

Media Release

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Supreme award for once-in-a-generation mental health service

An innovative programme that is improving the mental wellbeing of thousands of people every day, has just been presented with a prestigious Australasian award.

Tū Whakaruruhau – Auckland Wellbeing Collaborative is the integrated mental health and addictions programme funded and supported by Te Whatu Ora in partnership with primary health and social service NGOs from across the Auckland region.

The initiative provides immediate advice, support and care for people who present at participating general practices seeking help for psychological distress and behavioural health issues. There is a particular focus on meeting unmet need for youth, Māori and Pacific peoples.

Tū Whakaruruhau – which means to stand and shelter – operates in more than 85 general practices (GPs) across the Auckland region that serve a population of over 750,000 people.

So far, it has supported over 72,000 patients with over 308,000 sessions delivered by the more than 150 practitioners operating within primary care.

Tū Whakaruruhau has been acknowledged with TheMHS Medal during TheMHS Learning Network’s Mental Health Service Awards of Australia and New Zealand. This medal is only awarded periodically for exceptional entries.



Dr Ainsleigh Cribb-Su'a accepting TheMHS Medal

Judges say the programme’s contribution to the mental health sector in New Zealand represents the most significant change to primary care-based mental health and addiction service delivery in a generation. They also recognised that easy access to early intervention provided by Tū Whakaruruhau has made a significant change to the mental health outcomes of a significant number of people.

“These are people who might have otherwise slipped through the cracks,” says Tim Wood, Acting Executive Director Commissioning and Community Services at Te Whatu Ora – Waitematā and chair of the Tū Whakaruruhau leadership board. “New Zealand’s mental health system is struggling

to meet the needs of people with diagnosed serious mental illnesses. And the system does not cater for those who do not meet that threshold. Tū Whakaruruhau is making significant progress in addressing this gap in Tāmaki Makaurau.”

Mr Wood says Tū Whakaruruhau embraces an entirely new and integrated primary mental health and addiction approach bringing together the Awhi Ora and Te Tumu Waiora programmes with liaison services from the specialist teams.

“The model involves three workforce roles – Health Improvement Practitioners (HIPs), Health Coaches and Awhi Ora support workers – and these people are now embedded within participating primary care teams and communities,” he says.

“HIPs use talking therapies in brief and targeted sessions which are client and whānau driven. There are no drawn-out referral processes through to specialist services, no referral criteria and no paperwork – just a simple, warm handover from the GP, practise nurse or even the receptionist to the HIP. They also accept walk-ins and this service is free.”

“Health Coaches often have lived-experience of managing well with a long-term health issue and often there is cultural alignment to the clinic population. They support people with health issues to increase their health literacy and understanding, and identify and work on goals to improve wellbeing.

“Awhi Ora workers provide ‘walk alongside support,’ advocacy and service navigation. They provide practical support with issues that are contributing to stress and difficulties such as accessing financial entitlements, employment and housing.”

Dr Ainsleigh Cribb-Su’a, Programme Director for Tū Whakaruruhau accepted the award at the ceremony in Sydney and says the service’s “real and lasting impact” cannot be underestimated.

“Being able to provide immediate support to people in distress has meant that for practices where Tū Whakaruruhau practitioners are in place, we are seeing a reduction in unplanned GP visits for patients experiencing distress, while also seeing an increase in planned healthcare activities such as immunisations, pregnancy care and long-term condition care.”

The award recognised the innovative nature of the programme, as well as a range of positive indicators across patient satisfaction of the service, wellbeing outcomes and access to other wellbeing services.

“Although it is early days in the roll out of this programme our Tū Whakaruruhau practitioners are working with whānau to positively and proactively respond to the unmet mental and wellbeing needs of whānau,” says Dr Cribb-Su’a.

The Mental Health Service Awards recognise innovation, research excellence, best practice and lived experience leadership in mental health services.

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Media contact:

Media Line: 09 487 1276