

**Child and Youth Wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand, including through the COVID-19  
Lockdown and in Digital Wellbeing. Project summary report by the University of  
Auckland Coalition on Applied Cognition/Learning and Thinking/Learning Sciences,  
April 2022.**

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**Introduction:**

The Coalition carried out three small projects in response to a presentation by Professor Stuart McNaughton to its mini-conference in October 2020. The presentation addressed his topic ‘What value do learning sciences add?’. As part of that presentation he looked at learning challenges arising from COVID-19.

The projects were funded by a University of Auckland Knowledge Sciences Seed Funding Grant

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All three projects had emerging themes of

- The value of inter-disciplinary research, and ongoing co-ordination and connection
- The need to enhance understanding and acceleration of learning and thinking processes
- The importance of equity issues and child voice

The initial reports were completed in mid 2021, but have been updated minimally by Dorothy Howie in April 2022.

**Project Group Members:**

Dr. Maggie Brown: School of Psychology & psychotherapist

Professor Gavin Brown: Faculty of Education and Social Work

Dr. Christopher Erb: School of Psychology

Dr. Deidre Le Fevre: Faculty of Education & Social Work

Dr. David Moreau: School of Psychology

Professor Judy Parr: Faculty of Education & Social Work

Dr. Elizabeth Peterson: School of Psychology

**Research Interests:**

This multidisciplinary team of researchers is interested in understanding the impacts on wellbeing of digital life for children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The long-term research aim is to build knowledge about how, and for whom, digital media practices support positive wellbeing and learning outcomes. A practical aim is to mitigate any negative impacts on children, young people, and their families and whanau.

Running alongside those aims is an interdisciplinary curiosity about existing data and funding sources in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how to leverage data and projects to begin to build knowledge. The team is also aware of the need to develop meaningful indicators of wellbeing, including digital wellbeing, for children and youth in Aotearoa New Zealand, taking into account different contexts, world views and knowledge systems.

**Seed Project Description:**

The stated purpose of the Seed Project was to ‘scope’ the digital/learning/wellness research landscape in New Zealand, to identify current questions and priorities with a particular focus on identifying key stakeholders and their respective roles and contributions to date.

Interestingly, what was meant to be an uncomplicated exploratory undertaking quickly became complex and exciting, within a rapidly evolving context. The work began in November, 2020, just as new and important questions were being asked (globally and here in Aotearoa New Zealand) about digital (online) learning during and post COVID-19

lockdowns. For example, researchers, professional organizations, and government Ministries asked about teachers' experiences of best practice using digital-based methods (e.g., Ferdig, Baumgartner, Hartshorne, Kaplan-Rakowski, & Mouza, 2020), teachers' own learning and professional development needs related to online teaching (e.g., Flack, Walker, Bickerstaff, Earle, & Margetts, 2020), inequities in students' access and ability to effectively use digital tools for learning (e.g., Gleeson & Hubbard, 2021), and any impacts of digital learning on wellbeing for teachers and learners (Phillips & Cain, 2020; Freeman, Ergler, Kearns, & Smith, 2021 and on learning outcomes (Mutch, 2021), including concerns raised over 2020 NCEA exam results in NZ (Yates, Starkey, Egerton, & Flueggen, 2020).

The sudden surge in interest in digital learning, combined with the urgency of some of the questions and concerns within government, and research and learning communities, led us to refocus our exploration from reviewing 'what has been done' to discovering 'what research is needed and possible *now*'? That shift eventually translated into taking immediate action to respond to emerging questions including identifying relevant government policies and priorities, outcome indicators and data needs, seeking data sources and funding opportunities, and ultimately, collaborating with Maria Corkin, a doctoral candidate from Dr. Peterson's lab, around her successful submission to the Digital Research project for a study to look at 're-evaluating the "digital divide" in a changing media landscape. This study has fostered inter-disciplinary collaboration, and dovetails work on wellbeing and use of computers in education. There are plans to continue the next stage of this research work using the 'Growing Up in New Zealand' longitudinal data sets.

## Actions and results of the Seed Funding Project:

Actions	Outcomes	Outputs
Reviewed NZ government policies and priorities related to well-being, with specific emphasis on learning and, where possible, use of digital technology for learning	Identified key NZ policies and initiatives related to youth wellbeing, learning -related outcomes and use of technology.	Summary of relevant NZ government policies, priorities and outcome indicators (Section One).
Monitored emerging questions and research priorities in NZ and globally	Identified emerging research priorities and projects in the digital/learning/well-being space.	Selected bibliography (Section Two)
Sought opportunities for projects including funding and data sources	<p>Liaised with the 2E Lab) and GUiNZ (Dr. Elizabeth Peterson and Maria Corkin; School of Psychology).</p> <p>Identified cross-disciplinary research questions and potential sources of funding.</p>	<p>2E Lab submitted three cross-disciplinary project proposals.</p> <p>Seed funding approved for one project (at time of writing)</p>

### This Summary Report

This Project Summary Report has two sections. In Section One, we briefly describe New Zealand government initiatives, paying particular attention to priorities, outcomes and data requirements relevant to this team’s interest in youth and digital wellbeing, within current COVID-19 related contexts.

