

Media release
Public Health Association
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Water safety a significant issue for Northland Māori

Ignorance around water safety continues to put Māori at risk in Northland, Brian Harris from the Northland District Health Board (NDHB) said at the Public Health Association's annual conference in Waitangi today.

"Our research shows that the groups most at risk are Māori under five years, Māori teens and significantly Māori men over fifty," Brian said in his address to the conference.

"This last group includes men with lots of existing maritime knowledge – and a long history of living close to the sea and working with it. So we've had to think really hard about how we reach these groups with preventive messages."

Brian Harris believes that many answers lie in Māori tradition.

"Māori have always been a maritime people. They came to Aotearoa across the oceans from Hawaiki, and were skilled navigators.

"Early Māori communities had inter-generational skills transfer, graduated supervision around water and protocols for hazards and sustainability of kaimoana resources. We can link this tikanga to contemporary water safety issues."

Brian and his colleague, Taane Thomas have fashioned a checklist using traditional Māori knowledge and they use this in workshops with local Māori.

"We've used the word 'wairua' as the basis for a checklist of reminders – things that Māori need to be aware of when they are on or near the sea for work or recreation. It's about developing messages that Māori can connect with at an emotional and spiritual level."

For more information contact PHA conference media advisor Anton Blank on 021 406 031.

Water Safety Checklist

W	Weather check	What's ahead?
A	Ability	Am I capable?
I	Immersion	Am I ready?
R	Respect	"kaua e huria to tuara ki te moana"
U	Unseen dangers	Am I equipped?
A	'Ave a good time	And return safely