



# Findings Report: Mental Wellbeing Fund Learning Review

March 2025, Version 1.0



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Why was this review conducted? .....	<b>3</b>
What helped communities recover?.....	<b>3</b>
What challenges remain?.....	<b>3</b>
What are the key actions and recommendations for moving forward?.....	<b>4</b>
What needs to happen next? .....	<b>5</b>
Who needs to take action? .....	<b>5</b>
How can we ensure long-term impact? .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Background and context.....	<b>6</b>
Scope of the review .....	<b>6</b>
Methodology .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Key Findings</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Overview of Wellbeing Activities .....	<b>7</b>
Key Themes from Learning Hui.....	<b>9</b>
<b>Key Actions and Recommendations</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Priority actions .....	<b>16</b>
What needs to change? .....	<b>16</b>
Who needs to act? .....	<b>16</b>
Longer-term considerations .....	<b>17</b>
How does this inform future disaster recovery planning? .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix A: Overview of Wellbeing Activities</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Activities Delivered – Focus Areas & Attendees.....	<b>19</b>
Wellbeing Recovery Plan for Tāmaki Makaurau Outcomes Assessment.....	<b>24</b>

# Executive Summary

## Why was this review conducted?

The severe weather events of 2023 had significant and long-lasting impacts on the mental wellbeing of affected communities. To support recovery, the Auckland Council Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office (Recovery Office) established the Mental Wellbeing Fund, with funding from Te Whatu Ora and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). This fund enabled 19 iwi and community organisations to deliver services and initiatives that collectively supported around 7,000 impacted Aucklanders.

A participatory learning review was conducted with 17 of the 19 funding recipients across three learning hui. The purpose of the review was to understand what contributed to recovery, identify ongoing challenges, and determine actions needed to strengthen mental wellbeing support in future disaster recovery efforts.

*This review reinforces the importance of embedding mental wellbeing as a core component of disaster response and ensuring recovery approaches are community-led, culturally responsive, and sustainable. A key takeaway is that flexible, long-term funding and proactive coordination are essential for ensuring equitable access to services, particularly for marginalised and isolated communities.*

## What helped communities recover?

- **Community-led recovery approaches:** Flexible, locally driven initiatives provided tailored support and helped restore a sense of control.
- **Peer support and social connections:** Support from those with shared experiences played a crucial role in reducing isolation and building resilience.
- **Access to culturally appropriate services:** When people could access support that aligned with their values and experiences, outcomes improved.
- **Flexible and accessible funding:** Simplified application processes and unrestricted funding enabled grassroots groups to respond quickly and effectively.
- **Collaboration across agencies and sectors:** Strong partnerships between NGOs (non-governmental organisations), government agencies, and local groups ensured better coordination of services.

## What challenges remain?

- **Limited access to timely and appropriate support:** Many people, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, struggled to access counselling and other services.
- **Barriers to support for diverse communities:** Language, cultural differences, and stigma around seeking help remain significant obstacles.
- **Siloed approaches and inconsistent coordination:** While collaboration improved over time, some services operated in isolation, leading to gaps and duplication.
- **Ongoing housing instability:** For those still displaced or in uncertain housing situations, mental wellbeing continues to be significantly impacted.

- **Sustaining long-term support:** Funding and service availability often declined after the immediate crisis phase, leaving gaps in ongoing recovery efforts.

## **What are the key actions and recommendations for moving forward?**

### **1. Embed mental wellbeing into disaster recovery planning**

Ensure mental wellbeing is prioritised alongside physical recovery, with dedicated funding and resources, particularly for marginalised communities. This includes pre-planning for mental health surge capacity and embedding wellbeing into broader recovery frameworks. Support for frontline recovery workers should also be included to prevent burnout and sustain community efforts.

### **2. Strengthen community-led responses**

Invest in community-based mental health initiatives and ensure flexible funding continues to meet diverse community needs. Introduce retrospective funding mechanisms that allow iwi and community providers to act immediately in crises without delays in accessing funds. Support community-led solutions by providing resources that enable swift, locally driven responses.

### **3. Improve access and equity**

Expand culturally responsive services and address barriers to support, particularly in rural and isolated communities, ensuring equitable access to mental health care for all. Plan for surge capacity in culturally and linguistically responsive one-to-one counselling services, ensuring they are available before and throughout the recovery journey. Strengthen mental health support for older people, who often experience increased isolation after disasters, and ensure long-term counselling support for those needing ongoing care.

### **4. Enhance coordination and integration**

Strengthen partnerships across sectors to reduce duplication and ensure a seamless support system. Improve coordination between iwi, community organisations, and government agencies through regular sector hui and shared resources. Develop a centralised database of service providers to streamline referrals and improve accessibility to services.