Section Two is a bibliography of some recent relevant literature, particularly on wellbeing, showing emerging questions, methods and early results. There is some overlap between these references and those of another of the Coalition projects, which involved a scoping study of the impact of COVID-19 on educational outcomes in disadvantaged populations. However, this Section two bibliography has a stronger focus on wellbeing, and includes international references.

## Section One: Key Policies and Initiatives

### Cross-government Strategies and Priorities

#### *Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) Government's Priorities for Wellbeing*

<https://dpmc.govt.nz/cabinet-committees/swc-cabinet-social-wellbeing-committee>

<https://dpmc.govt.nz/cabinet-committees/swc-cabinet-social-wellbeing-committee>

Of particular relevance here are the New Zealand government's priorities for wellbeing, as expressed in the Wellbeing 2020 budget, developed by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee (SWB) and broadly set out in an evolving cross-government wellbeing package. The role of the SWB is to consider strategic and policy matters which support an equal, inclusive, and fair standard of living for all New Zealanders, including education, health, justice, income support, homelessness, public housing and residential tenancy issues, and the health and social impacts of COVID-19.

The Social Wellbeing Committee has five priorities:

1. Just Transition: Supporting New Zealanders in the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable and low-emissions economy
2. Future of Work: Enabling all New Zealanders to benefit from new technologies and lift productivity through innovation
3. Māori and Pacific: Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, skills and opportunities
4. Child Wellbeing: Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing
5. Physical and Mental Wellbeing: Supporting improved health outcomes for all New Zealanders

## *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 2019 (CYWB)*

<https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

The Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy (CYWB), endorsed by the SWB, places ongoing focus on children and young people. The strategy sets out six high-level interconnected outcomes for improving child and youth wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand, together with key indicators:

Outcome	Child and Youth Wellbeing (CYWB) Indicator*
1. Children and young people are loved, safe and nurtured	Feeling love, feeling safe, family/whānau wellbeing, injury prevalence, harm against children, and quality time with parents
2. Children and young people have what they need	Material wellbeing, child poverty: material hardship, child poverty: low income BHC50, child poverty: low income AHC 50, food insecurity, housing quality, and housing affordability
3. Children and young people are happy and healthy	Prenatal care, early exposure to toxins, subjective health status, preventable admissions to hospital, mental wellbeing, and self-harm and suicide
4. Children and young people are learning and developing	Participation in early learning, regular school attendance, literacy, numeracy and science skills, socio-emotional skills, self-management skills, and youth in employment, education, or training
5. Children and young people are accepted, respected and connected	Ability to be themselves, sense of belonging, experience of discrimination, experience of bullying, social support, support for cultural identity, and languages
6. Children and young people are involved and empowered	Involvement in the community, representation of children and young people's voices, making positive choices, and involvement in criminal offending

\*source: <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy-html#section-7>

Policies and initiatives related to this child and youth-focussed strategy, and to the SWB's five priorities clearly fall within and across many domains (portfolios). Indeed, the government has called for cross-agency collaboration to align all planning and actions related to children and youth to the CYWB. Initiatives that are of particular relevance to our interest in understanding the impacts of digital life on children and young people, fall within and across the government's education, health and social development portfolios. These are described briefly below.

## **Education Sector**

### *Education Work Programme (EWP)*

<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Information-releases/R-Education-Portfolio-Work-Programme-Purpose-Objectives-and-Overview.pdf>

The government's Education Work Programme (EWP) has a 30-year vision to reform the education systems in this country, via processes of review and initiatives/projects that extend from ECE to tertiary education. Central to the EWP is an understanding that *wellbeing is fundamentally entwined with learning*, and, therefore, needs to be a goal through all parts of the education system.

The five main objectives of the EWP (2018) are:

1. Learners at the Centre: placing learners with their whanau at the centre of the education system.
2. Barrier-Free Access: breaking down the barriers to participation at all levels. Great education opportunities and outcomes are within reach for every learner. (Note: this

objective acknowledges inequities, including those related to financial and physical circumstances, that stop learners from fully participating in education).

