



Impact Report

Paving the way for healthier futures
Regional Sports Trusts and Healthy Families NZ

Mihi

Taiāwhiowhio ana te rere o kā mihi atu i kā horotai Waitaha, o Aoraki matatū ki a koutou katoa e te tai whakaruka, e te tai whakararo.

Nei noa anō ka tai o mihi e pari atu nei i te tai Toka, i Murihiku whakatehe, Murihiku mataora ki a koutou e kā karakataka maha.

Piki mai, kake mai ki runga o Waitakere me ōna huhua, me ōna rahinga.

Ko Waitākere te awa e tere nei, e tere atu ra i runga i ngā au o mihi.

Greetings to you all, from the rising and retreating tides of the Waitaha region, the sacred land where Aoraki stands before you.

Greetings from the shores of Toka, from the southernmost lands of Murihiku, reaching out to all.

From the heights of Waitakere, with its many peaks and ranges, the land sends its greetings, flowing through the currents to you all.



This is the first collaborative report from the Regional Sports Trusts (RSTs) leading the Healthy Families initiative, showcasing the outcomes and impact of a systems change approach at a regional level.

It reflects the intrinsic connection between sport and health, one that spans communities, organisations, and both local and central government.

In this report we celebrate the powerful community-led movements driving community sport, physical activity, play, and active recreation across the motu. At the heart, are stories of communities and whānau leading the change, shaping healthier and more active futures together.

To all the Healthy Families kaimahi and champions in this movement—thank you for your dedication and support.

Together, we are creating meaningful change where it matters most, in our neighbourhoods, our communities, and the everyday spaces where people live, work, and play.

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Designed for Impact

A healthy Aotearoa starts in the places where we spend our time. In healthier environments, children learn better, people are healthier and happier, and communities flourish.

Healthy Families NZ is a national movement working to strengthen the conditions that protect and promote health and wellbeing across the course of a person's life. It was established to rethink how we prevent chronic disease – not through individual behaviour change alone, but by addressing the environments, systems, and structures that shape our everyday lives.

Embedded within local organisations – including iwi, councils, and three Regional Sports Trusts – Healthy Families NZ brings together a skilled workforce that partners with communities to lead locally driven change.

Through systems thinking, cross-sector partnerships, community-led insights, and collaborative approaches, the initiative supports long-term solutions that strengthen wellbeing and improve outcomes for all.

At its core, Healthy Families NZ is about working where health happens – in our homes, clubs, schools, parks, marae, workplaces, and community spaces.

When these environments support health from the outset, the need for intervention later in life is reduced, easing the burden on the primary healthcare system and hospitals. This preventative, population-based approach helps build healthier generations and more resilient communities.

The integration of Healthy Families NZ within Regional Sports Trusts like Sport Waitākere, Sport Canterbury and Active Southland has enabled these organisations to evolve beyond delivery into system-level change leadership.

As both catalysts and connectors, RSTs are uniquely placed to influence the upstream drivers of health – embedding prevention, equity, and whānau-led solutions into the heart of community sport, recreation, and wellbeing systems.

Paving the Way for Healthier Futures

This report brings together the collective experience and impact of three Regional Sports Trusts (RSTs) – Sport Waitākere, Sport Canterbury, and Active Southland – who lead Healthy Families NZ in their communities. It showcases how embedding a systems change approach within RSTs is unlocking new ways to support health and wellbeing where it matters most: in the environments where people live, learn, work and play.

Healthy Families NZ was established in 2014 to take a bold and preventative approach to public health. Rather than focusing on treatment, the initiative works across sectors and systems to strengthen the everyday conditions that enable health wellbeing over a lifetime. Its workforce is embedded in local organisations – like RSTs – bringing together councils, schools, marae, community leaders and local businesses to drive long-term change.

This collaborative model has sparked transformational shifts in how RSTs think, operate, and lead. Through systems thinking and locally led innovation, RSTs are now:

- aligning strategy with long-term health outcomes
- building workforce capability beyond programme delivery
- co-investing in solutions like the national play workforce
- reshaping local funding practices
- embedding cultural knowledge and values into sport and recreation systems

The result is a new way of working, one that centres community leadership, supports better decisions across systems, and contributes to national health outcomes, including reducing pressure on primary care. From active transport in Southland to water equity in West Auckland and dedicated pathways for Māori-led initiatives in Canterbury, this report demonstrates how RSTs are not just responding to community need but actively shaping environments that make healthy living easier and more accessible for all.

