



Submission on Social Cohesion Consultation

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Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono

About Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono

1. Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono is a project that seeks to bring a cross-sector approach to increasing belonging and inclusion within our society. As part of this work, we travelled to 46 towns and cities across Aotearoa, talking to them about their feelings of belonging. Details of those conversations can be found at <https://inclusiveaotearoa.nz/belonging/>. Participants spoke of [discrimination](#) as well as [racism, bigotry and xenophobia](#) as stopping them from feeling like they belong in Aotearoa. Some spoke about [Islamophobia](#). We have a database of over 15,000 pieces of analysed qualitative data sitting behind the material on our website that can inform policy makers about the experiences of a broad cross-section of society here.

1. What does social cohesion mean to you and what would Aotearoa New Zealand look like if social cohesion was improved?

1a. *What's important to you in achieving social cohesion?*

2. We believe that to have integrity in continually working toward social cohesion, several aspects need to be part of any strategy. Social cohesion policies must recognise that wellbeing, inclusion and participation is affected by power and wealth inequalities and access to opportunities. A society with high levels of inequality across education, healthcare and meaningful employment will struggle to realise social cohesion.
3. For Aotearoa, social cohesion must prioritise the differing needs, expectations, and aspirations of the many groups and individuals who live here, particularly those who have struggled to access equitable opportunities across the previously mentioned areas. To truly work towards social cohesion, the government must start implementing fundamental change in designing an Aotearoa that meets the different needs of our diverse population, not just the needs of the majority.
4. We believe that social cohesion must start with the government doing internal work. Through our conversations with New Zealanders across the country last year, we heard many stories of

people negatively impacted by government policies and staff in the wider public sector. These experiences were across the sectors of health, education, income support and housing. Government policies and programmes can significantly reduce social cohesion for the people they are designed to support. Public servants also shared difficult experiences in their workplaces due to their colleagues or the systems within the wider public sector.

5. We contend that social cohesion programmes will not work in the community if it is not also undertaken within central and local government. The public sector should model the kind of social cohesion it wants to see in society. Doing so will achieve many of the objectives sought by social cohesion programmes.

1b. Does the definition of social cohesion resonate with you?

If so, tell us more about what each of the outcomes (belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, legitimacy) means for you and what Aotearoa New Zealand might look like if these outcomes were achieved. If not, tell us why not and what you would change about the definition.

6. We believe that the definition of social cohesion needs to be more expansive. As referred to in our last answer, inequalities across power and wealth, accessibility for differing abilities, meaningful employment opportunities, education, and healthcare are all crucial to having integrity in social cohesion. However, there must be an appetite for fundamental structural and systemic change to work towards equity in these areas.
7. Therefore, the definition should expand to name accessibility, wealth and control of resources, cultural power-sharing, and acknowledge that a socially cohesive society is willing to enable structural and systemic changes necessary to continually be socially cohesive. Accessibility, for example, includes promoting equitable opportunities and catering to the needs of disabled people, neurodiverse people, people with limited or no English language and accessibility to nature; green and blue spaces.
8. Power-sharing relates to the ability to make decisions at leadership levels, set policies, develop institutions, set rules and regulations, and influence culture. The starting place for examining power-sharing is Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and we also refer to the excellent Mātike Mai report by Dr Moana Jackson. Definitions of social cohesion for Aotearoa New Zealand must explicitly include power-sharing with tangata whenua, as well as recognising the disparities and inequities that sit within the Crown side of Te Tiriti partnership.
9. Wealth inequality is more than solely income (currently listed under inclusion) and would be a more adequate measure of inclusion. Poverty in Aotearoa is relative and is also measured compared to others across the country, and hence includes aspects like access to appropriate education and healthcare, natural resources, clean air and healthy housing.
10. Finally, the definition should include equality in deciding the values and assumptions behind social cohesion. We recognise that Aotearoa has been dominated by its largest population group of New Zealanders of European heritage. This has resulted in mainly monocultural institutions and policies. The definition of social cohesion must also acknowledge that no one culture should dominate the values and assumptions of another.

