



Te Puni Kōkiri
MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT

Case Study:

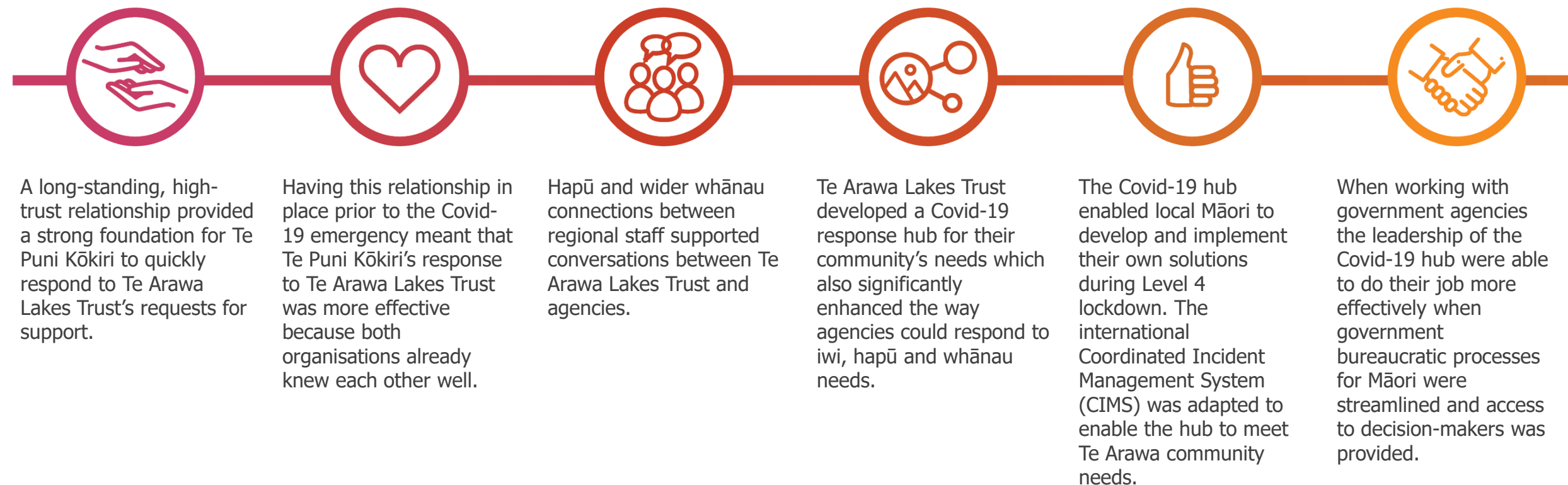
Te Arawa COVID-19 Response Hub – an iwi-led response to COVID-19 in Rotorua

This case study is one in a series highlighting how government agencies are developing good practice in working effectively with and for Māori. They are intended as a resource for government agencies to learn from and strengthen their effectiveness for Māori.

All case studies are available from www.tpk.govt.nz



Why did this relationship work for Māori?



Case study overview

Plans for a Covid-19 Level 4 lockdown across Aotearoa were announced on 23 March 2020. In a meeting of post-settlement governance entities, Te Arawa Lakes Trust, headquartered in Rotorua, put its hand up to form Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub (the hub). It was set up within hours of the Level 4 lockdown being announced.

Whānau wellbeing is vital to Māori. One of the reasons the hub was set up so quickly is because its leadership was aware that Māori are one of the most

at-risk communities affected by a pandemic. After years of steady employment in the tourism industry, some whānau suddenly found themselves without an income, and unable to provide for their families. At least 44 households had no internet and at least 69 Te Arawa lived alone.

The hub¹ supported the needs of participating iwi, hapū and whānau. Alongside hapū representatives, the hub included agencies such as Te Puni Kōkiri, local councils, the District Health Board, civil defence, health and social welfare agencies,

Te Arawa Whānau Ora, local hapū, Māori trusts and settlement organisations. The hub members worked to identify needs, communicate critical information and support whānau within the Te Arawa rohe (territory) with food and other provisions.

A long-standing, high-trust relationship between Te Puni Kōkiri regional office and the hub leadership set the foundation for Te Puni Kōkiri's agile response to the hub's requests for funding and support to set up and maintain operations.