As we look ahead, this mahi continues to evolve. With Healthy Families NZ embedded in RSTs, the opportunity remains to influence, connect and lead systems-level change that supports healthier futures – locally, regionally, and nationally.



A model for co-investment opportunities

Collaboration unlocks greater impact. When partners pool their resources, they not only strengthen funding pathways – they strengthen outcomes. Co-investment and co-funding approaches are increasingly recognised as key enablers of sustainable systems change, allowing organisations to draw on shared expertise, align priorities, and deepen commitment to collective impact.

By funding roles together, partners are better placed to support long-term initiatives and drive innovation – ensuring that those delivering the mahi are backed by shared belief in its value. Healthy Families NZ has been at the forefront of this approach, piloting co-funded roles across lead providers, including within Regional Sports Trusts. These roles have helped catalyse innovation, embed systems thinking, and enhance the long-term sustainability of locally led health and wellbeing initiatives.



Investing in a play workforce

Play is a powerful protective factor – laying the foundation for physical, emotional, and social wellbeing that lasts a lifetime. When people of all ages have access to play, they build healthy habits, strong relationships, and deeper connections to place and community.

Recognising the transformative potential of play, the Healthy Families NZ movement helped shape a national shift – supporting the growth of a dedicated play workforce and driving systemic change across Aotearoa. In response to limited access to play opportunities, Healthy Families Waitākere (led by Sport Waitākere), alongside Healthy Families Ōtautahi (Sport Canterbury) and Healthy Families Invercargill (Active Southland), brought together Regional Sports Trust leaders to explore how they could better prioritise play in their communities.

This collaboration sparked an innovative trial: Waitākere invested in a full-time Play Innovator role, with part-time roles established in Ōtautahi and Invercargill.

Working within their Regional Sports Trusts, these Play Innovators formed a community of practice to share learning, build capability, and embed play more deeply in local systems. Their mahi helped pave the way for systemic change—demonstrating the value of dedicated play leadership.

In 2021, Sport NZ began funding a Regional Play Lead in every Regional Sports Trust, embedding play as a strategic priority across the country. Today, all 18 RSTs have a dedicated play workforce – ensuring play is recognised not just as a moment of fun, but as a fundamental driver of health, wellbeing and social connection across Aotearoa.

“Healthy Families NZ has always been a concept that was about innovative prototyping, finding better ways of thinking and acting for change. The Play kaupapa is one of those. The first three roles put in place inside the Regional Sports Trusts were in front of the curve in the play workforce and system development in Aotearoa. The systems change Healthy Families NZ have influenced and guided has been profound in many of those settings.”

Scott Mackenzie, Manager Play / Takaro, Sport NZ

Co-funding for a more active Southland

Collaboration has been an important part of the Active Transport initiative in Southland. By forming cross-sector partnerships and utilising collective funding, an Active Transport Innovator role was created.

Sitting within the Healthy Families Invercargill team and co-funded by Invercargill City Council, Southland District Council and Active Southland, the role aims to get more people, more active across Southland by advocating and enabling healthy transport choices, while working to increase the confidence of young people to use active transport, growing the next generation of active travellers.

Te Pou o Te Whare goes national

Every child deserves the opportunity to move, play, and belong. Yet for tamariki and rangatahi in care, systemic barriers often stand in the way of participating in sport and play – spaces that support identity, connection, health and wellbeing.

Te Pou o Te Whare was created to change this. Developed by Lawrence Tau, Systems Innovator at Healthy Families Ōtautahi, the initiative brings together young people in care, social workers, Oranga Tamariki kaimahi, and sport providers to co-design solutions that reflect lived realities and meet actual needs.

What began as a local, community-led initiative has grown into a national shift. Its impact saw Tau seconded to Sport NZ, where he continues to embed this approach within national structures—ensuring play and participation are treated not as privileges, but as rights.



Collective impact creates healthier environments

Partnership drives deeper change. When organisations come together under a shared vision, they unlock the potential to transform systems – not just through coordination, but through collective action.