3. Quality Teaching and Leadership: quality teaching and leadership make the difference for learners and their whānau.
4. Future of Learning and Work: focussing on learning that is relevant to the lives of New Zealanders today and throughout their lives. (Note: this objective explicitly acknowledges the importance of education that is relevant to the technology learners interact with now, and in the future.).
5. World Class Inclusive Public Education: New Zealand education is trusted and sustainable. (Note: this objective relates strongly to the need for strong evidence).

The more recently released Education Work Programme 2021 (EWP 2021) seeks to actively address some specific issues within the education system, such as falling levels of achievement in maths and science, declining rates of attendance, and high levels of bullying. These and other EWP foci are supported by the National Statement of Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) shown below.

***National Statement of Education and Learning Priorities (NELP)***

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/the-statement-of-national-education-and-learning-priorities-nelp-and-the-tertiary-education-strategy-tes/>

The Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) - aligned with the EWP objectives - sets out seven priority areas for education. The priorities are designed to guide those who govern schools and kura, and are meant to be used *alongside* local priorities, and in conjunction with the delivery of local curricula.



## NELP Priorities:

1. Ensure places of learning are safe, inclusive and free from racism, discrimination and bullying.
2. Have high aspirations for every learner/ākonga, and support these by partnering with their whānau and communities to design and deliver education that responds to their needs, and sustains their identities, languages, and cultures.
3. Reduce barriers to education for all, including for Māori and Pacific learners/ākonga, disabled learners/ākonga and those with learning support needs.
4. Ensure every learner/ākonga gains sound foundation skills, including language, literacy and numeracy.
5. Meaningfully incorporate te reo Māori and tikanga Māori into the everyday life of the place of learning.
6. Develop staff to strengthen teaching, leadership and learner support capability across the education workforce.
7. Collaborate with industries and employers to ensure learners/ākonga have the skills, knowledge and pathways to succeed in work

Of particular relevance to our interests are EWP 2021 objectives to develop action plans and initiatives aimed at improving student attendance and engagement (aligned most strongly with NELP Priorities 2 and 3), tackle barriers to educational success (NELP Priorities 1 - 5) and improve digital access to help address the digital divide in schools (NELP priorities 3 - 6).

### ***Urgent Response Fund (URF) and Educator Wellbeing***

<https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/urgent-response-fund/>

<https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/wellbeing-in-education/>

On July 1, 2020, the government responded to COVID-19 lockdowns with a \$66 million package in funding within the education sector, to support the *learning, social, emotional, mental, or other well-being needs* of both learners and educators. The 12-month package included an Urgent Response Fund (URF) to provide immediate support to improve attendance, and to help manage any child and youth wellbeing needs directly related to COVID-19. URF funds were allocated regionally, and could be used for a very broad range of activities and initiatives aimed at supporting the continued engagement of learners, and their wellbeing needs. The package also included \$16 million to support educator wellbeing for the staff of early learning services, kōhanga reo, school and kura and their families.

In April 2022 the ***Report on the Urgent Response Fund Outcomes Survey*** was released.

<http://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/our-work/information-releases/Advice-seen-by-our-Ministers/February-2022/12.-Report-on-the-Urgent-Response-Fund-Outcomes-Survey-1278905.pdf>

Overall 32% of the education institutions that received URF funding responded to the survey. Planned regional engagement and follow up activity by the Ministry was limited due to ongoing COVID restrictions.

Almost two-thirds of schools and kura (64%) and 40% of early learning services that responded used the URF funding for teacher aides. Wellbeing/hauora was also a common category of use, selected by 52% of schools and kura and 40% of early learning services.

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that learners supported showed improved re-engagement in learning (93%) and wellbeing (92%). Over two thirds of respondents (71%) agreed or strongly agreed that learners supported by the funding showed improved cultural wellbeing.

The proportion of Māori and Pacific learners supported by the URF was higher than the proportion of Māori and Pacific learners on respondents' rolls. Although the Fund was unique in careful design to meet specific needs within the context of whānau and communities, the report suggests 'co-designing the application process with mana whenua, Iwi partners and Pacific leaders to better reflect Te Ao Māori and diverse Pacific approaches.

The report states 'coupled with a local approach to decision-making, the flexibility of the URF should be considered a strength that can be replicated' (p. 11). Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) stated that the needs of learners at their education institution relating to attendance, re-engagement in learning or wellbeing would not end once funding was exhausted.

The report includes Annexes including one with examples of ākongā, whānau and Kaiako voice, another covering a data overview nationally and for Auckland, and the third sharing vignettes on success and failure in improving attendance using the URF.

