

## **Mai i te Poapoataunu ki te Mana: Navigating Harm Reduction in Te Ao Māori**

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### **Background:**

Colonisation processes and the entrenchment of prohibitionist drug policy have produced and sustained inequitable drug-related harm for Māori. These harms are compounded by stigma, which deters help-seeking and directly affects wellbeing. While cultural safety and non-stigmatising language have been championed in harm reduction efforts, less attention has been paid to how these factors operate within Te Ao Māori and are expressed through te reo Māori.

For Māori, stigmatising language and drug-related discrimination can deprive a person of their mana, causing harm and hindering healing. At the same time, drug use, particularly addiction, may also be seen to diminish mana. This often creates a complex tension between conceptualisations of harm, harm reduction, wellbeing, and cultural values such as manaakitanga (care, compassion) and mana motuhake (self-determination).

This critical reflection will highlight tensions surrounding the communication of drug-related issues in Te Ao Māori. Examples include haka serving as a wero (challenge) to confront methamphetamine addiction, commonly used terms for drugs that carry negative connotations, and examples of positive initiatives regarding language and stigma such as Te Reo Hāpai, the Māori Language Glossary for mental health, addiction and disability.

I propose that further action is needed to acknowledge and address ongoing issues within and across both Māori and health communities – at policy, organisational, and flaxroots levels – as acts of care and decolonisation. To move forward, we must consider expanding kaupapa Māori resources, delivering education and public health campaigns grounded in both Te Ao Māori and non-judgmental language, harness social media, as well as Māori rangatira (leaders), to help shift public narratives. We must also consider whether a “middle ground” between approaches can exist and whether consensus can be achieved to protect Māori from drug-related harms while promoting wellbeing inclusive of drug use.

### **Description of Model of Care/Intervention:**

### **Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:**

### **Conclusion and Next Steps:**

### **Implications for Practice or Policy:**

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