Healthy Families NZ and its Regional Sports Trust lead providers play a key role in enabling this impact – bringing people together across sectors, weaving stronger connections, and creating space for shared insight and action. Whether it's convening thought leaders, aligning on common goals, or tackling complex challenges together, these partnerships help shift the conditions that shape health and wellbeing.

Real transformation doesn't happen in isolation. It requires long-term commitment from multiple partners – across sectors, systems, and communities. By sharing knowledge, insights, and data, we can move further, faster—together.

“Tunatuna has brought a whole lot of organisations and individuals together with the same goal, to get more kids on bikes and scooters and to really build their confidence. The impact has been massive – every community that Tunatuna has gone into has made the track their own. They've looked after it really well and it's been incredible to see how much activity it has created in every place it has been set up. It's fair to say that without the support of the Healthy Families Invercargill team at Active Southland, this wouldn't have been possible.”

Glen Thomson, Cycling Southland Major Events and Pathways Manager

Tunatuna – Making it easier to get active

Movement should be easy, fun, and accessible for everyone. Tunatuna—a free, mobile pump track—is helping make that vision a reality in Murihiku, offering a playful, community-led way to shift how, where, and who gets to be active.

More than just infrastructure, Tunatuna is a systems-change initiative—backboned by Healthy Families Invercargill and brought to life through 12 months of cross-sector collaboration. Cycling Southland, local clubs, councils, community boards, and funders all came together around a shared kaupapa: reimagining active recreation in a way that's inclusive, mobile, and community-driven.

By embedding shared ownership across partners, Tunatuna challenges siloed approaches to recreation and active transport—sparking new ways of working that prioritise connection, adaptability, and equity. It's not just building skills and confidence—it's influencing how decisions are made, strengthening relationships, and setting the groundwork for future investment in accessible active spaces.



Pro-water movement: Transforming funding to support healthier environments

Collaboration can shift systems – starting with something as simple as water. In West Auckland, the Pro-Water Movement brought together schools, funders, tamariki, and community partners to tackle a shared challenge: limited access to clean, appealing drinking water.

Healthy Families Waitākere led the initiative, partnering with schools and The Trusts Community Foundation (TTCF) to better understand the everyday barriers tamariki face in accessing drinking water at school.

Through student-led mapping, many schools identified broken, outdated, or missing water fountains. This insight directly shaped the design and placement of 52 new water stations, each supporting existing water-only policies. In one kura, replacing a single old fountain with six modern stations led to healthier lunchboxes, better hydration, and noticeable improvements in student wellbeing and activity levels.

Schools didn't stop there. They embraced new pro-water initiatives – student-led wai-only haka, peer advocacy groups, and broader water pledges. Recognising community demand, Sport Waitākere also helped secure funding for portable water trailers with fountains and bottle-fillers. These supported summer events across West Auckland, serving tens of thousands and further normalising water as the easy choice in West Auckland.

This collaboration marked a turning point for TTCF—prompting a shift from traditional one-off grants to more strategic investment in health-promoting environments. To support the initiative, TTCF adapted its funding criteria to enable bulk funding across multiple schools, making it easier for communities to access support at scale.





Keeping Play Simple

Play is a fundamental part of wellbeing, yet barriers such as cost, access, and social norms often limit opportunities for tamariki and communities to engage in it freely.

Chalk It Up 2, a collaboration between Healthy Families Invercargill and *Healthy Active Learning* within Active Southland, is more than just a play initiative—it's a shift in how play is valued, accessed, and integrated into daily life. By providing free chalk at nearly 50 community pick-up points, the initiative removed financial and logistical barriers, ensuring that play was accessible to all, regardless of background or location. Beyond access, *Chalk It Up 2* challenged traditional ideas about where and how play happens.

By encouraging tamariki and whānau to transform school grounds, driveways, streets, and other everyday spaces into playful environments, the initiative redefined public spaces as places for creativity and movement. This shift in social norms helped reinforce the idea that play doesn't need to be confined to playgrounds or structured activities—it can and should happen anywhere, anytime.

At its core, *Chalk It Up 2* demonstrates systems change in action by embedding play within Southland's communities and institutions. Schools, early childhood centres, businesses, and whānau all played a role, strengthening cross-sector relationships and ensuring that play is not just a one-off event but a sustained cultural shift.