2. How will we know if we are making progress? What does success look like?

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

11. We expect signs that Aotearoa is becoming a more socially cohesive society would be seen across a range of measures. Some would be decreasing suicide rates, reduced needs for emergency mental health support, less wealth and income inequality and decreasing rates of children experiencing poverty.
12. We also expect more positive statistics across various wellbeing measures for life satisfaction, such as finances, health (including equitable increases in life expectancy, reduction in the prevalence of poverty-related illnesses), housing (including higher levels of homeownership, rent being a lesser percentage of median income; reduced homelessness), human rights and relationships.
13. We expect that New Zealanders would be happier in their workplaces, leading to increased productivity, and would feel safer in their communities, leading to more trust in police and governance institutions. There would be equitable achievement of students at school, regardless of parents' wealth or which neighbourhood they live in.
14. We also expect that crime rates would lessen, and drug and addiction issues would decrease. When people feel like they belong, have access to opportunities, and have a place in society, there is less need to resort to artificial highs or criminal activities to gain wealth and power.
15. As well as general crime rates, we would particularly see reductions in hate crimes, not because people are afraid to report or there are not enough Police staff to deal with complaints, but because actual crime levels had decreased. There would be similar reductions in family and sexual violence.
16. We currently know vast amounts of government money go towards emergency measures such as mental health services, the criminal justice system, residential care services, and emergency housing. In summary, a more socially cohesive society would mean more resources could be directed toward New Zealanders' wellbeing, rather than going into measures that are, in effect, the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff.

2b. What would success look like?

17. Building on the signals of a more socially cohesive society outlined in the last answer, success would mean fundamental change across several parts of society. For NGOs, media, government and business, it would mean alignment with Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the default. This would result in redesigning how things are run, creating equitable spaces for all to participate, be visible and heard, and people-focused policies with wellbeing as the outcome rather than profit or growth.
18. Socially cohesive organisations across sectors would be flexible, innovative and responsive to the different needs of all communities, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. A socially cohesive Aotearoa would focus on equitably resourcing wellbeing infrastructure in areas with

underinvestment and resourcing community groups that service religious and cultural minorities and disabilities.

19. New Zealand's education system would be different; the curricula, resources, leadership and high quality of teaching would be accessible for all young people in Aotearoa. By the end of secondary education, young people would understand discrimination and systemic injustice. Students would be taught key issues around experiences of different communities of Aotearoa and have developed the skills to negotiate complex environments where people have differing needs and outcomes. They would also have the skills to respect themselves and others and resolve conflict non-violently. Teachers would be deliberately supported with professional development to do their own inner work to ensure this happens.
20. Communities would have the ability to shape solutions locally that suited their needs. They would be resourced to make decisions and implement solutions. Individuals would have adequate leisure time to spend with whanau and friends and to participate in civic life. This means reasonable and stable working hours and conditions, with enough pay, that people would not need to work two or three jobs to fulfil basic needs.

3. We have done a review of the research about what works to strengthen social cohesion – this is summarised as the six ways of building social cohesion. We are keen to know whether these six ways look right to you and whether there are other things that might work.

3a. Do the six ways look right to you?

21. While none of these six points are wrong, they fail to address systemic issues that result in barriers to a more socially cohesive Aotearoa. For example, we believe that an Aotearoa grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, not only in verbal commitment but more importantly in practice, would foster a more socially cohesive society. This would mean law, policies and requirements to uphold Te Tiriti in all parts of society. Furthermore, reducing inequality by improving opportunities for people and providing support and resources does not necessarily change the source of disparities and fails to consider equity. To work towards more social cohesion, there must also be an assessment of government policies, programmes, structures, and practices to measure their impact on social cohesion.
22. While focusing on fostering shared values and inclusive social norms is positive, we don't believe that a focus on national identity is a helpful metric in that national identity is too closely embedded in xenophobic and extremist nationalist ideologies. Instead, a focus on individuals, communities and countries as global citizens with broader responsibilities will have a much more positive impact on social cohesion.
23. Social cohesion cannot be achieved through silencing disagreement between groups or communities. Rather, it arises from dialogue that seeks to understand, appreciate and value other perspectives, even when we disagree with them. It also requires that individuals and communities see differing approaches, solutions or resourcing for different communities as

equitable and for the benefit of all, rather than fostering an attitude of resentment towards a group that is perceived as receiving something more. This requires a deeper understanding of equity and differing needs and values.

24. Social cohesion also requires recognising privilege and the ways that some individuals have benefitted from advantages due to structural, historic and cultural circumstances. With that recognition must come the willingness to step aside and make space for people who haven't had those advantages. This is the essence of equity and power-sharing.

3b. Which of the six ways are the most important to you? Why?

25. We wonder whether this is the right question because all six are critical, interconnected components if we take a systems perspective. You cannot achieve one without the others. For example, fostering common values and inclusive social norms are integral to encouraging and facilitating positive interactions between people. Tackling harms to inclusion, including prejudice, discrimination, and other harmful behaviours and supporting people to have the knowledge and skills they need to participate are integral to helping people to have a voice and feel heard.
26. Instead of prioritising one over the others, the focus needs to be on the "how" and maximising effort to outcome. Could one strategy enable all six areas to be working concurrently but also together? Could the resourcing of these areas be non-competitive as they are designed to achieve the same overarching goal? We implore the government to look beyond creating specialist and policy silos and use a systems approach to see the interconnectedness between any given ways to work towards social cohesion.

