

TRANSLATING THE NEW NARRATIVE

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Georgina (Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri, Ngāpuhi) and Cate (Ngāti Tati (Dutch)) are researchers for Wai Research, the research team for Wai-Atamai – here they talk about the place of ‘translational research’ within the West Auckland community.

Background

While there are many definitions of translational research – from the laboratory bench to patients’ clinical trials, to looking for improved health outcomes and behavioural changes across populations – translational research aims to create the biggest difference and best outcomes for people. What that means within the context of Wai Research, the research arm of Wai-Atamai, is that whānau drive the research process. Any research undertaken for whānau needs to meet the needs expressed by them, as opposed to researching what we, as researchers or as an organisation, might view as being important.

The translational research process that we aim for seeks to provide outcomes that directly relate to whānau and community outcomes moving forward. We work collaboratively on this, not just with other teams within Wai-Atamai, but also within the broader organisation of Te Whānau o Waipareira. Ultimately, translational research (or research that ‘translates’ into positive outcomes) addresses different levels: from the government, at the policy and advocacy level, through to services and providers at the frontline who are connecting with whānau, each with the same shared desire to build whānau wellbeing.

This article aims to share our approach to translational research and its place in our community.

Wai Research

Wai Research is a community-based research unit located within Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust – a whanau-centred, indigenous, community-based health and social services provider, founded within the West Auckland community over 30 years ago. Wai Research is based within the Social Innovation Hub – Wai-Atamai. This hub brings together insight, impact and innovation through the Wai Research Team, the Change and Transformation Team and the Strategy and Innovation Team. Alongside these teams are the Brand and Design Team and the Digital and Media Team ‘Edit Lab’, both of which help to bring our mahi to life in creative ways. Each team brings a unique perspective, passion and drive to change outcomes for the community. This is achieved through the incubation of prototypes and models both within the unit and alongside those in our provider networks that have an interest in developing particular initiatives. Through this hub, work is constantly changing and evolving to better meet the needs of our whānau and community.

Best Practice for Hearing Whānau Voices

For Wai Research, hearing the voices of our communities and what is happening with whānau often provides the catalyst for action as researchers and provides an opportunity to scope a particular issue through our own organisation and the wider networks regionally and nationally that we link with.

When carrying out translational research, the voice and needs of whānau are at the centre of everything we do. Hearing the voices of our whānau and the community is of vital importance to our research and provides key stepping stones into the next step of the research process. Ensuring that we gather information on whānau wants and needs is imperative, addressing what they position as their greatest needs, and not what we, as researchers, envisage them needing.



Gathering relevant information for scoping a project is done through a range of avenues. Searching for literature on the proposed topic, scoping what is already out there and where there are gaps that need to be addressed. Collaboration with frontline kaimahi, who experience whānau needs, and kōrero with whānau on a regular basis through their mahi, are important in painting a picture towards gaining knowledge in this area.

Throughout this process, when deemed necessary for the research, an internal steering committee is formed to inform and advise on the project. This is made of people with knowledge in this area, those who can bring lived experience and wisdom to a project.

Following this scoping and initial stakeholder engagement, opportunities may be taken to leverage further networks and supports to raise issues. Through further discussion, opportunities in research can be identified to understand and gather evidence which supports these concerns.

Collating relevant information, literature, and voices of kaimahi, whānau and other community stakeholders builds the knowledge base for research to be carried out, supported by a solid understanding of what is happening in that community.

Approach

There are different types of research that we carry out, depending on the nature of the topic and the outcomes to be achieved. Evaluations are one method that we commonly use to extensively look into and provide recommendations for improvements to current and pilot programmes. Evaluating a programme is important, as it helps to measure the effectiveness of a programme and its alignment with the desired outcomes. Much of our evaluation work to date has involved mainstream service provision within the broad health and disability area or social services, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for whānau Māori. We have also evaluated some programmes provided by Te Whānau o Waipareira.

At Wai Research, we also carry out research – looking for new insights, new information and new ideas relating to a topic of interest. Carrying out a literature review is a common step in the translational research process for Wai Research. Gathering background knowledge and information in the research area helps to provide a solid knowledge base in order to move to the next stage in translating this knowledge into outcomes. Conducting a literature review helps to inform best practice in the research area, giving us a toolkit through examining what other people have found, also helping to compare findings between different research areas. This also means that we know what has already been looked at in-depth, ensuring we do not reinvent the wheel.

Research

After pulling together available information and research, we will decide on a method that best fits the outcomes that we are trying to achieve. The way each research project is shaped will depend on a range of factors such as timing, budget, requirements for the research and intended outcomes.