By unlocking community-led action and empowering people to take ownership of play in their own spaces, the initiative lays the foundation for lasting change—where play is seen not as an extra, but as an essential part of a thriving, connected community.

Shifting the dial – a change in approach and outcomes

Before Regional Sports Trusts (RSTs) became lead providers for Healthy Families NZ, systems thinking was only beginning to take root within the RST environment. The traditional focus on programme delivery and individual behaviour change was slowly evolving – but there was no clear mandate or framework for shifting the conditions that shape health and wellbeing at a population level.

Healthy Families NZ offered a new way of working: one grounded in systems thinking, collaboration, and long-term change. By embedding this approach into RSTs, the movement has helped reframe sport and recreation as a lever for broader health outcomes – shifting the dial from isolated interventions to integrated, community-led action.

“The influence of the Healthy Families NZ initiative in Waitākere has driven a wider shift across the community sport and recreation workforce. We have seen the ripple effects of backboning collectives, utilising theories of change, and applying the six conditions of systems change across key planning process, which has strengthened our engagement and impact with communities and partners. This approach was central to our recent restructure, which intentionally wove together the Healthy Families Waitākere team and our wider organisation, creating new and enhanced opportunities for collaboration and innovation.”

– David George, Chief Executive Sport Waitākere

“Healthy Families NZ brought a richness to a different type of thinking around systems change, that we have all benefited from.”

– Julyan Falloon, Chief Executive Sport Canterbury

“The models and frameworks that get used, one of them being the Six Conditions of Systems Change which underpins the Healthy Families NZ approach, is a key framework that guides our thinking, our behaviour, our way of engaging with the community, so we have taken the parts that underpin our work in collaboration and partnership and that’s where the magic happens.”

– Vanessa Hughey-Pol, Chief Executive Active Southland

“ By aligning our strengths and perspectives, we are not just working differently—we are shaping a system where community voices, wellbeing, and equity are at the heart of everything we do. ”

A workforce with a systems thinking lens

Systems thinking is a proactive mindset – one that helps us see the bigger picture and understand the interconnected forces shaping our communities. At the heart of every complex system are people, and effective systems thinkers know how to engage with those systems in ways that honour lived experience while identifying where meaningful change can occur.

This way of thinking allows us to move beyond symptoms and surface-level fixes. It enables us to see the relationships, root causes, and gaps that hold challenges in place. For the Healthy Families NZ workforce, this is core to how we work. Our kaimahi are not just practitioners – they are system stewards, uniquely positioned to connect insight to action and shift the conditions for wellbeing across Aotearoa.



Te Kāhui Māori drive change in the Regional Sports Trust Network

Healthy Families Ōtautahi Māori Systems Innovator, Brandon Manuel was instrumental in bringing together other Māori kaimahi from RSTs across Aotearoa, alongside Active and Sport NZ, to discuss ways to implement Te Tiriti o Waitangi more effectively across the RST network.



*Giving better effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi will encourage systems change and shift conditions such as policies, practices and resource flows. Additionally, this will hopefully pave a pathway for RSTs to strengthen relationships with mana whenua in our respective rohe. – **Brandon Manuel, Māori Systems Innovator***

Sport Waitākere Impact Strategy – A healthy, connected and active West Auckland

Long-term change takes long-term commitment. With Healthy Families Waitākere embedded in Sport Waitākere for over a decade, systems thinking and a focus on sustainable impact have become central to how the organisation works.

Rather than simply delivering programmes, Sport Waitākere now helps shape the environments, policies, and relationships that influence community wellbeing. This shift has deepened its connection to the people and places it serves.

In 2023, this commitment was cemented through a 20-year Impact Strategy (2023–2043)—replacing the traditional strategic plan with a future-focused roadmap to support health, connection, and self-determination across West Auckland.



“Holding the Healthy Families Waitakere initiative has challenged us to think beyond programmes and initiatives, shifting our focus to long-term, systemic change. This thinking is now woven into everything we do, shaping how we work alongside people in community, influence environments, and drive sustainable impact. Our 20-year Impact Strategy reflects this evolution—embedding a future-focused, collaborative approach to creating a more connected, healthy and active West Auckland.”

