



Te Ao Mārama Aotearoa

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Te Tāhū Hauora – Health Quality Safety Commission “Window on Disability” report confirms crisis for tāngata whaikaha Māori, but falls short of the action needed.

Te Ao Mārama Aotearoa Trust (TAMA), Aotearoa New Zealand’s national, pan-disability Māori organisation, acknowledges the release of the Te Tāhū Hauora - Health Quality & Safety Commission’s (HQSC) *A Window on Disability* report last week, which exposes preventable deaths and unacceptable inequities across the health system for disabled people, particularly for tāngata whaikaha Māori.

The report confirms what our communities have long known: the system is failing this at-risk population. Disabled people experience poorer access and quality of healthcare throughout their lives and die from treatable conditions at five times the rate of non-disabled people. The situation is even more severe for disabled Māori who are dying from treatable conditions at ten times the rate of non-Māori non-disabled people.

While the report highlights significant inequities, TAMA is deeply concerned that the Crown’s response, in its recommendations, do not match the scale nor urgency of the problem. The HQSC proposes actions focused on improving data collection, which is needed, workforce training, and representation of disabled people in health services. While these steps are important, they are insufficient to address the structural drivers of inequity and fail to provide the guidance necessary to effectively provide a safe health system for all.

“These findings are not new to us, they reflect generations of inequity, exclusion, and systemic neglect,” said Associate Professor Bernadette Huatau Jones, (Ngā Wairiki, Ngāti Apa) who chair’s TAMA’s National Taumata of tāngata whaikaha Māori disabled leaders. *“What is new is the clarity of the data and the clarity of the analysis. Unfortunately, other than a call for stronger data collection, the recommendations miss the opportunity to provide strong change leadership which is critical for effective change.”*

“The report treats inequity as a technical issue which is something that can be fixed with better data and training” Taki Peeke (Ngāti Pāoa) TAMA’s Pou Tāhu

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Deputy Chair said. *“But for tāngata whaikaha Māori, this is about power, colonisation, and the Crown’s ongoing failure to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and provide a health system that is safe and values the lives of Māori.”*

Despite clear evidence of compounded inequities for Māori, the report does not include specific recommendations for tāngata whaikaha Māori, nor does it embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a binding framework for change. *“This omission is critical”* said Peeke. *“Without Māori leadership, Māori community voices and accountability to Te Tiriti, we will continue to see the same outcomes repeated.”*

The Wai 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Inquiry has already established that inequities for Māori are rooted in systemic breaches of Te Tiriti obligations. Any response that does not directly address this reality risks perpetuating harm.

There is growing concern across the sector that reports such as this risk becoming exercises in documentation rather than drivers of transformation. Advocates have already expressed doubt that the findings will translate into meaningful improvements, noting that similar issues have been raised repeatedly over decades without systemic change. Jones commented that *“For our communities, this is not just about data, it is a serious issue with disabled Māori dying from preventable conditions. Whānau are forced to engage with health systems that do not see them, do not hear them, and do not care for them adequately.”*

Te Ao Mārama Aotearoa is calling for immediate, transformative action to address the inequities identified in the report:

1. Māori-led governance and commissioning

- Establish pathways for Māori to lead, design, and deliver disability health services, and collection of data, including control of funding and decision-making.

2. Binding Te Tiriti accountability

- Embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations across the health and disability system, with enforceable accountability mechanisms.

3. Targeted action for tāngata whaikaha Māori

- Set explicit equity targets to reduce preventable mortality and improve access to care for Māori with disabilities.

4. Investment in kaupapa Māori models

- Expand and properly fund kaupapa Māori services that centre on whānau, culture, and holistic wellbeing.

5. Structural accountability and funding reform

- Tie funding to measurable equity outcomes and establish independent monitoring, including Māori oversight.

6. Workforce transformation and leadership

- Move beyond training to ensure Māori and disabled Māori are represented in leadership and decision-making roles.

“A Window on Disability provides further evidence of a system in crisis,” said Associate Professor Jones. “But evidence alone does not save lives. Action does. We cannot allow this report to join the long list of analyses that describe injustice without changing it. Tāngata whaikaha Māori deserve a system that upholds their mana, honours Te Tiriti, and delivers equitable outcomes.”

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The ‘Window on Disability’ Report can be accessed at:

<https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/news/disability-data-gaps/>