

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Racism in the Health System – Lessons and a Way Forward**

“You cannot build a just system on a system that is built on injustice.” Moana Jackson

Health inequities between Māori and Pākehā are the result of a system that has not upheld Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Despite repeated reforms, structural racism continues to shape policy, access, and outcomes.

The establishment of Te Aka Whai Ora, the Māori Health Authority was a critical step toward Māori-led, equity-focused solutions. Its disestablishment, alongside other policy decisions, prompted a complaint to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Key concerns included:

- The disestablishment of Te Aka Whai Ora
- Raising the bowel cancer screening age from 50 to 58, despite earlier onset for Māori
- Reversal of tobacco control measures and increased exposure of tamariki to vaping

These decisions demonstrate how racism manifests, through policies that ignore evidence, reduce Māori leadership, and widen inequities.

Taking the complaint to CERD elevated these issues to a human rights level and reinforced the need for accountability when Te Tiriti obligations are not upheld.

Key learnings are clear:

- Equity gains must be protected
- Māori leadership is essential
- Evidence must drive policy

Māori continue to lead solutions. At Te Kōhao Health, Taakiri Tuu Health Wellness and Diagnostic centre and reflects this, targeting preventable conditions such as cancers and heart disease through kaupapa Māori, early intervention, healing, and whānau-centred care.

A Te Tiriti-aligned system requires shared power, sustained investment in Māori solutions, and accountability for equitable outcomes. As a profession, we must advocate for equity, support Māori leadership, and actively uphold Te Tiriti in practice.

Kei a tātou anō te ara tika – the answers lie within us.