Mental Wellbeing Mindsets

People thrive when they are physically, socially, and mentally well. And mental illness does not occur in a vacuum – it is affected by a range of factors.

Thinking big

Anxiety or depression – common mental illnesses – occur in a context and are often emotional responses to pressures impacting on people's lives, work and leisure experiences. These may be economic, cultural, political, geographic.

Mental illness is social as well as psychological, and intersects in complex ways with gender, race, socio-economic status and disability. Simone Fullagar

Fostering good mental health requires us to talk about wellbeing from an holistic perspective, attend to underlying structural issues, and provide good support. We need to avoid focusing on 'individuals' as the problem and think about the impact of inequalities on wellbeing, particularly mental wellbeing. COVID has underlined the many factors that can impact on people's work, personal lives, and mental health and wellbeing – most of which are beyond our personal control.

Te Whare Tapa Whā

Te whare tapa whā is a model of the four dimensions of wellbeing developed by Ta Mason Durie in 1984 to provide a Māori perspective on health. The 4 dimensions are:

- taha tinana (physical wellbeing)
- taha hinengaro (mental wellbeing)
- taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing)
- taha whānau (family wellbeing).[1]

The four walls of the wharenui are connected with the whenua (land) which forms a solid foundation.
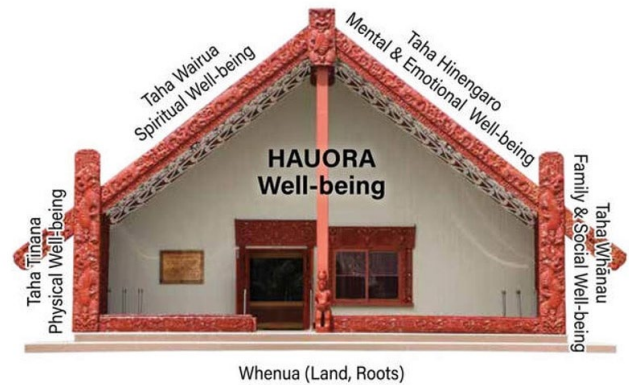
Māori Health Model: Te Whare Tapa Whā, developed by Mason Durie.

The role of recreation and sport

Sport and leisure experiences can contribute to good mental health or undermine it.

The inter-relationship between mental health, sport and recreation is complex and many factors can impact on people's experiences.

We know that in some sports, entrenched attitudes and practices mean that some groups, such as women and girls, LGBTQI+, disabled people, migrants – have been systematically excluded or forced to leave, either directly or by bullying, harassment, disrespect and/or social exclusion. In addition, the focus on performance can over-ride the importance of wellbeing.

High profile sports people are speaking out about their own experiences, providing practical examples for change.

The recent review of NZ Cycling identified that there was,

"…significant room for improvement in building a culture where people can thrive…create a better balance between winning and the welfare of athletes coaches and others." Steve Tew, CEO, HPSNZ

The good news

Some organisations are working to change these exclusive cultures.

Positive sport and recreation environments can contribute to removing barriers, reinforcing diversity and promoting a culture of inclusion that contributes to the good mental health of participants. The positive impact extends into participants' lives beyond participation in the activity.

The evidence-based Five Ways to Wellbeing shows us what to do to ensure we are well mentally.

Mental health at work

Employees who are mentally healthy can better cope with stress, take less sick days, are able to tackle more complex tasks, as well as apply creativity and an innovative mindset to the tasks they are given.[2]

Workplaces have a legal responsibility to manage risks to mental health and wellbeing as they do any other health and safety risk. This includes making sure there's no discrimination and taking steps to reduce work stress to prevent psychological harm.[3]

Key elements include creating a climate of trust, sharing and understanding, promoting health and physical activity, moderating workplace culture (free from harassment bullying and discrimination) and working with professionals to ensure that employees get expert help when needed.

'One of the biggest challenges for people experiencing mental distress is stigma and discrimination.' [4]

The Mental Health Guide for Leaders offers guidance for leaders as well as useful information for individuals to address their own mental health.

Case 1: AllRight? Wellbeing campaign

The All Right? campaign is a collaboration between the Canterbury DHB and the Mental Health Foundation of NZ. Started in 2013 during the recovery from the earthquakes AllRight? provides resources, apps, tools and information on mental health and wellbeing including workplace wellbeing and includes a comprehensive research programme. To read an evaluation click here

Figure 1Image from; https://www.allright.org.nz/free-resources/he-waka-eke-noa-posters

Case 2: CLM and Clearhead

CLM's managers noticed more staff talking about outside of work issues that were affecting them, however they are not trained to deal with mental health issues.

CLM approached Clearhead, who offer digital mental health support tools and therapy. They offer a range of tools to suit different learning styles, such as worksheets, podcasts, and mood logs. Counselling services are available, and people can choose a counsellor to suit their requirements.

"This doesn't mean that something is 'wrong' - these are really cool tools that anyone can use, and everyone will have something that the app can help with, because everyone has challenges in their lives at some stage! [Kirsty Knowles, Director, CLM]"

Life impacting on work is normal. We're still to fully understand the long-term impacts of COVID19 on people's mental health – lockdowns, changes in health, family, and working life.

Working with Clearhead has increased the organisation's awareness of mental wellbeing, created a more open culture for discussion and removed the stigma of seeking help.

Principles in action

Principles	Action
Understand the context	Develop inclusive cultures Invite and promote diversity in thought and action Address bullying, harassment and exclusion in policy and practice Take a whole person, whole system approach
Promote wellbeing	Promote the Five Ways to Wellbeing
Expert assistance	Provide accessible resources for employees Use and refer to experts when required
Provide holistic support	Use approaches that suit the person. One size doesn't fit all

References and resources

[1] Whare Tapa Wha; A Maori Model of a Unified theory of health. Springer
[2] Employers must play a role in caring for workers mental health, Stuff
[3] Wellplace.
[4] Health and safety workplace guide. WHSE
Workplace wellbeing in Christchurch 2017- report of research findings.