The *Education Gazette/Tukutuku Kōrero*, 12 August 2021, features an article 'Urgent Respond Fund enhances learning in Te Matau-a-Māui.' It describes a variety of uses of the URF fund in one region, for different sectors.

*Examples of Other Well Being-related Initiatives Within the Education or Health Education Sectors:*

**Healthy Active Learning.** A programme aimed at supporting schools, kura and early learning services to improve child and youth wellbeing through healthy eating and physical activity. <https://sportnz.org.nz/get-active/ways-to-get-active/physical-education/healthy-active-learning/>

**Mental Health Education and Hauora.** Teaching interpersonal skills, resilience, and wellbeing' is a practical resource (book) for teachers in schools whose students are Year 7 and up. <https://healtheducation.org.nz/resources/mental-health-education>

**Digital Technology: Safe and responsible use in schools.** A web-based resource and guide to help educators manage safe and responsible use of digital technology for learning. <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/digital-technology/digital-technology-guide-for-schools/>

**Meeting requirements for children's safety and wellbeing in ECE.** An ERO report showing how early learning services keep up to date with regulations and legal requirements to help manage children's health and safety. <https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/meeting-requirements-for-childrens-safety-and-wellbeing-in-ece/>

**Melon manual.** A website, supported by the Ministry of Health, supporting teenagers' emotional wellbeing. The web-based kite includes resources for use by secondary school teachers. <http://www.melonhealth.com/manual>

*Education Sector Summary Comments*

What is immediately apparent from the EWP and the initiatives described above is the government's understanding of wellbeing as a multifaceted construct, even within a specific (in this case, education) sector. This presents interesting challenges to existing wellbeing

measurement frameworks and indicators of wellbeing. It is our understanding that there is work underway across government agencies to address current limits, and to improve the quality of data on children and youth wellbeing. We flag here the need to work together, with and across traditional disciplinary boundaries, to develop indicators and measures that align with a multifaceted understanding of wellbeing, and that can be used within and compared across sectors and traditional research domains.

## **Health Sector**

### ***Kia Kaha: COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Plan 2020 (Kia Kaha)***

<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/kia-kaha-kia-maia-kia-ora-aotearoa-covid-19-psychosocial-mental-wellbeing-plan-21dec2020-v2.pdf>

The revised Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa: COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Plan (Kia Kaha) provides a framework for actions to support the mental wellbeing of all New Zealanders. Kia Kaha specifically aims to support individuals, whānau and communities to build and sustain mental wellbeing, so that they respond, recover, adapt and thrive in the contexts of COVID-19. The 18-month plan sits within the long-term work to transform New Zealand's approach to mental health and addiction, as laid out in He Ara Oranga: Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction (<https://mentalhealth.inquiry.govt.nz/inquiry-report/he-ara-oranga/>).

The term *mental wellbeing* is the core concept in Kia Kaha. Hence, the framework places strong emphasis on social, cultural and economic foundations of wellbeing, expressed through actions that spread across traditional boundaries, and often take place outside the health sector. The Kia Kaha mental wellbeing framework has a vision of Pae ora (healthy

futures): an equitable and thriving Aotearoa in which mental wellbeing is promoted and protected. Pae ora, a holistic concept, includes the following interconnected elements:

Mauri ora – healthy individuals. Taha tinana (physical health), taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing) and taha hinengaro (mental wellbeing) are important interconnected elements of mauri ora. Protecting our mental wellbeing is essential for all of us, as is equitable access to effective mental wellbeing support when needed.

Whānau ora – healthy families. Whānau are integral to our wellbeing. We all need to belong, to share, to feel cared for, and to have close relationships. This can apply beyond blood-ties, for instance in rainbow communities, where whānau may be interpreted more widely than people with genealogical links.

Wai ora – healthy environments. The communities and wider environments in which we live, learn, work and play need to be safe and support mental wellbeing. All people should be able to easily and equitably access social supports, including education, housing and income support.

Important to our interests, Kia Kaha recognizes that COVID-19 has the potential to exacerbate existing inequitable health, social, educational and economic outcomes for Māori and Pacific children and youth, and other ‘at risk’ youth. It also recognizes that hardships, such as limited access to digital tools and resources, can affect both learning and social connection, and may result in psychological trauma and other negative health and wellbeing outcomes, even though the effects may not be immediately apparent. Therefore, the principles and framework support strengthening *protective factors* around children and youth, to enhance positive outcomes over the course of a lifetime.

Key to the success of the plan is the ability to collect quality data, and to assess the effects of COVID-19 on various populations and communities, better understand emerging

and predicted community needs, evaluate and disseminate evidence of innovative solutions, and make informed decisions on five focus areas:

Focus area 1: Build the social, cultural and economic foundations for mental wellbeing.