– David George, CE Sport Waitākere

Enabling a return to Māori systems

Healthy Families NZ has an intentional and explicit focus on improving Māori health and health equity for groups at risk of preventable chronic disease. The return to Māori systems has created the space for Regional Sports Trusts, supported by their Healthy Families NZ location teams, to enhance cultural competency and implement approaches to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi more effectively.

Utilising indigenous frameworks to navigate complexity

Healthy Families Waitākere supported Sport Waitākere to adopt the [Hautū Waka Framework](#) (developed by the Auckland Co-design Lab with Roimata Taniwha-Pao and Ayla Hoeta) as the guiding tool for all projects and initiatives across Sport Waitākere. Hautū Waka is an indigenous framework to navigate complexity and systems change, providing a methodology for design thinking, reflection and evaluation. The framework was tested by Healthy Families Waitākere and subsequently rolled out across Sport Waitākere as the primary framework for tracking impact when working in partnership with communities.

Building cultural capability to enhance an understanding of Te Ao Māori

[Cultural capability sessions](#) created and facilitated by Healthy Families Ōtautahi have led to an increased understanding and insight into Te Ao Māori by Sport Canterbury kaimahi. Capability building was achieved through a series of internal sessions with the aim to increase confidence in waiata, mihi and tikanga practices.

Connecting kōhine with hine atua

Informed and led by a group of māmā eager to share knowledge with their tamāhine, the [Hine Atua initiative](#) has helped develop greater confidence through a stronger connection with taiao and atua.

Conceived by Healthy Families Invercargill Rautaki Māori Amelia Clark, and developed as a joint venture with Arahi, Māori Women's Welfare League and Te Wharekura o Arowhenua, Hine Atua utilised the Atua Matua framework to help impart lessons including plant identification and using local resources to make natural products. The result was a successful locally-led model which could be adapted and adopted across the motu.

Kaupapa Māori pathway boosts equity and wellbeing

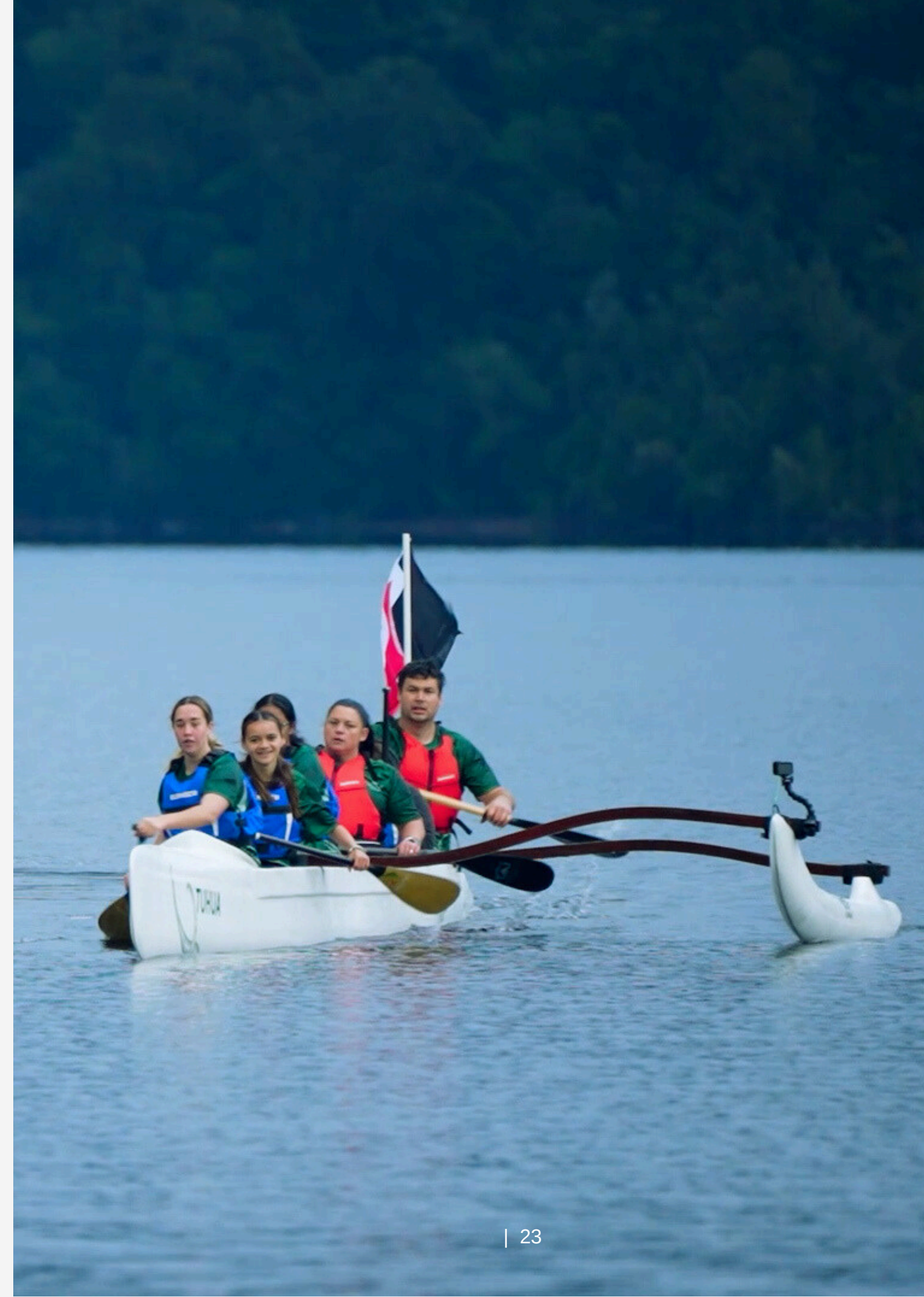
A transformative shift in sport and recreation funding is making waves in Waitaha and Te Tai Poutini, with \$800,000 across four years from the Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa fund directed toward historically underserved communities and Māori initiatives with a focus on improving health outcomes.

