



## Education Report: Next steps for Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools

<b>To:</b>	Hon Jan Tinetti, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	8 June 2023	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
<b>Security Level:</b>	Budget Sensitive	<b>METIS No:</b>	1311549
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<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	No

### Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to brief you on progress in implementing Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools and seek your agreement to continue the initiative at the current level of investment for the next two years.

### Summary

1. Budget 2020 allocated \$44 million over four years for Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools (CiS). Delivery has been below intended levels due to a combination of factors including the original procurement approach, COVID-19, weather events, and workforce constraints.
2. Delivery is increasing year on year as we contract more locally based community counselling providers, with 42 providers now delivering CiS across more than 220 schools. ERO's phase 2 evaluation shows that implementation is now largely going well and access to counselling is having a positive impact on ākonga wellbeing and engagement.
3. Current CiS contracts expire at the end of this year, December 2023. We recommend continuing with the current level of investment for another two school years while we continue to scale up delivery and assessing whether there is a case for additional investment after the final ERO evaluation report is received in May 2024. We will also work alongside the implementation of Mana Ake to ensure these services complement each other.

### Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

- a. **agree** to continue Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools at the current level of investment for the next two years

**Agree** Disagree

- b. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this paper once it has been considered by you, with Budget sensitive information withheld.

**Agree /** ☐ Disagree



Helen Hurst  
**General Manager, System Delivery**  
**Te Pae Aronui**

08/06/2023



Hon Jan Tinetti  
**Minister of Education**

17/06/2023

## Background

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1. Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools (CiS) is a pilot that was funded through Budget 2020 as part of a package of supports for learner and educator wellbeing in response to COVID-19. \$44 million was allocated over four years for contracting local community organisations to provide counselling services to ākonga in selected primary, intermediate, and small secondary and composite schools across eight Ministry regions.
2. The selected schools work with their local community providers and the Ministry to shape counselling support that best suits their school environment, culture, ākonga and whānau. Counselling practitioners are expected to be flexible and responsive in their way of working and use approaches that are evidence-based, developmentally and age appropriate, and culturally sustaining. This may include talk-based and/or activity-based experiential approaches that use, for example, the arts, play and outdoor activities, as well as approaches that are grounded in te ao Māori and other culturally informed practices. It can include group or whole-school wellbeing initiatives as well as one-on-one support.
3. CiS is the first time that government has provided funding for counselling in primary and intermediate schools. It differs from the guidance counselling model in secondary schools in that community organisations are contracted to deliver the counselling, rather than schools employing registered teachers as counsellors through guidance staffing entitlement.
4. Alongside CiS, the Government funds mental health and wellbeing support for primary and intermediate aged children through the Mana Ake programme, funded through Vote Health. Mana Ake began in Canterbury in 2018 and is now being expanded into Northland, Counties Manukau, Bay of Plenty, Lakes, the West Coast, and Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti following additional investment in Budgets 2022 and 2023.
5. Mana Ake kaimahi include psychologists, social workers, counsellors, teachers and youth workers. The intention is that these kaimahi undertake a range of activities including supporting teachers to deliver classroom programmes that promote wellbeing, working with children and their whānau at home and/or school, and connecting schools and whānau to community resources that enhance wellbeing.
6. The Education Review Office (ERO) is evaluating CiS, its impact on ākonga wellbeing and engagement, and whether it is sustainable and scalable. ERO have now completed the second evaluation report, which provides an early indication of the impact CiS is having on ākonga outcomes [M23-22 refers]. The final evaluation report is expected in May 2024.
7. The current CiS contracts expire in December 2023. This provides an opportunity to make changes to the initiative based on what we have learned so far. Funding available for distribution to community organisations remains at \$11.074m per annum for 2023/24 and subsequent outyears.

## Implementation progress

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### **Delivery of CiS has been below intended levels**

8. CiS began in November 2021 with 141 schools and nine providers across eight regions.
9. The original RFP process did not secure the number and diversity of providers that the Ministry had hoped for. One of the reasons for this was that smaller, local providers do not

tend to engage with a national tendering process. Therefore, we developed a regional Direct Sourcing Model to attract and connect with counselling practitioners who work as sole traders or small companies, including Māori healthcare providers.