¹ To learn more about the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub, go to the following website: <https://tearawacovid19.nz/>



The leadership from Te Puni Kōkiri was agile responding quickly to identified needs

Te Puni Kōkiri's regional Rotorua office was agile, responsive, and genuinely supportive of the kaupapa of the hub. Based on a high-trust relationship and strong whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships) developed over 30 years, Te Puni Kōkiri's Rotorua office joined the work of the hub and made funding available quickly for the hub's establishment. Te Arawa Lakes Trust also contributed some of its own money to Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub. Iwi representatives would have carried out the hub mahi even without government funding. However, Te Puni Kōkiri's quick response enabled them to mobilise at a faster pace.

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Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub agency official

The vision and aspiration of the hub was a biggie. They were all there for the people. They had good leadership... real clarity around structure. [...] As a Māori organisation, without having it documented there's just a [way of] knowing that we do this this way - with respect, with aroha, manaaki (generosity), tika (appropriateness), pono (integrity) – all of those things that are us.

Strong and trusting relationships are key to effectiveness for Māori

Whakawhanaungatanga between government agencies and Māori organisations is vital for effective relationships for Māori. When an emergency or disaster occurs, strong, high-trust relationships and emergency structures should already be in place to produce good outcomes for iwi, hapū and whānau.

One interviewee involved in Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub said it is important that both government and Māori organisations take responsibility for improving the way in which they work together:

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Kaumātua in the hub

There needs to be a commitment to have a genuine dialogue about how we can serve each other best. [...] To me, I think both of us would be better than one of us doing it better.

Having streamlined and high-trust processes made it easier to engage

One Agency interviewee from the hub's leadership found engaging with agencies was more effective than in usual circumstances because there were fewer bureaucratic barriers. An example is Te Puni Kōkiri regional office providing support to the hub quickly. Part way through lockdown the National Emergency Management Agency changed how requests for assistance were assessed using a higher trust approach. This meant scaled-back scrutiny, reducing application processes to only what was absolutely necessary, making it easier for the hub to respond to iwi, hapū and whānau needs in a timely way. Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub leadership worked long hours to address the needs of over 4000 Te Arawa whānau.² Hub members could do their job more easily when government agencies used high-trust models and enabled easy access to decision-makers. This reduced lengthy process requirements to get support.

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Ngāti Whakaue kaumātua

Trust is just so fundamental in approaches for us as Māori.

² In some cases, the hub also provided support to non-Te Arawa Māori or non-Māori in need.



The way agencies could respond to Māori needs was made more effective by being part of the Covid-19 Response Hub

Agencies found it very helpful that Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub provided a single point of contact to help agencies respond more effectively to local whānau needs.

Learning from Māori experience and knowledge in emergency response is beneficial to everyone.³ Māori have responded to emergencies for many years. Yet some agencies were surprised at the speed and organisation with which Te Arawa Lakes Trust set up Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub.

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In a crisis we're very considered, and we can be quite calm and respond. In a tangi, in 24 hours a whole kitchen can be set up and we can mobilise really fast. We transferred those skills into this [Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub]. Actually, that has been something we have been building for generations.

Hub leadership member

Agencies which were part of the hub's membership also benefited greatly from the hub's understanding of whānau needs. Whānau wellbeing and family connections were of central importance in responding to the Covid-19 lockdown. This included: having warm homes, being able to pay rent/mortgage repayments, receive welfare payments, and access help for people to return to work if they lost their jobs. Effectiveness for Māori at this time also included physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. The hub's leadership understood that some unemployed whānau may feel whakamā (embarrassment) at needing help and would not ask for it. The hub's networks had a higher chance of reaching vulnerable people, than the civil defence system, which relied on people asking for help.

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Karen Vercoe,
Head of Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub



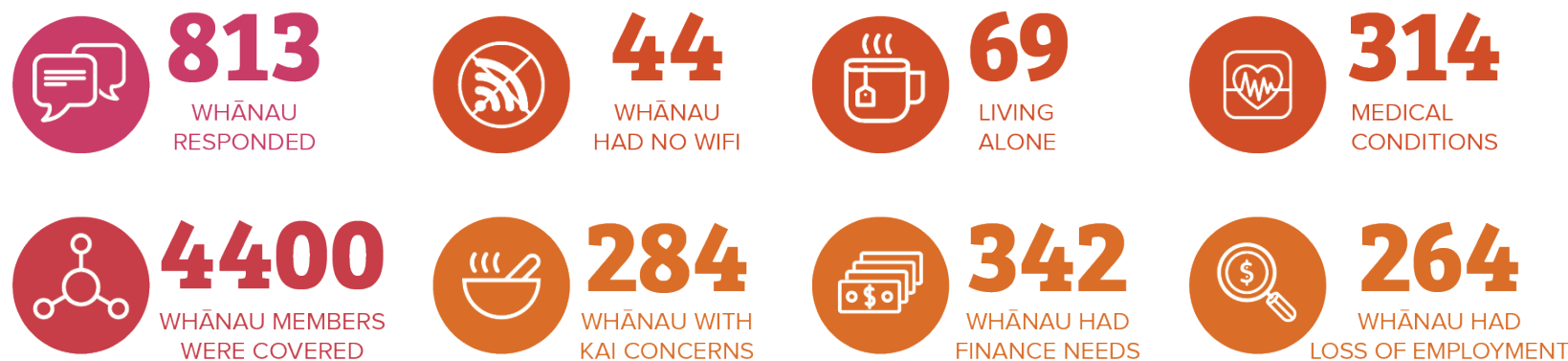
For us it was about the broadest measurement of whānau wellbeing during that time. Also, too, their wairua (spirit). So, a lot of them were really scared and we had to make sure that they knew we were out there...that there was someone who was going to look after them.