Administered by Sport Canterbury on behalf of Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa, the fund is designed to help tamariki and rangatahi, especially those less active, to participate in quality play, active recreation or sport.

In 2021, Healthy Families Ōtautahi (HFŌ) identified a critical opportunity to address the imbalance. Working closely with Sport Canterbury, HFŌ's lead provider, the organisation led a cultural competency journey grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, aiming to embed equity, Māori principles and values into the heart of funding decisions.

The result was a dedicated Māori pathway within Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa, now accounting for about 13 percent of the regional fund. This pathway ensures initiatives are delivered “by Māori, for Māori, as Māori” and are recognised and resourced.

The impact has been immediate and far-reaching. More Māori-led kaupapa are being funded, enabling whānau to engage in physical activity through a Māori lens – whether that's kapa haka, waka ama or traditional games like Kī-o-Rahi.



Stronger together: Paving the way for healthier futures

Initiatives like Healthy Families NZ, embedded within lead providers such as Regional Sports Trusts, are designed to keep people healthy and reduce pressure on the health system. Evidence consistently shows that investing in prevention delivers the greatest long-term value, reducing the burden of chronic disease and creating healthier communities. ¹

By fostering cross-sector collaboration between lead providers, iwi, local leaders, agencies, and communities, Healthy Families NZ identifies opportunities for change and implements solutions that make healthier choices more accessible and achievable.

This growing health prevention movement, driven by Healthy Families NZ and Regional Sports Trusts, is shifting mindsets, transforming systems, and nurturing a skilled workforce. It is embedding kaupapa Māori principles, strengthening local leadership, and filling a critical gap in community health.

Together, we are creating sustainable change where people live, learn, work, and play—generating ripple effects that extend far beyond the initiative itself.

1. National Prevention Council (2011) National Prevention Strategy. In [hhs.gov](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/disease-prevention-wellness-report.pdf).
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/disease-prevention-wellness-report.pdf>



The Healthy Families NZ Locations and Lead Providers are:

Healthy Families Far North (Te Rūnanga o Whaingaroa)
Healthy Families Waitākere (Sport Waitākere)
Healthy Families South Auckland (The Cause Collective)
Healthy Families South Auckland (Auckland Council)
Healthy Families Rotorua (Te Arawa Whānau Ora)
Healthy Families Te Ngira (Te Kōhao Health)
Healthy Families Whanganui Rangitikei Ruapehu (Te Oranganui)
Healthy Families East Cape (Te Ao Hou Trust)
Healthy Families Hutt Valley (Hutt City Council)
Healthy Families Ōtautahi (Sport Canterbury)
Healthy Families Invercargill (Active Southland)

www.healthyfamiliesnz.org

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