This focus area reflects the importance of collaborative efforts that ensure individuals, whānau and communities have the resources they need to recover from COVID-19 experiences, and adapt to a changing world. It emphasizes engagement and the role of supportive environments such as schools that support wellbeing by enabling remote learning for all students, promoting mental wellbeing support, and funding counselling services for educators. Specific actions include implementing the Urgent Response Fund (URF) and Educator Wellbeing initiative described above.

Focus area 2: Foster community-led solutions.

The aim is to build on and strengthen community-led responses to mental wellbeing, particularly initiatives led by community organisations; whānau, hapū and iwi; and tāngata whaiora (people seeking wellness).

Focus area 3: Equip whānau and individuals to look after their mental wellbeing.

Equipping people includes equitable access to evidence-informed self-help tools and educational resources tailored to meet the needs of diverse population groups.

Focus area 4: Expand primary mental health and addiction support in communities.

This focus area takes into account multiple hardships and risk factors, and the impacts on mental wellbeing outcomes, now and in the future. There is a strong emphasis on mitigating negative impacts by expanding community-based services for Māori and Pacific youth.

### Focus area 5: Strengthen specialist services.

Equitable access to specialist services means that services are available, and are tailored to meet the needs of different communities and diverse populations.

Kia Kaha’s mental wellbeing framework is consistent with the Ministry of Health’s (MOH) Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan 2020–2025 and Ola Manuia: Pacific Health and Wellbeing Action Plan 2020–2025. These are described briefly below.

#### *Whakamaua Maori Health Action Plan 2020-2025*

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/whakamaua-maori-health-action-plan-2020-2025>

Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan 2020–2025 outlines the government's approach to achieving Pae ora for Māori, and sets direction for Māori health advancement over the next five years. The plan is strongly aligned with the Government’s wellbeing agenda (described above) and priorities for the health and disability system, which include improving child, mental and general wellbeing, and reducing health inequities and health loss for Maori.

Here we identify two particularly relevant outcomes of the Whakamaua Plan:

1. Māori individuals, whānau, hapū and iwi have access to services that are timely, culturally safe and responsive.
2. Māori providers have access to powerful evidence, insights and data to transform and advance Māori health and wellbeing.

As stated in the Plan: “Whakamaua Maori Health Action Plan is underpinned by a system that collects and uses data, disaggregated by ethnicity and other variables, to understand differences and drive continuous quality improvement to achieve equity.” There is a clear imperative to design research in line with these data requirements.



*Ola Manuia: Pacific Health and wellbeing Action Plan 2020-2025*

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/ola-manuia-pacific-health-and-wellbeing-action-plan-2020-2025>

This plan provides directions for improving Pacific health and wellbeing, and is based on an understanding that equity is an enabler of wellbeing. It therefore aims to achieve equitable health outcomes for Pacific peoples via *rebalancing* approaches and resources to meet different needs.

Importantly, the Ola Manuia plan recognizes that, for Pacific people, health and wellbeing are often strongly tied to financial stability, relationships, social cohesion and a sense of solidarity and belonging. This is seen, for example, in the 2019 report *What Makes a Good Life?*, (a collaboration between the Office of the Children’s Commissioner and Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children) which reported that, for children and young people to be well, their whānau, friends and communities must also be well (<https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>).

The Ministry of Education has made the following commitments to the Ola Manuia: Pacific Health and Wellbeing Action Plan:

1. Increase the proportion of Pacific children starting school who have participated in ECE.
2. Pacific learners participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners in tertiary education.
3. Increase the number of Pacific school leavers with University Entrance to achieve at least parity with non-Pasifika school leavers.
4. Increased number of Pacific students choosing STEM related subjects

Actions toward these outcomes need to be guided by evidence and data that reflects Pacific learners' specific needs, and aspirations that are meaningful to Pacific families and communities. Hence, there is an urgent need to explore opportunities to capture information from families and communities (not only individuals). The plan also points more generally to the importance of ethnic-specific data, including data on the population of people who identify as both Māori and Pacifica.

### **Youth Development Sector -Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi (MYD)**

In Budget 2019, the Government committed an additional \$1.9 billion over four years to broadly address the social determinants of mental wellbeing. A third of this was allocated to portfolios other than Health and Education, including Social Development, Housing and Urban Development, Corrections, Police, Justice, Courts, Defence Force and Internal Affairs. Of particular relevance here is the Youth Plan, which falls within the MYD portfolio.