3c. What else is important for building social cohesion?

27. The MSD report is written from a particular cultural perspective that hasn't challenged any societal norms; it is not bold or innovative. If the government is not prepared to be bold and innovative, then it will not be able to empower communities and individuals to make the changes that are necessary to break down the current barriers to social cohesion.
28. We note that research is conducted within cultural contexts and using a set of cultural values and assumptions. Particularly with social research, conscious or unconscious bias can be built into definitions, research questions, the choice of methodology, the selection of variables to be tested, the collection of data, and the interpretation of results. A recent example of bias is the letter to the Listener by seven academics, but it has also been seen in complaints of racism at the University of Waikato. Building diversity within research institutions is crucial to social cohesion, making space for indigenous paradigms and other approaches to seeking knowledge and insights. This will improve the body of knowledge that informs social cohesion policies and programmes.
29. This work requires a willingness to challenge base assumptions and values. Many of our assumptions around the economy, notions of productivity and efficiency, are born out of the industrial revolution and are no longer appropriate to current societal needs. Social cohesion needs to incorporate different notions of work, including hours of work and ways of working. For example, working hard, as a value, can be counterproductive, especially when it negatively impacts health and wellbeing, reduces necessary leisure and personal relationship time, and creates resentment against those who are perceived as not working hard enough.

30. The MSD report does not challenge any of these basic assumptions or values. Social cohesion necessarily requires exploration and acceptance of vastly different paradigms and belief systems, and this approach needs to be embedded from the very beginning of this work. That can only happen when social cohesion programmes are first conducted within and on the public service.

4. What actions should government take or support to build better social cohesion, and who could be involved in the work?

4a. Looking at the types of actions underway, which ones do you think are the most important to progress?

31. The actions listed lack the boldness mentioned in our answer to question 3c. We need to begin with constitutional transformation, as the Westminster system is based on division and conflict, with the purpose of rigorously testing ideas. Ideas can be tested equally rigorously under less divisive paradigms, and incentives can be built into political systems that reward innovation and flexibility, and do not strongly punish trial initiatives that failed to achieve outcomes. Rather, the latter should be used to increase learning and to further shape new innovative actions.
32. Our conversations with communities show support for measures such as the teaching of the history of Aotearoa, creating opportunities for communities to come together to build understanding, reducing poverty and inequality, and building diversity in leadership. We strongly recommend that state agencies engage with the data provided from the conversations held with a wide range of New Zealanders across all sectors of society.
33. We note that building diversity within the public sector is not enough in itself. Staff from diverse communities need to have the power and ability to make structural changes and to fundamentally challenge and change assumptions and values.

4b. Is there other work that government is not doing that you think is a high priority for strengthening social cohesion?

34. The Minister notes in her introduction the need to bring together the efforts of individuals, communities and organisations across multiple sectors and multiple levels (from grassroots to policy). A critical evaluation of how the government is both enabling and getting in the way of collective action would be a starting point. The intent would be to identify and resource activities that would elevate the voices of communities and more actively engage civil society, local government, and the private sector.
35. Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono is currently working to build belonging and inclusion through the development of cross-sector networks which will take action for social change. The government can support this work by providing resourcing to the networks (or constellations) while allowing the networks to set the agenda and implement solutions. We strongly recommend that the government establish a relationship with IACT to ensure that the work being done in communities is complementary with the work planned and implemented by government.

Concluding Comments

36. We appreciate the opportunity to submit on this topic, and are pleased to see that the government is putting significant resourcing and planning in this area. This is long overdue, and is work that is crucial to the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.
37. One final comment we would make is that we strongly believe that government and the public service should use a co-design model featuring human-centred design, and that the co-design process should be run with community involvement. For this to happen adequately, community members must be resourced to enable fair and full participation, and all accessibility needs should be taken into account. The lived experience of communities is vital to this work, and more than this, successful community focused programmes must involve those communities in design and implementation.
38. Social cohesion work done within the public sector would also benefit from co-design with communities. This is because communities interact with government in a variety of ways – they may use a range of government services (such as health and education), rely on government for financial support, interact with government institutions through law enforcement, justice or corrections, or be impacted directly or indirectly by government decisions (such as infrastructure spending or taxation laws). All of this experience is vital in developing social cohesion programmes focused on the public sector.