³ There is a body of academic research supporting this point. For example, see Lambert, Simon, 'Policy instruments for Indigenous Peoples and Disaster Risk Reduction A Case Study of Māori participation in Disaster and Emergency Management, Aotearoa New Zealand', Technical Report, April 2015. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274375020_Policy_instruments_for_Indigenous_Peoples_and_Disaster_Risk_Reduction_A_Case_Study_of_Maori_participation_in_Disaster_and_Emergency_Management_Aotearoa_New_Zealand).



Mapping Te Arawa whānau needs

The Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub had an intelligence and planning function. A GIS mapping system was created. Key data on the location and needs of whānau was gathered via survey and updated in real time.



Note: Key statistics above are from the hub's data intelligence survey on Te Arawa whānau needs during lockdown.

Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub agencies also benefitted from the hub's data intelligence. The Lakes District Health Board made decisions about where to set up temporary health clinics for influenza vaccinations based on the hub's knowledge of areas with low vaccination rates of Te Arawa whānau. The hub then communicated directly with Te Arawa whānau they knew required vaccinations to encourage them to attend the clinics.

Agency approaches tailored to local, Māori-led solutions are effective for Māori

Agencies can improve the way they work with Māori through better engagement with iwi, hapū and whānau that will have their own knowledge and solutions. Agencies should be open minded and value these solutions, and work with Māori to help determine how these could be appropriately resourced.

A hub leadership member said that initiatives to support Māori work well when agencies really listen: "One of the hardest things when agencies are trying to be responsive is that sometimes we just really need them to listen to what we're asking for, not try to think for us."

Recognising self-determination at the local level is also important. This means understanding that each iwi, hapū and whānau will know what will work best for them. These needs and aspirations can be very diverse across Aotearoa. In future emergency scenarios, better communication between agencies and iwi-led hubs could draw on the iwi-led hubs' understanding of whānau needs resulting in a more targeted and cost-effective response.

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Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub agency official

Government agencies have got so much to learn about iwi models of working and again those four things: leadership, relationships, partnerships and communication. They [the leadership of the Covid-19 Response Hub] had all of those right at the get-go

4 The privacy of information was top of mind for the hub when working with agencies and there were processes in place to protect individual privacy.

Overcoming boundaries – Aunty Phylli gets essential workers informed and certified in a matter of days

Phyllis Tangitu (Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Awa, Ngā Ranginui, Ngāti Haua) is the Pou Manukura Relationships and Engagement for the Lakes District Health Board. During the level four lockdown she held the role of General Manager of Māori Health. She is affectionately referred to as 'Aunty Phylli'.



During lockdown Phyllis Tangitu assisted around 120 iwi-based workers to gain essential worker status. Some of these workers were teachers, scientists, or truck drivers whose work had stopped over lockdown, and they wanted to contribute to the work of the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub. Gaining essential worker status meant they were permitted by police to travel and help carry out the tasks for the hub, such as distributing food. Tangitu created health and safety manuals appropriate for engaging with iwi, hapū and whānau and held online training courses for the essential workers.

When asked about her involvement in the hub Tangitu responded:

“It was just phenomenal - an incredible response. Very humbling to be part of.

The unique situation meant there was no strong hierarchical structure

During the lockdown there were no egos or strong hierarchies within the wider the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub. One interviewee said: “it was really cool to see Māori working like that”. Karen Vercoe, Chief Executive of Te Arawa Lakes Trust led the hub. Her approach was to have very strong coordination, and to lead in a collaborative and enabling, rather than a hierarchical way. “For me it was about bringing the right team together but then allowing those team members to really own that role. They are each a specialist in their own right”. For example, the data and digital response lead for the intelligence arm of the hub drew on people with highly specialised skills which had an influential impact on the hub’s operations (including the way hub agency members were able to carry out their work).