#### *Youth Plan 2020-2022 Turning Voice into Action - rebuilding and recovering.*

<https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-plan/youth-plan.html>

The Youth Plan works toward the outcomes set out in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (described above), and sets actions for the government to take to understand and respond to the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on young people. The Youth Plan sits alongside and complements a number of other initiatives including the Youth Employment Action Plan (as part of a larger Employment Strategy), and the evolving Oranga Tamariki Action Plan.

A focus of the Youth Plan is to support and strengthen wellbeing, which is seen as more than mental wellbeing, and includes identity, whānau and community. The Youth Plan addresses, for example, social isolation, loneliness, disrupted schooling, lack of access to

devices, data or internet, and increased screen time, and includes an emphasis on research to better understand the impacts on youth, particularly those in four priority groups

1. Rangatahi Māori aged 17-24 years
2. Pacific young people aged 17-24 years
3. Rainbow young people aged 17-24 years
4. Disabled young people aged 17-24 years.

The MYD acknowledges that young people in these populations experience particular disadvantage and marginalisation and, as a result, are likely to experience worse health and wellbeing outcomes. Carefully targeted data collection and analysis will be needed to guide future decisions and actions for each of these groups.

A related focus of the Youth Plan is on creating a safe digital environment for young people. This includes an initiative to develop a public awareness campaign about risks and how to prevent online harm. Additionally, the Youth Plan dovetails with an initiative led by the Department of Internal affairs, aimed at creating a safe digital environment for children and young people. The MYD has also partnered with the Ministries of Health and Education to provide self-help tools, including app and web-based support - to mitigate negative impacts of COVID-19 related uncertainty and change. Evidence of the uptake of these tools and initiatives, and their efficacy within differing populations and communities is needed.

**Updating in April 2022:**

**Ministry of Education 2020 Cabinet approved funding of up to \$2.75 million to support Auckland NCEA students through two lockdowns.**

The fund was to expand existing Te Kura (formerly known as the Correspondence School) services, which is a distance education provider. The additional funding was to provide up to 400 places for disengaged students and student at risk of disengaging to access a term-length version of the Te Kura Big Picture Programme. It also provided additional Te Kura Summer School placements to support students to achieve up to 10 additional credits to gain NCEA accreditation or University Entrance. It also provided up to 3000 additional places allocated by the Ministry of Education for students to participate in targeted Dual Tuition and Summer School. Additional support for NCEA students was also provided through extra NCEA credit recognition, lower requirements for University Entrance and certificate endorsements, and a \$14.5 million urgent Response Fund for the Auckland region, to hire additional staff to support students and provide catch-up tuition.

The expanded Te Kura programme was deemed successful in reaching at risk students, with the students enrolled more likely to live in low socio-economic households and identify as Māori or Pacific. A total of 193 students were enrolled in the programme, filling approximately half of the 400 places set aside. The Te Kura ran a student wellbeing survey for enrolled students. The majority of the students in this TK400 programme extension who completed the survey said they felt they could go on learning when things got tough on occasion or all of the time. Nearly all the students felt safe in their community and thought they could access help if needed. Finally, nearly all students indicated that they felt confident that they could learn, at least some of the time.

The report has a section on lessons learnt from the evaluation of this education provision. These included the value of targeting specific schools to help reach the students with most need, and within that, face-to-face meetings with school leaders and students to reach students most in need.

## **Ministry of Education 2021 ‘Tackling the Digital Divide during COVID-19 lockdown’.**

In June 2021 this new initiative included:

- Connecting digitally, including to excluded homes
- Removing the barriers of devices and connection costs
- Addressing the lack of device supply in a surge
- Providing non-digital learning to increase inclusion
- Working with Māori iwi and community intermediaries to gather information and establish trust
- Shifting towards leadership, guidance and support
- Developing digital policies and skills
- Co-ordinating and accelerating action on digital inclusion

[\(www.digital.govt.nz/showcase/tackling-the-digital-divide-during-covid-19/\)](http://www.digital.govt.nz/showcase/tackling-the-digital-divide-during-covid-19/)

## **Ministry of Education March 2022 Additional funding to support distance learning**

The Ministry announced that it would be committing an additional \$11 million to support distance/hybrid learning in schools through the Omicron peak.

This money could be used in a range of ways, including

- developing teacher resources

- printing and couriering

-continuing access to online learning subscriptions

### **Points to Consider**

Policies and plans described in Section One highlight the New Zealand government's current priorities related to our interest in the impacts of digital life on children and young people. The interrelated plans point toward some specific research questions, outcomes and, in some cases, indicators and data requirements, and the various initiatives can provide direction and possible sources of research funding and partnerships.

