement framework, co-designed with iwi partners, to strengthen trust, reduce harm, and ensure culturally grounded, mana-enhancing practice.	Urban Māmā	Medium term

## ECE & Education

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Progress toward funding parity for Kōhanga Reo through phased increases beginning in Budget 2026, ensuring more equitable resourcing for Māori-medium early learning.	Urban Māmā	Medium term
Develop a targeted recruitment and training plan with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust to strengthen the Māori workforce across Kōhanga Reo.	Māmā aspirations	Medium term
Provide targeted funding for kai provision in Kōhanga Reo and ECE services operating in low-income communities to reduce cost barriers and support participation.	Provider Wānanga	Medium term

## Social Services

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Develop an integrated, consent-based digital birth registration process that enables secure information sharing with MSD, IRD, and health services.	Māmā & Provider Wānanga	Medium term

## Cross Sector

RECOMMENDATIONS	INSIGHT SOURCE	TIMEFRAME
Provide targeted funding to existing Māori providers to deliver peer-led Māmā support groups as part of existing whānau wellbeing services.	Urban Wānanga	Short term
Resource a regional kaupapa Māori research fund that supports whānau-led inquiry and elevates lived experience in local decision-making.	Provider Wānanga	Medium term
Reform parental leave legislation to provide both parents with six months of paid leave, enabling greater whānau stability and improving long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.	Rural Māmā	Long term

# He Whakaaro Whakamutunga

## *Closing Reflections*

We honour the generosity of Māmā who shared their kōrero. Their voices are a gift and a challenge. Let us respond with integrity, urgency, and aroha.

At the heart of this kaupapa is a simple but profound truth: when we listen deeply to whānau, we unlock the most powerful lever for system change.

These wānanga were both a space to speak, and a space to be heard. Māmā brought their stories with courage and generosity, trusting that their lived experiences would be held with care and used to shape a better future. Their kōrero was rich with insight, pain, hope, and vision. It reminded us that the answers we seek are already within our communities.

To the providers who walk alongside whānau every day, we see you. Your unwavering commitment to Māmā and Pēpi, your willingness to engage with honesty, and your thoughtful insights have shaped this kaupapa in powerful ways. You are the steady hands and open hearts that hold space for whānau through their most vulnerable and transformative moments.

We thank you for showing up, for speaking

truth, and for continuing to serve with integrity and aroha. Your mahi matters, and it is deeply appreciated.

Our commitment now is to carry these voices forward as a guide for our āpōpō. The stories shared here are a blueprint for transformation. They show us where the system is falling short, and where it can rise to meet the needs of whānau with compassion, cultural integrity, and practical support.

These wānanga would not have been possible without the tautoko of Te Kahu Taurima and Ki Tua o Matariki. Your presence as known and trusted faces in known and trusted places created a space where Māmā felt safe to share openly. You brought Māmā into the room, held space for their kōrero, and even offered cuddles to pēpi so their Māmā could be free to speak. Nei rā te mihi nui ki a koutou, your aroha and awahi made this kaupapa powerful.

We close this report with deep gratitude to the Māmā who trusted us with their kōrero. Your voices are the heartbeat of this mahi. Mā koutou e arahi, it is through you that we find the path forward.