10. We also provided funding to Te Rūnanga Nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa and Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa to develop an approach to counselling support for ākonga in Māori medium Kura. Te Rūnanga Nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa provided direct funding to kura as part of their operating costs. Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa have kept the funding at an organisational level and individual kura approach the peak body to access the funding.
11. A critical shortage of suitably qualified counselling practitioners with specialised paediatric experience that meets the needs of ākonga in many regions led to slower than anticipated recruitment by the original providers. For some, recruitment and retention has continued to be an issue with high turnover of practitioners. CiS is one of several counselling initiatives funded through the Government's wider mental health package of supports, which has created competition between counselling providers for the required counselling workforce.
12. Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti is an example of where the Direct Sourcing Model was adopted to address the lack of suitable larger providers. Direct Sourcing enabled the region to engage and contract with smaller, locally based providers with knowledge and connection to schools and their communities. While this model does come with a high administrative burden it has shown to be effective and has resulted in the procurement of 23 providers and is now delivering to 77 schools.
13. The impact of COVID-19 has been an ongoing and significant contributor to the low volume of delivery. The initial periods of lockdowns across the country in 2021 meant that no whanaungatanga between schools and their counselling practitioners or service delivery could take place. Illness amongst counselling practitioners, ākonga and school staff has been ongoing throughout the pilot.
14. To address some of the wellbeing needs created by the prolonged Auckland lockdowns, \$1.5m of the CiS budget was allocated to the Auckland Resurgence Fund.
15. Weather events have also impacted the delivery in some regions, especially those which have used the Direct Sourcing Model as they are more likely to have practitioners who are affected by the weather events themselves. The benefit of a local provider in these circumstances, however, is that they understand the situation faced by the ākonga, their whānau and school first hand and can assist the wider community with wider support such as delivery of food parcels.

#### **Delivery is increasing over time**

16. Delivery is increasing year on year as we contract more locally based community counselling providers. As of 30 March 2023, 54,433 hours have been delivered by our community-based providers (not including services provided through the Auckland resurgence funds). There are now 42 providers delivering CiS to ākonga in more than 220 primary, intermediate, and small secondary or composite schools.
17. This has been done by renegotiating the size of some of the original contracts awarded through the RFP and directly sourcing regional and local providers. In situations where

providers, despite best efforts, have not been able to deliver a significant amount of their contracted hours, the Ministry has followed appropriate contract management processes. These have included providing clear expectations, listening to, and understanding the provider's views or actions and jointly determining a way forward. This has led to contracts being renegotiated to reflect current capacity or capability. We have reallocated 'unused' hours of delivery and budget to new providers and are confident, based on our reporting mechanisms, that our new providers will increase the delivery through a range of counselling practice models.

18. To widen the breadth of available practitioners to meet the needs of the schools, ākonga and whānau, we expanded the original definition of who can provide counselling to include social workers; occupational therapists; psychotherapists; psychologists; creative art therapists; music therapists and mental health nurses. These practitioners deliver counselling through a range of age and culturally appropriate therapies. All counselling practitioners need to be registered or supervised by a qualified supervisor.
19. Of the \$44 million over four years allocated through Budget 2020 for CiS, a total of \$11.925 million has been spent as at 30 March 2023.

	Expenditure (\$m)
2020/21	1.061
2021/22	6.496
2022/23 (to March 23)	4.368
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11.925</b>

### **Service delivery is now largely going well**

20. The Phase 2 ERO evaluation and feedback from regions indicates that service delivery is now largely going well, with schools and providers adopting different counselling models to suit their community and the needs of ākonga, supported by a broader range of practitioners. As relationships between practitioners and schools develop and grow, so too does the number of referrals to the service.
21. While most counselling sessions are with individual ākonga (84%), some schools are also running group sessions (15%), and whole-school activities have been undertaken in 27 schools. These include programmes to support ākonga to build resilience, recognise sources of distress, and use strategies to manage stress. These programmes have been well received by schools and have started to normalise the idea that counselling is a positive experience.
22. Principals and teaching staff have commented on how much they appreciate having counselling practitioners become part of their community. Having a counselling practitioner on site has enabled teachers to refer ākonga for counselling in a timely way.
23. The Phase 2 ERO evaluation identified a few aspects of delivery that are still not going entirely as intended:
  - a. Referrals are still mostly being made by principals, teachers, and the pastoral care team, but there are signs that self-referrals are increasing, with 14% of referrals now coming through whānau.