Before the start of any research project and before we gather data from whānau for a particular purpose, it is important to prepare ourselves for the research through the development of a plan to



guide the research development; to show the expected outcomes of the research; and to ensure a transparent programme of work for stakeholders and other researchers. The plan should include who the stakeholders are, including whānau; the purpose; aims and objectives; key research questions; and the methods and types of research analysis that will be used to answer the research question/s. Sometimes, this will be presented diagrammatically as well, in the form of a logic model demonstrating the expected theory of change for whānau as a result of the service they are receiving or the research being undertaken.

Research tools, such as information sheets for all participants, which include whānau consent forms and questionnaires, must be developed so that all participants understand what the research is about, who will be carrying out the research, how the research will happen, what will happen with the information, how the information will be protected and anonymity maintained if necessary, how they will know what has happened to the research, and their role and rights in the research process.

There are also ethical considerations, so once the plan is agreed and research tools developed, the research or evaluation plan will be submitted for internal and, at times, external ethical consideration. This process asks about all of the elements already discussed regarding preparation, but more importantly, what steps will be taken to engage appropriately with whānau and other participants using known cultural best practice; the use of whānau information and protection mechanisms in place to preserve their information and restrict access; who will be working on the research team and the experience they bring to the team and the research; and how the final research will be disseminated. Within the Waipareira ethics approval process, we are required to discuss how all aspects of 'Te Kauhau Ora' will be addressed as part of our research. We are unable to, and should not, proceed with the research without ethical approval and at a minimum, the approval of the Waipareira ethics committee.

Gathering Data, Analysis and Translation

Once the research is underway, gathered data is assessed and if there are any emergent issues seen as important, these are discussed in the team and reported back to the funders of the research. This may allow them to adjust actions on a timely basis, for example, during the course of an evaluation where it is shown that some service actions are causing harm or significant concerns to whānau. Sometimes, service staff may have already made adjustments, but the process of informing the funder provides further evidence and maintains a strong working relationship, supporting positive whānau outcomes.

Once the research data is gathered, the information or evidence will be analysed for data which answers the original research or evaluation questions and can show achievement, or otherwise, of the expected research outcomes. This part of the process is important from a translational outcomes perspective, because we will look at strategic or high-level policy implications within an organisation or at a ministerial level, or we can consider operational recommendations which the evidence shows could provide better services or new services to produce better outcomes for whānau Māori. The research can also identify other areas or questions for further research. The evidence and findings from the research can then be reported and recommendations made to address translational outcomes.



Dissemination of Data and Presentation of the Final Report

The production of a final report initiates the next step of the translational research process. It is important to inform all the identified research stakeholders of the outcome of the research. A dissemination list is drawn up to ensure the initial stakeholders are included in dissemination. A summary of the research findings will also be prepared for distribution to those that may not want the detail of a full report. The dissemination list should also consider a wider group of stakeholders that may receive the report once the final report has been signed off.

How the research is presented also needs consideration depending on the nature of the research, the funder and the wider opportunities for dissemination shown by the dissemination list and the strategic importance of the topic for Māori.

When there are particular strategic considerations, the research team will produce a publication or a specially printed report to illustrate aspects of the research findings. The latter has been found useful for capturing whānau stories, which can be a powerful way to communicate whānau outcomes, needs and aspirations visually and graphically.

As a research unit, Wai Research sits within the unique setting that is the Innovation Hub. Through this hub, we are able to work together and connect with other teams in the hub, each of which can play an important role in maximising the impact of the research dissemination, going outside the script of traditional research dissemination. We have several different approaches in producing and disseminating our research, not only to the funders, but out into the community and back to whānau.

There are a range of tools available to the research team which include social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, organisational websites, video and photo reporting, along with publications designed and produced through the Innovation Hub's Brand and Design team. This range of methods helps to connect our research with the community on many different levels, to improve access for whānau to our research information. This method makes the research findings available on a timely basis in innovative ways, helping to break down barriers across generations and different settings.



An approach which presents an organisational report of our research is also useful when there are a potential wide range of stakeholders who might be interested in the research but are also involved in producing strategic policies or developing services which impact Māori health and wellbeing.

Publications provide powerful tools to support dissemination of findings at ministerial levels and conferences, both nationally and internationally, to influence current thinking, challenge our research views and attract further interest from research communities.

Overall, these approaches to dissemination allow for discussions and kōrero to occur in different forums and different levels of society leading to a variety of outcomes. Those outcomes might involve improvements in policy which influence funding decisions, but ultimately for Wai Research, in time, better outcomes for whānau.

Mā te rongo ka mōhio – through perception comes awareness

Mā te mōhio ka mārama – through awareness comes understanding

Mā te mārama ka mātau – through understanding comes knowledge

Mā te mātau ka ora – through knowledge comes wellbeing