### **5. Sustain long-term support**

Develop long-term funding and service models that provide ongoing recovery support beyond the immediate response phase. Ensure funding models allow continuity and follow-up support beyond one-off interventions. Support the integration of climate-resilient housing solutions into preparedness and recovery planning and ensure sustained mental wellbeing support, particularly for Māori and Pasifika-led initiatives.

### **6. Increase communication and rebuild trust**

Establish a proactive, transparent communication approach between council, agencies, and community organisations to rebuild trust before future events occur. Regularly share recovery learnings, updates, and preparedness plans to improve

coordination and confidence in response efforts. Involve communities directly in shaping recovery planning processes to ensure transparency and accountability.

#### **7. Promote social connection**

Expand opportunities for social connection throughout recovery, focusing on isolated communities and those who seek support later in the process. Address transport barriers for older people to participate in social events and ensure kai is provided at gatherings to encourage participation, particularly among women. Strengthen community advocacy and leadership development to ensure evolving needs are recognised and addressed.

#### **8. Foster self-efficacy and sustainability**

Require future wellbeing funding applicants to demonstrate how their programmes foster self-efficacy, positive identity, and long-term resilience. Support skills-building initiatives that empower communities to lead their own recovery efforts. Ensure funding models allow for follow-up engagement and continuity of support beyond initial programmes. Strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer, such as kaumātua teaching traditional practices, to promote resilience and long-term sustainability.

#### **9. Embed cultural responsiveness in recovery efforts**

Increase opportunities to integrate indigenous knowledge and frameworks into disaster recovery initiatives. Strengthen partnerships with Māori and Pasifika providers, recognising and uplifting whānau, hapū, and iwi-led recovery initiatives by ensuring they are adequately resourced and supported. Recognise the importance of gender-specific and safe spaces within cultural recovery efforts and ensure access to culturally appropriate kai and essentials as part of recovery planning.

### **What needs to happen next?**

The lessons from this review call for a shift towards a more integrated, community-led, and sustainable approach to mental wellbeing in disaster recovery. We must invest in community-driven initiatives, strengthen relationships between government agencies and local providers, and embed resilience-focused interventions into recovery efforts. This will contribute to more effective recovery outcomes now and in the future.

### **Who needs to take action?**

A sustained, collaborative approach is needed between councils, government agencies, funders, community providers, iwi, health and social service providers, and local leaders and advocates. Each party must work together to strengthen disaster resilience, ensuring mental wellbeing remains at the forefront of future recovery efforts, particularly for the most vulnerable communities.

### **How can we ensure long-term impact?**

By embedding these recommendations into policy, funding structures, and operational planning, we can ensure that all communities—especially those most vulnerable—receive the support they need to recover, rebuild, and thrive.

# Introduction

## Background and context

In 2023, the Recovery Office received \$1.6 million in funding from Te Whatu Ora and MSD to support iwi and community organisations in delivering services and initiatives aimed at enhancing the mental wellbeing of those impacted by the 2023 weather events. This funding focused on key areas:

- enabling access to youth-friendly tools
- increasing the capacity for therapeutic interventions, and
- delivering mental wellbeing recovery programmes that fostered community cohesion and social support.

## Scope of the review

The learning review was conducted to capture insights from grant recipients and assess the effectiveness of the mental wellbeing interventions funded.

Funded interventions were evaluated against the desired outcomes of the [Wellbeing Recovery Plan for Tāmaki Makaurau](#) and the five essential psychosocial support elements: sense of safety, calm, connectedness, self- and group-efficacy (empowerment), and instilling hope. These elements, fundamental to disaster recovery, are supported by global research and best practice in psychosocial support, ensuring the review was grounded in a recognised, evidence-based framework for disaster recovery.

## Methodology

The review combined both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of the funded initiatives:

- **Quantitative data:** Attendance figures and participation rates.
- **Qualitative data:** Insights into broader wellbeing benefits and community impact.

As part of the review, three learning hui were held in September, October, and November 2024, engaging 25 representatives from 17 of the 19 grant recipients. The hui created space for in-depth discussions with those delivering psychosocial support activities in impacted communities. Attendees reflected on the effectiveness of their programmes and shared insights through a series of guided questions, focusing on areas such as programme impacts, lessons learned, and ongoing wellbeing needs in the community.

Given the participatory nature of the review, it's acknowledged that participants might have been inclined to highlight the successes of their own programmes. To encourage open and honest reflection, the learning hui were designed to facilitate constructive conversations, enabling participants to explore both successes and areas for improvement. This approach was intended to ensure that the findings were balanced, with the focus remaining on learning, sharing, and improving future initiatives.

# Key Findings

## Overview of Wellbeing Activities

Throughout the recovery, a range of initiatives were delivered to support mental wellbeing in affected communities. These activities varied in scope, format, and focus, reflecting the diverse needs of different groups.

To provide a structured overview, we have documented:

- The **activities delivered**, their **focus areas**, and the **number of attendees**.
- How these activities align with the **five elements of psychosocial support** and the **three outcomes** in the [Wellbeing Recovery Plan for Tāmaki Makaurau](#).