- b. CiS is intended to target ākonga with mild to moderate wellbeing needs, but some practitioners are also taking on ākonga with high and complex needs due to a lack of more appropriate supports.
- c. Communication issues between all key stakeholders (school, provider, Ministry) can be a key barrier to implementation and ongoing service delivery. This has led to, for example, variable understandings of the model and a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, including procedures for ensuring ākonga safety.

### **Counselling in Schools is making a positive difference for ākonga**

- 24. ERO's evaluation indicates that CiS is having a positive impact on the wellbeing and engagement of ākonga in participating schools. Counselling practitioners help ākonga to better manage their emotions, navigate their relationships with others, and become more resilient, confident, and calm. Administrative data indicates that 71% of ākonga feel better in themselves after receiving counselling, and many also report feeling better at school (63%), in their family life (53%), and in other things outside of school (63%).
- 25. Parents and whānau are noticing a positive difference when their children receive counselling, with 89% reporting improvements in wellbeing and 80% reporting an improvement in engagement. Most ākonga and whānau surveyed by ERO were positive about their experiences and reported feeling listened to and that they were given strategies that work. However, as most ākonga who responded to ERO's survey attended secondary schools, more evidence is needed to understand the experiences of primary aged ākonga, who are the main target audience of the initiative.
- 26. Teachers are also noticing improved social skills in ākonga receiving counselling, which in turn leads to improved relationships and greater involvement in the classroom. Teachers assessed 53% of ākonga who received counselling as showing improved participation in learning activities, and 52% as showing improved learning progress.
- 27. Māori make up the highest proportion of ākonga receiving counselling support through CiS (64%), reflecting the population of the schools involved. Counselling is having a positive impact on their wellbeing and engagement outcomes, comparable to the impact for other ākonga. There are signs that culturally responsive practice for Māori learners is improving, though still not fully embedded across all schools and providers. 66% of ākonga Māori feel that their practitioner understands their culture, which is slightly lower than for other ākonga.

### **Next steps for Awhi Mai, Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools**

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- 28. A decision is required about whether to continue funding CiS after the expiration of current contracts in December 2023. We have considered two potential options for CiS in 2024:
  - a. Recontract and reassess the case for additional funding after the final evaluation report is received (**recommended**)
  - b. Cease funding for the initiative at the end of this year and reprioritise towards other supports such as Mana Ake.
- 29. As CiS is now being effectively delivered in many schools and is having a positive impact on ākonga wellbeing and engagement, we consider that the initiative should continue after this year. Funding is ongoing and removing CiS from the Schools it is currently operating in would likely have a detrimental effect on those ākonga currently accessing this support.

30. The final evaluation is due to be completed in Term 2 2024. Given the current delivery levels and ongoing workforce constraints, there is not a strong case to expand the initiative prior to the final evaluation being completed.
31. We recommend continuing with the current approved level of investment for a further two years as we continue to increase delivery. 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]. This report will provide information on longer-term outcomes for ākonga and how these compare to comparable programmes.
32. If you agree to continuing CiS, we will engage with current schools and providers to confirm their willingness to continue with the service. We will recontract with providers who have been able to meet school and ākonga needs. Providers that have not met the level of delivery or performance that we expect throughout the initiative will not be re-contracted. We will also work to bring on board new locally based providers to ensure CiS provides appropriate support for school communities. We will also advise schools and whānau of the extension of CiS.
33. During this two-year period, we will work closely with Māori healthcare providers and Kura Kaupapa to develop a Mātauranga Māori approach, building on work of Te Rūnanga Nui and Ngā Kura ā Iwi, to determine ongoing funding needs. We wish to continue our work in building a greater community led approach.
34. We will also carry out further work to scope the impact of Mana Ake and how CiS and Mana Ake can complement each other in all Ministry regions. There has been a recent announcement that Mana Ake will be introduced into Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti primary and intermediate schools as part of the community-led mental wellbeing initiatives to support children impacted by the cyclone. We will work closely with Te Whatu Ora to ensure all schools in the region receive counselling and wellbeing support.
35. Working with Te Whatu Ora we will seek to understand how CiS and Mana Ake can work together in the same region, as is currently happening in Te Tai Tokerau, Auckland and Canterbury. It is important that both the Ministry and Te Whatu Ora understand the opportunities, constraints, similarities, and differences to ensure that as many schools as possible can access counselling and wellbeing support. 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
36. Following the final ERO evaluation report and a two-year focus on addressing the issues identified by ERO and our regions, additional funding may be required to expand the initiative. Further advice would be provided to you at this stage.