



To: the Ministry of Social Development

By e-mail: social_cohesion@msd.govt.nz

Submission: MSD Social Cohesion survey

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to write a submission to in response to the call for feedback on the Social Cohesion strategy.

The Public Health Association of New Zealand (PHA) is a national association with members from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Our organisation's vision is 'Good health for all - health equity in Aotearoa', or 'Hauora mō te katoa – oranga mō te Ao', and our purpose is to advocate for the health of all New Zealanders. To achieve this, we provide a forum for information and debate about public health action in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our organisation includes a wide membership across New Zealand and has a Māori Caucus, a Pacific Caucus and an Asian Caucus. Through these forums our collective public health action aims to improve, promote and protect the health of the whole population through organised events and resources and collaboration with stakeholder partners.

We recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, defining respectful relationships between tāngata whenua and tāngata Tiriti. We are actively committed to supporting te Tiriti o Waitangi articles in policy and legislation.

We actively promote full implementation of related international agreements to which New Zealand is a signatory, including the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), particularly Article 12 The Right to Health, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Social Cohesion

Question 1: Tell us your views on Social Cohesion

The PHA agree with the definitions given of the importance for everyone in our superdiverse communities to feel safe, that they belong, to have fair opportunities, that they have full access to, and have the ability to participate in all aspects of life. We also acknowledge the pre-eminence of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and our bicultural foundation and see no contradictions or reasons for conflict while holding those truths. We agree that for Māori, social cohesion means having a collective sense of identity and belonging (as Māori) which is respected by broader society. Manaakitanga, the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others (including diversity of, ethnicities, cultures, regions, citizenship status, values and beliefs, ages, disabilities, family composition, gender identities and expressions, and sexual orientation) is at the heart of the social cohesion work. We would add however, that inequalities and unfairness stemming from other social categories such as wealth, education, employment or housing status also have considerable potential to contribute to social disconnect.

Question 2: What changes might show us that Aotearoa New Zealand is becoming a more socially cohesive society?

We would have a society that was kinder and more tolerant. People would feel safer and happier rather than vulnerable and anxious. Both individuals and groups would have a greater sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition, and legitimacy. Our sense of identity would be strengthened ironically by harnessing the potential residing in diversity.

While it is important for public sector agencies “to collect the right data to know whether their policies and programmes are working as intended”, careful analysis and use of this data to make timely changes to those policies to address the extreme and growing wealth gaps that are unevenly distributed between the diverse sectors of society is vital. For example, housing inequalities caused by poverty and or unemployment lead to ghettoization – and to a lack of mingling in schools and all other venues and facilities. Lack of personal familiarity with “other” risks perpetuating ignorance, intolerance, and fear. School zoning in particular has an insidious and entrenching impact, where “white flight” can further disadvantage communities with fewer choices.

A closing of the wealth, health, educational attainment, employment, and housing gaps in our society would indicate progress. During COVID-19, we have instead seen many of these gaps widen.

New Zealanders are often well connected to the news and social media from around the world. We are not immune from deliberately orchestrated hatred, division, misinformation, and politicisation. While gaining

strength from legitimate social activism (such as Black Lives Matter) is healthy and a sign of progress, the rise of right-wing extremism is all too visibly detrimental. It will be increasingly important to be aware of (and counter) these internet-based movements – from outright fascism, to misogynistic and sometimes murderous “involuntary celibate” or conspiracy theorists determined to undermine any confidence in authority. Robust, community-led rebuttal of harmful social media would be a good measure of progress?

Question 3: Tell us your views on what works to improve social cohesion

All six key ways look useful – though we would place the priorities in a different order – with reducing discrimination and inequalities and promoting more positive interactions & increasing knowledge about other groups and cultures being our top priorities. “Fostering common values and inclusive social norms” has a more coercive and assimilationist slant than “Knowing about and respecting and valuing others’ values and norms”!

What is missing?

Social cohesion cannot be sustained by market economics or the vagaries of our democratic political system. It needs to be underpinned by a concern for the welfare of others, an active commitment to the common good and a willingness to ask, not just what is good for me, but what is good for all of us.

Researchers from New Zealand have published widely on policy and social interventions to increase social cohesion for decades. [Spoonley](#) (2005) in particular has been instrumental in framing this work, contributing to a similar [MSD framework initiative](#) in 2016, and [updating this post COVID-19](#). (2020)

Missing from the current document being consulted on are the effects of policy around immigration and settlement for new migrants & their families and refugees, both on immigrants and on the settled communities. Migration has historically been used by politicians to undermine social cohesion – with migrants being easy targets for blame for every social ill from the housing crisis to unemployment. Rational debate about policy settings for migration and humanitarian resettlement, while *“ensuring that participation is conducted responsibly, with a spirit of openness and fairness, and is not simply a way of asserting dogmatic claims or scapegoating unpopular groups”* ([Pearce et al 2016](#)) will be vital.

Question 4. Actions and Actors

The PHA strongly supports all the initiatives listed. We particularly commend community-led initiatives that promote an inclusive national identity, e.g. Huarahi Hou; Pathway to Treaty-based Multicultural Communities and Building in opportunities to strengthen social cohesion in existing equity programmes – such as the welfare overhaul, public housing, Oranga Tamariki, health and disability system review, and education system work programme. Balancing priorities between the urgent need to rectify over a century

of the effects of colonisation on tangata whenua, with adequately responding to the more recent changes to the ethnic diversity of more recent migrants is presented as a false dichotomy. Ensuring equity and reducing inequalities and systemic racism in all sectors will contribute to a fairer, more harmonious and healthier society for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grant Berghan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Grant Berghan,
CEO, PHA

References

Spoonley P, Peace R, Butcher A, O'Neill D. Social cohesion: A policy and indicator framework for assessing immigrant and host outcomes. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*. 2005 Mar 24;24(1):85-110.

Peace RM, Spoonley P, Butcher A, Damian Patrick ON. Immigration and social cohesion: Developing an indicator framework for measuring the impact of settlement policies in New Zealand. Ministry of Social Development, Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora; 2016.

Spoonley P, Gluckman P, Bardsley A, McIntosh T, Hunia R, Johal S, Poulton R. He oranga hou: social cohesion in a post COVID-19 world.