A detailed breakdown of this information is included in **Appendix A**. This mapping provides insight into which wellbeing areas were well-supported, where gaps may exist, and how recovery efforts aligned with established wellbeing frameworks.

## Key Insights from Activity Mapping

- **High engagement in youth-focused activities:** A significant number of initiatives focused on youth wellbeing, with strong participation in activities such as creative workshops, dance, and sports events. This highlights the value of targeting young people in recovery programmes, as they form a key demographic in the healing process after a disaster.
- **Cultural and whānau-centred approaches:** Many of the activities integrated cultural healing and family wellbeing, which reinforced the importance of community and cultural identity in the recovery journey. This is especially relevant for Māori and Pasifika communities, where cultural practices like kapa haka and Talanoa helped foster connection and healing.
- **Diverse range of focus areas:** The funded initiatives addressed a wide spectrum of psychosocial needs, ranging from emotional wellbeing and social connection to practical support such as emergency preparedness and employment skills. This diversity of focus areas ensured that the interventions were well-rounded and could address the multi-dimensional impacts of the weather events on the community.
- **Wide reach across communities:** Several initiatives reached over 1,000 participants, demonstrating the scale of outreach across Auckland. This highlights the extensive impact of the Mental Wellbeing Fund, especially in reaching larger, more diverse groups in both urban and rural areas.
- **Cultural responsiveness and self-efficacy:** Culturally responsive initiatives were highly effective in supporting communities. By aligning with the cultural values and practices of impacted groups (such as Māori and Pasifika), the programmes contributed to a stronger sense of cultural identity and belonging. These initiatives also promoted self-efficacy, helping individuals and communities gain confidence in managing their wellbeing.
- **Challenges of short-term funding:** A key challenge identified was the short-term nature of the funding. While many programmes had immediate impacts, the inability to extend support beyond the funding period limited the ability to support ongoing

recovery efforts. This underscores the need for longer-term funding models that can provide continuity and follow-up support.

- **Importance of collaboration and communication:** Collaboration between community organisations, local councils, and government agencies was crucial for effective service delivery. The review highlighted that strong communication and networking at the local level ensured that services were well-coordinated and reached those who needed them most. However, concerns were raised about the effectiveness of future planning, with participants noting that there is still work to be done in preparing for future climate events.
- **Impact on Māori and cultural resilience:** The programmes aimed at whānau Māori were highly successful in fostering cultural identity and resilience. Initiatives that involved traditional practices were seen as essential for empowering Māori communities to navigate their recovery. The review also highlighted the importance of passing on indigenous knowledge and ensuring that intergenerational connections were supported.
- **Need for ongoing learning and adaptation:** The review also pointed to the ongoing need for learning and adaptation, particularly in terms of how agencies prepare for future climate events. The importance of incorporating lessons from past events into future planning was emphasised to ensure more effective recovery efforts moving forward.
- **Overall assessment:** The Mental Wellbeing Fund had a significant positive impact, particularly in supporting Māori cultural resilience and fostering collaboration between agencies. However, the short-term funding and concerns regarding long-term sustainability and preparedness indicate areas that require further attention. The ongoing need for culturally appropriate support, self-efficacy building, and sustainable recovery models was clear from the review.

These findings inform the key themes explored in the following sections.



## **Key Themes from Learning Hui**

The following themes were extrapolated from the qualitative data gained across the three-learning hui.

### **High Trust Funding Model**

#### **What worked well?**

Participants valued the high-trust funding model used for the mental wellbeing grants. Community providers in impacted areas have established relationships, cultural and linguistic relevance, and existing programmes to support those on the recovery journey. This funding model enabled the expansion of existing supports while allowing flexibility for providers to tailor services to community needs. Keeping funding local ensured timely and targeted distribution of resources.

In some cases, Council was not perceived as a trusted provider, creating barriers to access. Directing funding to trusted community providers helped overcome this, increasing service access and information-sharing. Linguistically responsive services were also key to inclusion.

#### **What were the learnings?**

Participants noted delays in funding distribution. By the time funding became available, iwi had often already taken action to support their communities in the early stages of recovery. Retrospective funding—where actions are taken first, and funding is secured afterward—was suggested as a way to address this issue.

Opportunities to wānanga with whānau provided valuable insights into evolving community needs. Having a mechanism for community feedback before submitting funding applications could have been beneficial.

For rural communities, wellbeing interventions need to be seasonally adapted to align with agricultural cycles and community rhythms.

#### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Establishing a pre-agreed funding model across local, regional, and national agencies would enable more efficient wellbeing support distribution in future disasters.
- Ensuring equitable funding access for all impacted communities is essential. Some areas, such as South Auckland, are only now navigating categorisation and deconstruction, yet funding is already depleted.
- A partner navigator approach may be more effective if a Council navigator is embedded within a community organisation rather than having a community provider navigator join Council. This would maintain trust-based relationships.
- Trusted community advocates could play a key role in supporting whānau throughout the recovery journey.

