

# PATHWAYS TO IMPACT: ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE THROUGH POLICY

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## The Strength of Advocacy

Te Whānau o Waipareira has a long tradition of advocacy. From the very early days, the development of Waipareira was as much a response to the conditions that Urban Māori were facing as they made new, and often precarious, settlements in the city, as it was a way to shape the future of whānau within and beyond West Auckland. For Urban Māori, the personal has long been also the political. The history of Waipareira highlights that throughout the development of what began as a small movement of Māori individuals fighting for their rights as Māori, to what is now a large, pan-tribal multi-sectorial provider of services, with strategic and functional partnerships that reach far beyond West Auckland, advocacy has always gone hand-in-hand with that development.

In 2013 the Waipareira Trust Board strategically embedded advocacy within their new 25-year vision, 'Whānau Future Makers – A 25-year Outlook'<sup>1</sup>, highlighting and strategising the importance of lobbying for whānau wellbeing. The establishment of Wai-Atamai, Waipareira's innovation hub, has taken on the challenge of looking at how advocacy can run across multiple platforms, engaging a myriad of sectors in various ways.

The establishment of Wai Research, Wai-Atamai's research, evaluation and policy unit, has been a major step towards fulfilling the ambitions of the 25-year strategy. The creation of new evidence – the kind of evidence that is useful to West Auckland whānau – was seen not just to fill the existing knowledge gaps and to reclaim rangatiratanga over our own data, but was also the type of knowledge that would support advocacy going forward on an evidentially-based platform. As such, the research done within Te Whānau o Waipareira has been instrumental in providing the springboard from which to plunge into the potential murky waters of what is known as 'Policy'.

### The 'Chicken and the Egg' Dilemma – Who Influences Policy?

Policy, in a New Zealand governmental decision-making context, has been described as having the potential to be "the foundation of effective government decision making. It underpins the performance of the economy and the wellbeing of all New Zealanders."<sup>2</sup>

Policy, as it forms or informs laws and strategies at a governmental level, is thereby a vital mechanism for how New Zealand advances on the very issues that shape whānau wellbeing: from health to education, justice and social systems, to determining the running of government departments and its representatives. For policy to be relevant and intelligent, it has to have a firm relationship to research, in that policy needs to be grounded in evidence.

For us as researchers at Wai-Atamai, what this means is that 'doing policy' – which can be either responding to an existing or an emerging policy – is another form of disseminating whānau research. Tilley et al<sup>3</sup>. remind us that when we think about how to make the most impact with our research, we need to reframe the idea of how we put the research out there to make it meaningful:

*"Think 'engagement' not dissemination. We talk a lot about research 'dissemination', but this is one directional and communication is much broader; it's about engagement and knowledge exchange."*



This is of particular importance as Te Whānau o Waipareira’s commitment to advocacy means making the voice of whānau heard. To bring the voice of whānau to the forefront in advocacy and via research means looking at how policy and research relate to each other. This is very much akin to the ‘chicken and the egg’ question, and has created some substantial debate within research. In terms of research versus policy impact, there are four distinct theories of how these two relate to each other:<sup>4</sup>

- The first theory offers a ‘supply’ model of research-policy relations, **focusing on how knowledge and ideas shape policy:**



- The second theory points out that research is not independent of politics and policy, and proposes that **political power shapes knowledge:**



- The third theory suggests that research knowledge and policy/politics are **linked through a mutually reinforcing relationship:**



- The fourth theory goes a step further, and declares that there is no causality of one or the other – instead **the two systems pick up only selective outputs or ideas from one another:**



When looking at the competing theories of influence and impact, it is possible to see value in each of those models. The relationship between the spheres of influence is obviously a complex one, and it is beyond the scope of this article to argue for one over the other, but to say that the main point of the influence debate highlights that research and policy are intertwined.

What is of interest here, is that when we look at how to influence decision making ‘from-the-ground-up’ we can see that innovating around the different models is crucial. Without innovation – meaning being able to ‘get the message out’ in new, noticeable ways (which is done throughout Wai-Atamai’s various teams) – we run the risk of not being heard, not having whānau voices as part of the narratives that come across decision-makers’ desks. With the advent of the 2017 elected Labour Government’s focus on re-examining issues and policy across the board, the Wai-Atamai policy team has had various opportunities to be part of re-writing those narratives.



## Bringing Whānau Voices to Policy Makers

Bringing about sustainable and lasting positive change has called for exploring all avenues to influence change. This implies innovation shepherded to develop expertise and knowledge of local contexts; to facilitate debate and discussions between key stakeholders; and to engage and foster bottom-up approaches, leveraging the voices of whānau and community to influence reforms. Wai Research is unique in its position – operating in an environment where leaders, policy makers and whānau intersect. It works at the interface between knowledge, policy and practice to influence change and impact.