What seems most apparent is the complexity and breadth of the key concept of wellbeing. There is an obvious need to expand beyond simple and domain-specific ideas, especially when taking into account *what is most meaningful to different communities*. As can be seen, the governments' plans and initiatives necessarily involve and cross multiple portfolios. In terms of data needs, the complex issues involved in the development of consistent and meaningful indicators of wellbeing for children and youth in different communities will also require cross-disciplinary collaboration - combining strengths and data sources.

Is the time right for cross and interdisciplinary research that is in sync with government (or other) wellbeing initiatives for youth in Aotearoa New Zealand? Are there institutional or other barriers that preclude interdisciplinary research, and if so, how can we work to reduce the obstacles? Are researchers able to extend or reframe current work to align with broad constructs and urgent new questions? At this point, it is unclear if or how researchers can meet the many challenges presented. However efforts are being made, here

in New Zealand and elsewhere, especially in response to urgent questions raised about the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people.

For example, in Section Two we present relevant published literature in the form of a bibliography.

This bibliography has been updated in April 2022, and of note in the more recent research publications are the following:

1. The interdisciplinary/holistic and cross agency reports which have come from bodies such as the reports from the Growing Up in New Zealand Study (2021) and from the Office of the Children's Commissioner (November 2020 and March 2021).

The Growing Up in New Zealand (2021) Part I study: 'Life During Lockdown', relates to health and wellbeing. It reports findings from a Wellbeing survey delivered in May 2020, when the country was under strict lockdown, which was completed by 2,421 children aged 10 – 11, who were part of the longitudinal study. Results were compared to their responses at aged 8. Of the 42% who completed the survey (and there was a response bias evident across socio-demographic groupings, with a lower response rate for Māori, Pacific and Asian children, and children living in rural areas) some of the relevant findings were as follows; There was an increase in the number of children reporting symptoms related to depression, compared to when they were eight years of age, although when compared to European children, there was a decrease in the proportion of Māori and Pacific children with symptoms of depression over this age. Pacific children had significantly lower anxiety scores at the time of the survey, compared to European children. At the time of the survey girls, children who were worried about how much money their family had, and children with two or more wellbeing and developmental concerns (e.g. disabilities or learning challenges) when they were eight, were more likely to have higher depression and anxiety scores.

In its recommendations this report identify a number of mobile and virtual mental health support services available, and see providing equitable access to digital technologies as important as part of the move in making mobile and virtual mental health support services more acceptable and accessible. The report also recommends the investigation of how well online teaching environments met the needs of children who have disabilities or learning challenges, during Alert levels 3 and 4.

The Growing Up in New Zealand Part 2: Education, was based on the same study as part One.

64% reported still feeling connected to their school or kura often or always, and 24% reported an increase in school satisfaction between age 8 and lockdown. Some children enjoyed the flexibility of the distance learning routine, having an increased independence, more free time, and increased self-regulation to their learning during lockdown. On p.28 it is stated 'Many children were using Tik Tok and other apps that are not permitted until they are 13+ years of age, emphasising the need for increased cyber-safety knowledge for children and young people'. Another worrying finding was that there was a 34% increase (since age 8) of children stating that they never or almost never talked about their feelings.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner 'Life in Lockdown: Children and Young People's views on the nation-wide Covid-19 level 3 and 4 lockdowns' (November 2020) noted the critical role of relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, during lockdown. Most of the children and young people responded that their relationships had either improved (46%) or stayed the same (31%) during lockdown. The study looked at wellbeing using the measure 'What makes a good life' and found that, when compared to the 2018 study, there were a greater positive percentage of responses, but a notable decrease in some specific areas such as 'I can cope when things get hard'.



The 'Children's Rights in the Covid-19 Response' by The Children's Convention monitoring group, including the Children's Commissioner, used the above study information to assert 'Many children and young people enjoyed time with loved ones and agency of their time over lockdown' (p. 21).

It is of concern that the report stated 'While online communities are central to maintaining many children and young people's learning support and play through COVID-19, they are also increasing exposure to cyberbullying. Incidents of harm skyrocketed both during and after the COVID-19 lockdowns according to data collected by Netsafe' (p.23).

## 2. Equity and voice issues.

The Report of the Commissioner for Children 'Life in Lockdown (November 2020) was exemplary in its exploring the views of children and young people across a range of ethnicities and other backgrounds including 74 (6%) with a disability, 156 (13%) part of the LGBTQ1+ community, 276 (22%) rural, 66 (5%) refugees, and 45 (4%) 'Oranga Tamariki have a say in where I live'.