## **Young People**

### **What worked well?**

Online resources, social media engagement, and promotional efforts increased accessibility to support services for young people affected by the weather events. Group events and peer-to-peer sharing, further strengthened support networks and amplified youth voices.

Schools served as a critical conduit for wellbeing support. The mental wellbeing grants enabled schools to access fully funded opportunities that would have otherwise been unavailable.

Events bringing families together provided parents and young people with shared learning experiences, fostering mutual support in managing stressors related to the weather events.

### **What were the learnings?**

Many young people faced significant educational disruption due to the weather events, compounded by previous COVID-19 interruptions. Normal routines have yet to be fully restored, particularly for students who transitioned to high school during the pandemic. Truancy and reduced educational achievement were linked to anxiety and grief over the loss of friendships and stability due to displacement.

Providers working with Pacific communities observed cultural disconnects within families, where discussions on mental health were often avoided, and young voices were not always heard. Additionally, young people sharing knowledge about weather events and climate change with elders sometimes created tensions. Family-focused events provided opportunities for parents to share their experiences, gain support, and better understand their children's perspectives.

Social media is a key engagement tool for young people, but there is concern that some influencers may not be promoting the right messages. Expanding the online promotion of positive wellbeing supports could help address this.

School-based interventions highlighted the need to engage not just students but also teachers affected by the weather events. Viewing schools as community hubs fosters a more connected approach to wellbeing support.

Many young people are experiencing increased anxiety about nature and outdoor environments, perceiving them as unsafe. Outdoor programmes that facilitate managed-risk interactions with te taiao (the environment) help rebuild trust and enable open conversations about environmental concerns.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Recognising the multifaceted nature of educational disruption supports the need for a joined-up approach across agencies, including the community sector.
- Truancy interventions should be supportive rather than punitive, acknowledging the various household stressors young people face.
- Encouraging young people to lead whānau in disaster preparedness should be explored while being mindful of cultural dynamics.

- Collaboration with influential figures (e.g., rugby teams, UFC fighters) could help promote positive wellbeing messages, particularly through social media.

## **Safety and Preparedness**

### **What worked well?**

Initiatives that rebuilt trust in nature and reconnected people with te taiao were effective in reducing fear and anxiety about environmental risks. These reconnection programmes benefited both adults and young people, creating opportunities for positive interactions with nature and meaningful conversations about environmental concerns.

Creating safe spaces for sharing experiences, supported community wellbeing and facilitated access to further services and support.

### **What were the learnings?**

There remains uncertainty about Council and government agency responses to future weather events. Many communities feel that plans for their long-term future remain unclear.

Weather-related anxiety and uncertainty about future events were identified as potential triggers for relapse among individuals in addiction recovery.

Preparedness planning and information need to be prioritised at both community and whānau levels. Pacific providers noted that many families lack a 'Plan B,' such as insurance, and are often unaware of available services and resources.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Increased communication from Council and government agencies on how lessons from the 2023 weather events will inform future responses would enhance community confidence.
- Reconnection with whenua programmes should be available across Auckland, with particular attention to gaps in te taiao wellbeing initiatives in South Auckland.
- Culturally responsive preparedness workshops should be offered at both the community and whānau levels to enhance resilience and disaster readiness.

## **Mental Health Supports**

### **What worked well?**

One-on-one counselling was identified by providers as a highly effective method for improving individuals' wellbeing, equipping them with coping tools, and fostering self-agency and self-esteem. It also contributed to improved physical health, such as better sleep. For individuals experiencing grief and suicidal ideation, funded counselling provided strategies that empowered them to move forward.

Cultural and faith leaders often support community members who have experienced trauma. Facilitating discussions on mental health within these trusted spaces helped break taboos and increased access to mental health supports in culturally appropriate ways.

### **What were the learnings?**

Expanding the number of available counsellors in a short timeframe proved challenging, leading to long wait times for services.

Older people affected by the weather events often experienced increased isolation, highlighting the need for targeted mental health support.

Culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health and social supports are critical to ensuring equitable access, particularly for migrant communities. Group counselling and support for individuals experiencing relationship breakdowns were also identified as important.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Psychological impacts of the weather events should be considered in the broader context of ongoing trauma, including COVID-19 and the rising cost of living. The floods also re-triggered past trauma and exacerbated social isolation.
- Pre-planning for surge capacity in counselling services would ensure more timely and effective mental health support.
- Community providers engaged in recovery efforts are experiencing burnout, impacting both their professional and personal lives. Mental health support for these workers is essential.
- Limited funding often restricts counselling to a few sessions, preventing those needing long-term support from accessing continued care.
- Expanding mental health training for cultural and faith leaders could increase service access for impacted communities.
- Developing an online resource outlining available mental health services, including recovery-funded programmes, would improve access and provider coordination.

