Summary

Four initiatives supporting improved outcomes for Māori

The Government has made significant funding commitments for supporting improved outcomes for Māori, including more than $900 million in 2020 and more than $1 billion in both 2021 and 2022. We wanted to understand how public organisations are using this funding and what has been achieved as a result.

We looked at three public organisations and four initiatives aimed at supporting improved outcomes for Māori, and which have received new or increased funding in recent years. The four initiatives we selected, and the public organisation that administers them, are:

- He Poutama Rangatahi (administered by the Ministry of Social Development);
- The Māori Agribusiness Extension Programme (administered by the Ministry for Primary Industries);
- Te Ahu o te Reo Māori (administered by the Ministry of Education); and
- Whānau Engagement (administered by the Ministry of Education).

The public organisations had designed these initiatives with the aim of supporting the principle of rangatiratanga, or self-determination. All four initiatives are based on the idea that Māori know what works best for Māori.

What we found

Overall, the funding was spent as intended and there are elements of good practice that could be applied more widely in the public sector.

A critical success factor that the initiatives had in common was the strength of relationships between public organisations and Māori. The relationships demonstrated a strong sense of mutual trust. We heard positive feedback from Māori about what the initiatives are trying to achieve and how public organisations worked with them to design and deliver the initiatives.

Building effective and enduring relationships takes time. Public organisations should factor this into their planning. Some public organisations we spoke with told us they needed longer than planned to build

relationships for some of the initiatives, and those initiatives were delayed as a result. Initiatives can fail or become compromised when they do not factor in enough time to meaningfully and authentically engage with those they want to work with.

Public organisations relied on staff with local knowledge and connections to build and strengthen relationships with Māori. Many of these staff are Māori and can face additional pressures compared to non-Māori colleagues. This can include feeling pressure when there is tension between their iwi and the public organisation they work for. Sometimes Māori staff could have a real or perceived conflict of interest that needs to be appropriately managed.

Other pressures Māori staff face can include being expected to take on additional tasks that call on their knowledge of tikanga, such as performing a karakia. It is important that public organisations acknowledge these pressures and engage with their Māori staff to understand how best to support them.

Engaging with public organisations can also put pressure on iwi and service providers. Some receive frequent requests for their input and involvement, but many have limited capacity. Public organisations can help to reduce the burden on iwi and service providers by improving co-ordination across their different areas of work to ensure that efforts are well aligned and reduce duplication.

Although we have seen much that is encouraging in the work done to date, we expect public organisations to hold themselves to account and be publicly accountable for the funding they administer. In our view, they are not yet doing enough to fulfil this expectation.

Although we heard anecdotally that all four initiatives have made a positive difference, this has not been adequately reflected in reporting. Reporting has focused on the progress in contracting providers and enrolling participants and some anecdotal accounts of peoples' experiences. This is not enough to properly inform Parliament and the public about what has been achieved and what value has been derived.

It is important to acknowledge that these initiatives do not represent all the ways public organisations work with and for Māori. We encourage all public organisations to consider and apply the findings described in our report to the work they are doing to support improved outcomes for Māori. In particular, we would like to see all public organisations build effective relationships so that iwi and Māori have better experiences with other Government initiatives.