

TREATY PRINCIPLES BILL

SUBMISSION FROM THE WISE GROUP

SUMMARY

- › The Wise Group strongly opposes the Treaty Principles Bill and does not support a referendum.
- › Our concerns centre on the significant negative outcomes this bill will generate for vulnerable populations; that it will breach Te Tiriti and undermine tino rangatiratanga and Māori rights; and the increased division it continues to generate at a time when Aotearoa needs kotahitanga more than ever.
- › We recommend the Government abandons the Treaty Principles Bill and focuses on honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a unifier for Aotearoa, and key to ensuring everyone has what they need to thrive.

The Wise Group: Working to improve lives every day, everywhere

The Wise Group is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest non-government organisations providing mental health, addiction and wellbeing services nationwide. The Group is in its 35th year of working with Government, multiple agencies, systems and funding arrangements to support the delivery of positive outcomes for vulnerable populations across Aotearoa through our entities and services (*Appendix: Wise Group org chart*). Every day, over 15,000 people are supported by Wise Group frontline services.

A thought leader in the sector, the Wise Group works to create new opportunities for the wellbeing of people, vulnerable populations, organisations and communities. Everything we do is evidence-backed and data-informed – in a complex sector, we know what works. The reach we have in regions and communities means the Wise Group is uniquely placed to offer valuable insights and perspectives on legislative changes and government strategies for meaningful impact and improved outcomes. Our focus is always on achieving the best outcomes for all New Zealanders.

General position

The Wise Group firmly opposes the Treaty Principles Bill.

We believe Te Tiriti is a strong foundation for unifying all people of Aotearoa, while recognising our nation's unique history with Māori as tāngata whenua. It is also an important part of the work the Wise Group does to create new opportunities for the wellbeing of people, vulnerable populations, organisations and communities. We have seen the benefits to kaimahi and tāngata whai ora of embedding Te Tiriti in our thinking and planning and we will continue to do so in order to provide effective services that successfully support all New Zealanders. We don't want to go backwards.

The Treaty Principles Bill risks increasing systemic inequities that so many people and organisations in the health, housing and social sectors have been working to remove. To say we are all the same fails to recognise that the drivers and outcomes of inequity are not the same for different groups of New Zealanders – we don't all start from a level playing field.

Where Te Tiriti and equity bring kotahitanga / unity, this bill creates division. It has been drafted with little to no consultation with Māori and removes the right of tino rangatiratanga agreed to in Article 2 of Te Tiriti. The legal status and rights of Māori as tāngata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa, needs to be protected.

Concerns

We have a responsibility to address the poorer outcomes experienced by people and communities in Aotearoa, making sure no one is left behind.

Māori are already disproportionately represented in nearly every negative social and economic statistic in Aotearoa. The latest Statistics NZ information release on severe housing deprivation (homelessness)¹ shows Māori continue to be affected by severe housing deprivation, and this had increased from 2018. Across Wise Group frontline mental health, addiction and housing services, Māori make up 31 per cent of people supported (LinkPeople, Pathways, Real, The People's Project and Workwise, 2023). In our housing and homelessness services, the number is higher, with Māori making up nearly half of the people supported in 2023.²

The redefined principles in the Treaty Principles Bill would undermine existing Māori rights and limit Crown obligations, resulting in even more barriers for Māori needing to access health, housing and social services. It would also prevent the use of data-led, targeted approaches to address the glaring inequities that already exist in these areas. Acting in ways that are fair and right matters, and we can do this by addressing equity, guided by Te Tiriti, to move forward together and truly ensure everybody in Aotearoa can thrive.

Tino rangatiratanga upholds the authority and status of Māori as tāngata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa. It is essential that this is protected. The Treaty Principles Bill has been drafted with little to no meaningful consultation with Māori and undermines the rights of tāngata whenua, removing tino rangatiratanga. This is a breach of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to self-determination, to culture, identity and language.

When we support each other and stand together, everyone benefits. By discussing, understanding and acknowledging our nation's unique history with Māori as tāngata whenua, and our changing demographic population, it's possible to accept and honour our country's past and look to the future. Development of the Treaty Principles Bill has generated ill-informed debate and caused division across Aotearoa. Any discussion about the principles of Te Tiriti needs wide, meaningful debate in a way that upholds the mana of Te Tiriti and involves both Tiriti partners from the start.

Instead of a divisive bill that causes harm, we have the opportunity to embed Te Tiriti in a way that unifies Aotearoa, bringing us together to take a long-term view to the future and better outcomes for our tamariki and mokopuna.

Recommendations

To flourish as a nation we need Government to honour Te Tiriti and the partnership agreement, address historical inequities and support all communities.

The Treaty Principles Bill should not be progressed and no referendum should be held. It distracts us from the real issues facing New Zealanders struggling with the cost of living, health system challenges and lack of housing.

We call on the Government to respect and uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and in doing so protect the status and rights of Māori as tāngata whenua. Recognise Te Tiriti as the strong foundation we need to unify Aotearoa, addressing inequities and ensuring everyone has what they need to thrive.

[1] [2023 Census severe housing deprivation \(homelessness\) estimates | Stats NZ](#)

[2] Wise Group data: 46% of whānau supported by LinkPeople in 2023 were Māori; 53% of whānau supported by The People Project in 2023 were Māori.

Appendix: Wise Group organisational chart



Entities within the Wise Group provide a range of services and resources across Aotearoa New Zealand:

- › Mental health, addiction and wellbeing services
- › Employment support
- › Education and training
- › Workforce development
- › Housing and homelessness services
- › Violence prevention
- › Research and data insights
- › Information services and software development
- › Community wellbeing initiatives
- › Business support
- › Specialist dementia care