## **Housing, Homelessness and Health**

### **What worked well?**

Community providers with existing housing programmes were able to quickly extend support to affected whānau and connect them to relevant services.

### **What were the learnings?**

Many impacted whānau continue to live in unsuitable conditions, including overcrowded, unhealthy, and inaccessible housing, negatively affecting their mental health. Frequent relocations due to inadequate housing disrupt social connections and stability. This issue was particularly highlighted by Māori and Pasifika providers and refugee or migrant communities, notably Afghani participants.

Providers reported a rise in homelessness due to the compounded effects of extreme weather events, COVID-19, and the rising cost of living. Families, including those with young children, are living in cars, often unable to move when directed by authorities due to financial constraints.

Basic needs remain a challenge for many affected communities, significantly impacting their wairua and overall wellbeing. A notable increase in rheumatic fever, often linked to unhealthy housing conditions, has been reported by Te Whatu Ora.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- A coordinated approach between agencies and community providers is needed to address housing and homelessness issues in impacted communities.
- Health concerns could be mitigated through initiatives such as school swabbing for rheumatic fever, gut health programmes, and increased access to council facilities (e.g., means-tested gym memberships).

## **Collaboration and Communication**

### **What worked well?**

Participation in local social service networks enabled providers to connect, share resources, and collaborate on recovery and wellbeing support efforts. Understanding community needs at a street level allowed for responsive service expansion regionally.

The MSD-funded Community Connectors model from COVID-19 facilitated inter-agency collaboration and could be adapted for the recovery context, recognising the cumulative impacts of disasters.

### **What were the learnings?**

No single provider can meet all needs—cooperation and coordination are essential to enhance communication and service accessibility. Providers without counselling services needed more information on referral options. Increased awareness of funded programmes would have improved service access.

Data sovereignty and trust-based relationships with whānau must be respected. Building strong provider relationships before an event is crucial.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Strengthening provider relationships and referral pathways would improve service accessibility.
- Regular collaborative hui could facilitate information-sharing and coordination, with wider government agency participation improving responsiveness.
- A centralised database of providers and a funded programme pānui would aid referrals and sustainability.
- Ongoing wrap-around support services and a single, trusted provider contact are critical for whānau.

## **Social Connection**

### **What worked well?**

Creating spaces for shared experiences—such as dance, music, and creative arts—reduced isolation, validated experiences, and fostered social connection.

For rural communities, events tailored to local interests (e.g., farming-related activities) provided non-traditional avenues for engagement and wellbeing conversations.

### **What were the learnings?**

Individuals who initially declined support (“others have it worse”) may seek help later, necessitating opportunities for re-engagement.

Providing kai at events enabled women, who would typically cater, to fully participate in activities and conversations.

Elderly individuals need additional support to reduce isolation, requiring consideration of transport and mobility services.

### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Social connection plays a vital role in long-term recovery, fostering community advocacy and mutual support.

### **Sustainability and Self-efficacy**

#### **What worked well?**

For some providers, funding was used to cover costs of developing a resource, e.g. a website, that could then be maintained through BAU (business as usual). This ‘seed funding’ approach ensured the sustainability of service provision.

Many providers focussed on self-reliance, including kai resilience and budgeting, to increase knowledge and skills of individuals and whānau, and reduce dependence on providers in the long term. Several providers found an increase in indigenous knowledge to be key to engagement and self-efficacy.

#### **What were the learnings?**

Mental wellbeing grants helped providers expand services but were short-term, making it difficult to sustain support beyond the funding period.

Where funding enabled single events or programmes, there was often no follow-up support available for participants.

#### **What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Strengthening community-driven recovery through knowledge, skills, and resilience-building initiatives.
- Expanding online resources and promoting existing services to support self-sufficiency.

### **Cultural Responsiveness**

#### **What worked well?**

Culturally relevant activities created safe and familiar spaces for impacted communities to connect and access services.

The use of indigenous knowledge strengthened wellbeing and identity. Programmes reconnecting people with te taiao and whenua fostered both human and environmental recovery.

**What were the learnings?**

- Gender-specific spaces and religious connections can enhance engagement but may also reinforce hierarchies that limit participation.
- Passing on indigenous knowledge (e.g., kaumatua teaching traditional skills) strengthens intergenerational wellbeing but requires sensitivity to cultural dynamics.
- Loss of marae access due to weather events compounded displacement and disrupted cultural connections.
- Access to culturally appropriate food and essentials is key to recovery.

**What are the ongoing needs and opportunities?**

- Supporting indigenous knowledge sharing can offer sustainable health and wellbeing solutions. Increasing access to rongoā, for example, could provide affordable traditional medicine options.