Locally rooted and well-networked, Wai Research is well placed not only to conduct rigorous and critical research to fill the knowledge gaps, but also to advocate and influence change with research-informed policy. The meaning of ‘translational research’ has been covered by other articles in this journal, but for the purpose of engaging in policy reform, the team utilises the following strategies:

1. *Communication and dissemination* – informing government, policy makers and community on key issues to stir public debates.
2. *Engagement in policy process* – being a part of the complex system and processing and shaping change in policy.
3. *Direct advocacy* – advocating for implementation of specific measures and/or proposals to subsequently be adopted by the authority (local councils, government).
4. *Influence with new ideas* – bringing to the table innovative, creative and/or tailored solutions and ideas to reframe approaches and outlook to issues.
5. *Monitor and evaluate* – hold government, local bodies or other institutions accountable by monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes and policies.

With the recent changing of the political landscape, advocacy has meant focusing on ‘filling the gaps’ of traditional policy processes, where – more often than not – Māori voices have been silenced.

Here are some examples of how Wai-Atamai, through its research evidence and innovative focus on advocacy, has proactively participated in bringing whānau voices to governmental agendas:

### ***Child Poverty Reduction Bill***

Wai-Atamai’s policy team drew on research done by Wai Research around whānau poverty and debt to inform the Child Poverty Reduction Bill and Child Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Working with the Child Wellbeing Unit, whānau experiences were taken into account to reaffirm Crown obligations to the Treaty of Waitangi to ensure the inclusion and consideration of wellbeing of Māori children and their whānau, who are often subject to more complex and adverse factors over period/s of time as compared to others.



### ***Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historic Abuse in State Care***

The Wai-Atamai policy team were instrumental in informing the Royal Commission of Inquiry into historic abuse in state care, headed by Sir Anand Satyanand. Through written submission and through kanohi-ki-te-kanohi (face-to-face) meetings, research around whānau needs and experiences formed the basis on which to assert consideration of Māori-specific issues within the inquiry process.

### ***National Mental Health Inquiry***

Wai Research's robust evidence outlining the experiences and systems in place for whānau facing mental health problems was shared and put on the table at the National Mental Health Inquiry. The research showcased the on-the-ground reality of the national issue and has been key to designing and informing new models of practice and programmes along with objective research towards Māori mental health. This policy work also trickled down to inform regional and community practices and models.

### ***Government Living Standards Framework***

A Māori wellbeing framework has been advocated to be recognised and synchronised with the Government Living Standards Framework, supporting the New Zealand Treasury vision to promote higher living standards for all New Zealanders. The current government framework fails to reflect the status of Māori as the indigenous population of New Zealand and as partners of the Treaty of Waitangi.

### ***Reform of the State Sector Act***

Recommendations were made to the Reform the State Sector Act, reflecting the interests and experiences of the community. An equitable and outcomes-focussed lens, with considerations to Māori participation and service delivery, were among the significant recommendations put forward to the reform of the Act.

### ***Whānau at the Centre***

The raison d'être for a Social Innovation Hub is to serve as an important catalyst for ideas and action for the community. By using our own evidence from our research team, and through the strategic efforts of the policy team, we have been able to actively engage in the type of political, policy-based mechanisms from which communities – and Māori communities in particular – are so often excluded.

By being able to identify and capture underlying issues, stimulating public debate, bringing whānau voices to the table, broker ideas and offer creative yet practical and local solutions to tackle problems, we have been able to make a connection between research and policy. Reliant as they are on each other, and when evidence comes from the-ground-up, the relationship is not mutually exclusive, but self-reinforcing. Without good evidence we will not have good policy – and without engaging from the private to public, from community to government, we will not have positive change for Māori.



The research, policy and advocacy strategies undertaken by Wai-Atamai present an inclusive and innovative platform and a guide – from a Māori world view – for collecting, analysing and using data for whānau wellbeing – whānau are at the centre. This sets an example of the array of efforts at multiple levels to influence change via research and policy for all Māori.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> [https://www.waipareira.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/W12.Te\\_Whanau\\_O\\_Waipareira\\_Trust\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2013.pdf](https://www.waipareira.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/W12.Te_Whanau_O_Waipareira_Trust_Strategic_Plan_2013.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project>
- <sup>3</sup> Research Excellence Framework (REF) impact toolkit Helen Tilley, Louise Ball, Caroline Cassidy  
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- <sup>4</sup> Rethinking policy ‘impact’: four models of research policy relations  
Christina Boswell<sup>1</sup> & Katherine Smith

