

Associate Professor Te Kani Kingi – Coming full circle: From mentored to mentor

Specialist Māori mental health researcher, Associate Professor Te Kani Kingi (Ngāti Pukeko, Ngāti Awa), hopes he might mirror the outstanding leadership qualities of his own mentor, the renowned Māori health and public researcher Professor Sir Mason Durie, in his role as Director (Māori) at Massey University.



Associate Professor Te Kani Kingi

Dr Kingi's research career began at Te Pūmanawa Hauora in Palmerston North where Sir Mason was director at the time. Dr Kingi grew up in Poroporo, near Whakatane, and attended St Stephen's School in South Auckland. He says Sir Mason has had a huge influence on his career.

"I couldn't have asked for a better supervisor or mentor than Mason. He's an outstanding clinician and researcher, but he's also a very giving and patient person. He showed a huge amount of empathy towards me and to others he supervised."

Dr Kingi's HRC-funded doctoral research into the disparity between Māori and non-Māori in mental health was carried out under Sir Mason's tutelage and is recognised internationally as groundbreaking. As part of this research, Dr Kingi helped to develop a Māori measure of mental health outcome known as *Hua Oranga*.

Rather than an exclusive focus on clinical symptoms, *Hua Oranga* is largely a measure of wellbeing, looking at gains in mental, physical, spiritual, and social health. It's designed to ensure that treatments for mental health issues are more aligned to the cultural expectations of Māori.

"*Hua Oranga* is a good example of translational research, where the research was initially supported by the HRC and is now being used in clinical settings and resulting in positive health outcomes for Māori," says Dr Kingi.

In his role at Massey University, Dr Kingi is responsible for staff development, student recruitment and retention, and research. He believes there are two main parts to being a successful mentor for emerging researchers: first, you need to be a competent researcher to guide others along the research path; and second, you need to have the capacity to listen and nurture others.

"Mason showed a great deal of compassion for other people's learning, which is something you can't teach. As a young researcher, I remember him introducing me to leaders in the field and taking deliberate steps to ensure that I was exposed to the right people and the right

environment. This is one small example of how Mason subtly guided young people to make a contribution in their chosen field.”

Although now a director himself, Dr Kingi is still actively engaged in mental health research and only recently stepped down as chair of the New Zealand Mental Health Commission’s Advisory Board. He was also recently appointed as chair of Te Rau Puawai, a Māori mental health workforce development scheme hosted by Massey University.

“The relationship between culture and health is most obvious in the mental health field, where an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and perspectives are often shaped by cultural factors. There’s a significant cultural dimension with mental health, particularly with regards to how mental health might be perceived, how symptoms might present, and how treatment and care options might be designed.”

Historically, levels of psychiatric admissions for Māori were low, but this has changed in recent times. Today, large numbers of Māori experience mental health concerns, something Dr Kingi puts down largely to socioeconomic and environmental pressures.

“On a positive note though, there’s now a lot more research being conducted by Māori on Māori mental health. There’s also been huge growth in the number of health providers and in the development of the Māori mental health workforce.”

Dr Kingi says it’s critical for emerging Māori health researchers to be supported to conduct research, and that a number of opportunities are likely to emerge from this process.

“While we often focus on the outputs of research, which are undoubtedly important, an added benefit is that it provides for research experience and research mentoring. If we reflect on the growth of the Māori health research workforce, many have been supported through research grants and research opportunities. To this end, the HRC has also played a major role in shaping our workforce and providing the kind of support which has allowed it grow and develop.”