## Key Actions and Recommendations

### Priority actions

#### What needs to change?

- Establish mental wellbeing as a core pillar of disaster recovery, with dedicated funding and pre-planned surge capacity.
- Implement retrospective funding mechanisms for iwi and community providers to act immediately in crises.
- Expand culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate mental health services to promote equity, particularly in rural and isolated communities.
- Strengthen long-term funding models to ensure sustainable recovery support beyond the immediate response phase.
- Improve coordination between government agencies, iwi, and community providers to streamline services and reduce duplication.
- Increase transparency in recovery planning and communication to rebuild trust between council, agencies, and communities.
- Promote social connection initiatives that address isolation, particularly for older people, women, and those seeking support later in the recovery process.
- Develop strategies for community-led resilience, including intergenerational knowledge transfer and skills-building initiatives.

#### Who needs to act?

- **Council and government agencies:** Embed mental wellbeing in recovery frameworks, establish funding mechanisms, improve coordination, and ensure clear, transparent communication.
- **Community providers and iwi:** Lead culturally responsive mental health and wellbeing initiatives, advocate for sustained funding, and strengthen community-led solutions.
- **Funders and philanthropic organisations:** Support long-term, flexible funding models that prioritise wellbeing and community-driven recovery.
- **Health and social service providers:** Expand access to trauma-informed mental health services, particularly for isolated and marginalised communities.
- **Local leaders and advocates:** Strengthen community advocacy and leadership to ensure recovery efforts remain responsive to evolving needs.



## **Longer-term considerations**

### **How does this inform future disaster recovery planning?**

- Future disaster recovery planning must integrate mental wellbeing alongside physical infrastructure and economic recovery efforts.
- Sustainable funding models should replace short-term funding cycles, ensuring ongoing support for affected communities.
- Investing in community-led responses will improve resilience and recovery outcomes, reducing reliance on government-led interventions.
- Stronger coordination between government, iwi, and community groups will enhance response efficiency and accessibility.
- Lessons from past events must be incorporated into future planning, ensuring a proactive rather than reactive approach to disaster recovery.
- Cultural responsiveness should be embedded in all disaster response and recovery planning, ensuring communities receive support that aligns with their values and needs.

## **Conclusion**

The findings and recommendations in this report highlight the critical role of mental wellbeing in disaster recovery and the need for a more integrated, community-led, and sustainable approach. The response to recent extreme weather events has reinforced the importance of prioritising mental health alongside physical recovery, strengthening local capacity, and embedding cultural responsiveness in all aspects of disaster planning and response.

A key takeaway is that flexible, long-term funding and proactive coordination are essential to ensuring equitable access to services, particularly for marginalised and isolated communities. Investing in community-led initiatives, strengthening relationships between government agencies and local providers, and embedding resilience-focused interventions will contribute to more effective recovery efforts now and in the future.

By learning from past experiences and taking a forward-thinking approach, we can create a disaster recovery system that not only addresses immediate needs but also builds long-term resilience within communities. Strengthening mental wellbeing as a core component of disaster response, fostering self-efficacy, and ensuring strong community networks will help mitigate the long-term impacts of future events and improve overall preparedness.

Moving forward, it is imperative that council, government agencies, funders, and community providers work together to embed these recommendations into policy, funding structures, and operational planning. Only through sustained commitment and collaborative action can we ensure that all communities, particularly those most vulnerable, receive the support they need to recover, rebuild, and thrive.

## Appendix A: Overview of Wellbeing Activities

### Activities Delivered – Focus Areas & Attendees

The following table outlines the wellbeing activities delivered by various funding recipients, including the focus areas, types of activities, and number of attendees. It provides an overview of activities, highlighting the diverse range of initiatives aimed at supporting mental wellbeing in communities impacted by the weather events.

### Funding Recipient Activities Overview

Funding Recipient	Focus Area	Activities	Number of Attendees
<b>Adventure Specialities Trust</b>	Youth, Cohesion, Therapeutic	6 ReConnect Programmes (8 days per programme) with West Auckland Schools.	68
<b>Affirming Works</b>	Youth, Cohesion	Dance Activities; Youth Mentoring Camps and Creative Workshops.	360
<b>Blue Light Ventures NZ</b>	Youth, Cohesion	Weekly wellbeing sessions at Māngere College and Aorere College covered topics such as making choices and tools for wellbeing both at school and outside of school, and utilised Te Whare Tapa Whā.	145
<b>Cook Islands Development Agency NZ</b>	Youth, Therapeutic	Developed, launched and promoted the Young & Fortified online platform focusing on wellbeing and self-development.	1000+
<b>Hoani Waititi Marae</b>	Cultural, Youth, Wellbeing	A holistic approach to healing and community strengthening, incorporating cultural programmes and activities such as the Rangatahi Mentoring Program, Waiata Wenerie, Whānau Wellbeing Workshops, and more.	500+
<b>New Settlers Family and Community Trust</b>	Social Support, Wellbeing	One-on-one social support; wellbeing workshops; emergency preparedness; mindfulness, water safety, and more.	200+
<b>Ngāti Tamaoho Trust</b>	Cultural, Social Support	Pouaka Marakai workshops; Whānau wanānga; Māra Kai workshop.	50+ whānau
<b>Ngāti Tamaterā Treaty Settlement Trust</b>	Mental Health, Wellbeing	Mental Health and Wellbeing Hauora and Waka Ama Day, and wānanga.	300+
<b>Rural Support Trust Northland</b>	Social Support, Wellbeing	Comedy evenings; Matariki dinners; Brunch and breakfast; First Aid Courses.	1000+
<b>South Seas Health Care Trust (SSHCT)</b>	Youth, Social Support	MYSTORY workshops at 8 schools across West, South, and Central Auckland.	400
<b>Taulanga U (Talanoa Mana Program)</b>	Youth, Cultural	Talanoa Mana camp and workshops, organised in collaboration with Tongan churches, mainly targeting young people.	200
<b>Taulanga U (Uloa Model Program)</b>	Cultural, Therapeutic	The Uloa Model of Care in a kava Talanoa setting, with a group divided by gender.	200
<b>Te Hā Oranga</b>	Cultural, Social Support, Wellbeing	Matariki; weekly kapa haka; Te Whare Tapa Whā – Tinana; Amazing Race at Rānui Community Day; and safety plans.	500+

