



Te Niwaha

Research Project Impact Case Study

The Risk Perception of Infectious Diseases Among Pacific Youth and the Role of Social Media in Effective Communication in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Short Research Title

"Pacific Youth, Infectious Disease Risk, and Social Media in Aotearoa"

Key researchers

The Research Team for this study consists predominantly of Pacific clinicians and researchers

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Introduction

This project delivered the first Aotearoa-wide mixed-methods evidence base on how Pacific youth understand, navigate, and act on infectious disease risk. Through 20 focus groups, co-design activities, and 603 surveys, we generated deep insights into the behavioural, cultural, and relational influences shaping health decision-making for youth aged 15–24.

Key findings

Key findings demonstrate that Pacific youth:

- Rely heavily on **social networks**, private group chats, and informal online communities
- encounter high volumes of **misinformation**, especially during outbreaks
- Prefer **visual, short-format** messaging (reels, infographics, TikTok-style content)
- Respond strongly to messaging that is **culturally grounded**, humorous, relational, and delivered by credible Pacific voices
- Experience **barriers to accessing health services**, including stigma for STIs and misconceptions about rheumatic fever and COVID-19

Impact

Impact to date includes:

- Co-designed ID messaging prototypes
- Early policy relevance for national youth health communication
- Strengthened community–research partnerships
- Presentations at key Pacific and national health forums
- Emerging international collaborations through PMA, PIHRS, and Te Niwha networks
- Growing pipeline of RAs in infectious diseases who are now enrolled and progressing Postgraduate Diploma all the way to PhD.

This work provides a platform for national infectious disease preparedness that authentically centres Pacific youth realities, preferences, and cultural frameworks.