The study found that those who identified as Māori or Pacific were much less likely to do school work on line, and instead were more likely to do school work with a package their school sent to them. Weighted responses (for response population bias) showed that access to a device during lockdown was about 63% and 22% indicated that they had to share a device. The report states 'This "digital divide" in access to technology and data existed before COVID-19, but the lock down event heightened awareness of its impacts' (p. 20.)

The document by the Commissioner for Children and other similar agencies making up the Children's Convention Monitoring Group, 'Children's Rights in the COVID-19 Response', focussed on children's rights in general, including safety. It states 'Although the full impact of COVID-19 on child safety is still emerging, home isn't always the safest place to be and it

is likely the lockdown's increased children and young people's exposure to violence' (p. 21.)

They quote Franks 'Covid-19 Family violence spiked after news of level 4 lockdown, new data shows' (2020) (<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300126009/covid19-family-violence-spiked-after-news-of-level-4-lockdown-new-data-shows>)

The report outlines on p.23 ways in which the government agencies can better deliver on children's rights to ensure that children and young people are love, safe and nurtured.

The report also sees investing in mental health and wellbeing as urgent. It states 'Calls and text messages to services such as Lifeline and Youthline increased markedly during lockdowns. The Government's response has included boosted support of mental health services for children, new services in regions, building on existing programmes e.g. Youthline and OUTline, supporting new digital and app-based self help tools, and revision of the national psychosocial and mental wellbeing recovery plan to respond to the impacts of COVID-19.' (p. 38).

The report also identifies concerns in the experiences of children and young people identifying with the LGBTQIA+ community. It states 'For some LGBTQIA+ children and young people the lockdowns posed specific challenges to their rights because they were required to isolate at home with families unsupportive of their identity, with a potential toll on their mental health. Thirty-six percent of LGBTQIA+ young people surveyed by the Ministry of Youth Development's Youth Pulse Check survey stated that they felt unsafe in their bubble at least some of the time' (p.47).

The report also identifies the importance of providing children and young people with information to enable them to have their voices heard and considered, in response to COVID-19 (p. 49). The report states 'Children and young people have unique perspectives and valuable ideas to contribute which can inform policies which may mitigate the negative

effects of COVID-19, improve long-term outcomes, and maintain the gains identified during the pandemic’ (p. 51).

The article ‘Tino Rangatiratanga and Well-being: Māori Self Determination in the Face of Covid-19’ (February 2021) outlines the interdependence of Tino Rangatiratanga and Māori well being. ‘The authors argue that tino rangatiratanga enables positive well-being, and equally, the positive well-being of individuals and communities enables the exercise of tino rangatiratanga’ (p. 1). The issue of a collective voice and wellbeing, while both individuals and groups can express the essence of tikanga relating to expression of tino rangatiratanga, is discussed. Also, ‘Hauora’, the holistic Māori philosophy of health and wellbeing, is explained. Case studies of how Māori responded to COVID-19 are presented, with clear demonstration of the link between tino rangatiratanga and well-being, and how the responses were informed by tikanga Māori. One of these case studies is ‘Online Innovations’.

‘Relationships are central to tino rangatiratanga, in that the basis for both affirming and advocating for rangatiratanga is aimed at collective well-being as opposed to individual well-being. In lieu of face to face interactions, online tools enabled Māori to maintain whanaungatanga [relationships, both familial and non-familial] through the promotion of specifically Māori material’ (p. 8) Examples given include Māori on line webinar series; online karakia [prayer], tangihanga [funeral proceedings], medical and psychological advice, educational resources etc.; and health communication through a new online communication strategy and hashtag #Protectourwhakapapa. The article states ‘Māori values and holistic well-being was the key motivation, as Māori responded to the physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and economic challenges of Covid-19, in a culturally appropriate manner’ (p. 8). The article concludes with recommendations for how Aotearoa can plan for a future that enhances both tino rangatiratanga and well-being.

3. Digital wellbeing, information rights, and learning to think critically. Above are outlined some concerns about children's exposure to harm in the digital environment. The reports by the Commissioner for Children and the Children's Convention Monitoring Group emphasise the right of children to information, and empowerment and voice in relation to that. In an international report released in April 2022 *Unprecedented and Unfinished: COVID-19 and Implications for National and Global Policy*, by the International Science Council, one of the key recommendations is as follows: 'There is a need to address the challenges of disinformation, and to strengthen pluralistic science advice systems to increase trust in science, thereby protecting societies from risks' (p.10). The report also advocates 'elimination of the digital divide in education' (p.10). This is an important international report, from the International Science Council currently chaired by Sir Peter Gluckman.

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