<b>Te Kaiāhari</b>	Youth, Therapeutic	6 Reconnection Programmes focused on self-awareness, trust, sense of belonging, self-regulation, and embracing Te Āo Māori principles.	500
<b>Te Mahurehure Cultural Marae Inc</b>	Wellbeing	Wellbeing Expo.	200+
<b>The Asian Network Incorporated</b>	Migrant Communities, Wellbeing	Migrant Women Wellbeing Programme; Change Maker Hui; Peer Support Groups.	100
<b>Turuki Health Care Limited</b>	Social Support, Wellbeing	Connect events with Māngere schools.	1000+
<b>Visionwest Community Trust</b>	Mental Health, Wellbeing	One-on-one counselling.	200
<b>Zeal Youth Trust Aotearoa (Zeal Education Trust)</b>	Youth, Social Support, Cohesion	Movie nights; dance and music; sports and activities; Nerf War; Free Food Fridays.	800+

### Key Insights from Activity Mapping

- **High engagement in youth-focused activities:** A significant number of initiatives focused on youth wellbeing, with strong participation in activities such as creative workshops, dance, and sports events.
- **Cultural and whānau-centered approaches:** Many of the activities integrated cultural healing and family wellbeing, which reinforced the importance of community and cultural identity in the recovery journey.
- **Diverse range of focus areas:** The funded initiatives addressed a wide spectrum of psychosocial needs, ranging from emotional wellbeing and social connection to practical support such as emergency preparedness and employment skills.
- **Wide reach across communities:** Several initiatives reached over 1,000 participants, demonstrating the scale of outreach across Auckland.
- **Cultural responsiveness and self-efficacy:** Culturally responsive initiatives were highly effective in supporting communities. These initiatives also promoted self-efficacy, helping individuals and communities gain confidence in managing their wellbeing.
- **Challenges of short-term funding:** A key challenge identified was the short-term nature of the funding. While many programmes had immediate impacts, the inability to extend support beyond the funding period limited the ability to support ongoing recovery efforts.
- **Importance of collaboration and communication:** Collaboration between community organisations, local councils, and government agencies was crucial for effective service delivery.
- **Impact on Māori and cultural resilience:** The programmes aimed at whānau Māori were highly successful in fostering cultural identity and resilience.

- **Need for ongoing learning and adaptation:** The review also pointed to the ongoing need for learning and adaptation, particularly in terms of how agencies prepare for future climate events.
- **Overall assessment:** The Mental Wellbeing Fund had a significant positive impact, particularly in supporting Māori cultural resilience and fostering collaboration between agencies. However, the short-term funding and concerns regarding long-term sustainability and preparedness indicate areas that require further attention.

## Five Elements of Psychosocial Support

The following section links the five essential elements of psychosocial support to key themes from the learning review. The themes discussed below, such as **High Trust Funding Model** and **Young People Focus**, are directly connected to how psychosocial support was provided, and they influence each element of wellbeing.

### 1. Sense of Safety

- **Key Themes Addressed:**

- **Safety and Preparedness:** Programmes promoting safety and preparedness were key in restoring a sense of security for participants. These initiatives focused on weather-related anxieties and preparedness for future events.
  - **Housing, Homelessness and Health:** Persistent issues of poor housing and homelessness were found to negatively impact a sense of safety and wellbeing, demonstrating the importance of addressing these in the recovery journey.
  - **High Trust Funding Model:** The high trust funding model enabled flexibility in addressing these safety concerns by allowing local providers to tailor their services to community-specific needs, ensuring more effective responses.
- **Key Findings:** Programmes that encouraged reconnecting with nature, addressed weather anxieties, and focused on preparedness contributed to rebuilding trust in te taiao. However, challenges in housing and homelessness remained, detracting from the feeling of safety for many whānau.