Leading the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub and seeing its impact

Karen Vercoe (Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Māhino) is Chief Executive of Te Arawa Lakes Trust in Rotorua and led the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub.



“We’ve got pictures of whānau crying when they got their kai packs. We’ve got a video of our boys going to do deliveries and then a whole whānau doing a haka to the boys to say, ‘thank you’. Some of our koeke (elderly) were interviewed on mainstream media and they talk about just how lovely it was to be cared for. And we had 1100 kids that we knew were being looked after.

What can agencies do to develop good practices working with Māori?

1 Establish, build, and maintain trusting relationships with Māori organisations relevant to your work as part of your everyday business

Start by finding out which relationships your agency has with iwi, hapū and Māori organisations. Is there a Māori engagement plan? How does your organisation communicate with iwi partners? How does this relate to your work?

In this case study, a long-held and high-trust relationship between the Regional Office of Te Puni Kōkiri and Te Arawa Lakes Trust meant that when an emergency arose, Te Puni Kōkiri Regional Office was able to support Te Arawa Lakes Trust to quickly mobilise in setting up Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub.

2 Work with your agency to identify the skills you need to develop to engage effectively with Māori in your role

Often specialist Māori advisors are put in the position of having to lead and take on full responsibility for this mahi, rather than providing advice on it. This was the case for one of our interviewees in this case study. Similarly, Māori employees are sometimes called upon to provide advice on agency engagement with Māori in a capacity that is beyond their role.⁵

Agencies can improve on this approach by lifting the capability of all staff in engaging with Māori. Te Arawa provides many resources in this area. One of our Māori advisor interviewees noted when the capability of staff across the organisation to engage effectively with Māori is lifted *“then my space becomes everyone’s space.”*

3 Look at your processes for engaging with Māori organisations, including communications, decision-making, and accessing support or funding

In this case study, Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub worked with agencies more effectively when access to decision-makers was made easier, or bureaucratic processes were streamlined. Iwi, hapū, whānau and Māori representatives are often over-burdened and under-resourced (and not just when there is an emergency response occurring).

Consider how your agency is actively promoting Māori well-being outcomes and genuinely operating as a Te Tiriti o Waitangi partner, including through the accessibility of its structures and processes for Māori organisations.

4 When engaging with Māori listen actively and respect the knowledge and skills they may share

In this example, the local district health board was able to draw on the unique knowledge and data intelligence of the Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub to find the best location for influenza vaccination centres for whānau who needed the service.

Rather than approaching Māori organisations with a pre-determined solution, consider the solutions they put forward that are appropriate for their own iwi, hapū and whānau and the place in which they live.

5 Consider the ways in which you can enable and support Māori to determine and achieve their aspirations

Iwi, hapū, whānau and Māori have solutions based on in-depth understanding of their communities. Investing and working with them to increase their capability building, such as data intelligence skills, will lead to better outcomes. In this example, the data intelligence capabilities and mātauranga held within the leadership of the hub were highly beneficial to meeting the outcomes of agencies involved in the hub. In late 2020, the Ministry of Health co-designed a process with Te Arawa Covid-19 Response Hub and the Universities of Waikato and Otago to trial the use of a Covid card in the community of Ngongotahā. The aim was to produce a more equitable contact tracing solution.⁶

In the co-design process Te Arawa Covid-19 Response leadership took the same approach with data and personal information as they did during the level four lockdown response. They ensured there were very strict requirements for its collection and storage. Adequate time was given to develop relationships within the community and the uptake of those involved in the trial was far higher than if the Ministry of Health had not worked as closely with Te Arawa on the approach. Ngāti Whakaue kaumātua Monty Morrison commented on the positive response from whānau in the Ngongotahā community to help trial the card: *“People really understand how important this trial is to help Aotearoa’s fight against COVID-19... Contact tracing is our best defence in locating people who may have been in contact with a positive case. The faster we can track the virus, the quicker we can stop its spread and help protect our whānau.”*⁷

5. Research by Auckland University of Technology Professor Jarrod Haar (Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Mahuta) supports the pervasiveness of Māori taking on the extra burden of explaining Māori culture and how to engage with non-Māori to colleagues.

6. Whaitiri, Delilah, ‘Local Focus: Covid card experiment underway in Ngongotahā’, Herald. 9 November 2020.

7. Te Arawa Press Release, ‘Strong Response to COVID Contact Tracing Card Trial’, Scoop. 4 November 2020.