### 2. Calm

- **Key Themes Addressed:**

- **Mental Health Supports:** Mental health services, including counselling and therapeutic activities, played a significant role in helping participants feel calm and supported.
  - **Cultural Responsiveness:** Te Ao Māori programmes, which incorporated cultural practices promoted calm by allowing participants to engage in activities that aligned with their values and cultural identity.
- **Key Findings:** Safe spaces, group activities, and individual therapeutic sessions were instrumental in providing a sense of calm. Cultural practices were particularly effective in supporting emotional wellbeing, providing a holistic approach to calmness.

### 3. Connectedness

- **Key Themes Addressed:**

- **Social Connection:** Many programmes focused on fostering social connections, which were key to supporting wellbeing. These included community events and initiatives that encouraged participation and collaboration at a local level.

- **Collaboration and Communication:** The effectiveness of these social connection initiatives was enhanced by strong collaboration and communication between community providers, which ensured that services reached the people who needed them.
- **Key Findings:** The review highlighted that fostering local social connections significantly improved wellbeing by providing both emotional support and practical resources. Building these networks was seen as critical for future recovery and preparedness.

#### 4. Self and Group Efficacy

- **Key Themes Addressed:**
  - **Sustainability and Self-efficacy:** Programmes that promoted self-development, including those focused on indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices, empowered individuals and groups to feel more capable of managing their own wellbeing.
  - **Young People:** Many initiatives targeted young people, providing them with opportunities for leadership and skills development, which fostered a strong sense of self-efficacy.
  - **High Trust Funding Model:** The flexibility of the high trust funding model allowed providers to respond to emerging community needs, supporting individuals and groups in building efficacy in recovery.
- **Key Findings:** Programmes that focused on self-development, leadership, and sustainable practices were vital in promoting both individual and group efficacy. Participants, particularly young people, gained confidence in their ability to manage their wellbeing, making them more resilient in future events.

#### 5. Instilling Hope

- **Key Themes Addressed:**
  - **Mental Health Supports:** Therapeutic mental health supports, such as counselling and group therapy, were instrumental in helping individuals overcome feelings of despair and instilling hope for the future.
  - **Cultural Responsiveness:** Culturally specific programmes also played a role in restoring hope, by reconnecting participants with their cultural identity and values, which provided a sense of purpose and belonging.
- **Key Findings:** While "instilling hope" was not explicitly mentioned, it was clear that many of the wellbeing programmes, particularly those focused on mental health and cultural engagement, contributed to a more hopeful outlook for participants. Access to surge capacity for mental health support during peak recovery moments was identified as a key need for future programming.

## **Wellbeing Recovery Plan for Tāmaki Makaurau Outcomes Assessment**

### **How well did the Mental Wellbeing Fund meet the three outcomes?**

- 1. Individuals, families, whānau, and communities have access to relevant services, support, and opportunities to aid their wellbeing throughout their recovery journey, moving towards a more hopeful future.**
  - Around 7,000 people from impacted communities across Auckland received a variety of wellbeing supports through the Mental Wellbeing Fund in 2024. These supports included individual one-on-one wellbeing sessions, group or whānau programmes, and community events or services delivered through schools.
  - The funded initiatives were relevant because they were delivered by trusted community providers, who were able to address cultural and linguistic diversity. This enhanced access to further services and supports.
  - However, as the funding was short-term, it did not provide the continuity needed for providers to support wellbeing throughout the entirety of the recovery journey.
- 2. Impacted whānau Māori feel culturally supported and empowered to navigate their recovery journey in a way that honours and enhances their unique Māori identity and wellbeing.**
  - Seven iwi and Māori providers were funded through the Mental Wellbeing Fund to deliver programmes and services, including whānau wellbeing wānanga, Waiata Wenerei, kapa haka, traditional healing and rongoā training, Māra Kai, Pouaka Marakai workshops, Waka Ama, and Matariki events.
  - The review identified that further focus on sharing indigenous knowledge and passing on traditions is essential for empowering whānau to navigate their recovery. This includes addressing intergenerational conversations and connections, as well as fostering identity, self-efficacy, and sustainable practices.
- 3. Key agencies and organisations set the foundations for working together to support wellbeing in anticipation of further weather events and the long-term impacts of climate change.**
  - The importance of collaboration and communication was highlighted in this review, with an emphasis on ensuring that local council and government agencies work alongside the community sector to distribute funding effectively and support wellbeing initiatives for the long term.
  - Networking and information flow at a local level were particularly emphasised, not only between service providers but also with relevant agencies.
  - Concerns were raised regarding the lessons learned by councils and agencies in planning for future events. These concerns suggest that there is still work to be done in terms of preparing for the next climate event and implementing the learnings from past events into future recovery strategies.