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*SocialLink Tauranga Moana is a registered charity based at The Kollektive in 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Tauranga. It aims to support “a thriving social and community sector improving Western Bay of Plenty communities” through research, innovation, collaboration, information, networking and advocacy.*

## **Submission on Social Cohesion to the Ministry of Social Development September 2021**

Suggestions in this submission draw on published evidence, our own experience as an umbrella group supporting the social service sector in this region and locally based research, experience and knowledge from providers with whom we have consulted.

SocialLink is appreciative of the opportunity to participate and wished to make the following points.

**Q 1. Tell us your views on social cohesion. What does social cohesion mean to you and what would it look like in Aotearoa New Zealand if social cohesion was improved.**

**Q1a. What is important to you in achieving social cohesion?**

- 1. Urgently address the growing socio-economic gap within Aotearoa-New Zealand which detrimentally affects our social cohesion***

Unfortunately, Aotearoa New Zealand and its people no matter what age, gender or ethnicity face major challenges as do other countries, in grappling with the impact of Covid-19 pandemic; the frightening urgency of the impact of climate change impact, as well as the difficulty for a large proportion of the population on low incomes meeting basic needs such as affordable, decent housing and access to food, education and income.

Strengthening social cohesion will need to be continually addressed as a key policy and practical focus at national and local government levels. We need especially to improve the living standards, opportunities and outcomes for people on low incomes so that they have ongoing access to their culture, to a good standard of health, education, housing, income and employment.

Koi Tu Centre for Informed Futures, University of Auckland, in its document *He Oranga Hou: Social cohesion in a post-COVID world* pointed out, in response to the initial impact of the pandemic in 2020:

*“A high level of social cohesion can be seen in New Zealand’s response to COVID-19 in the acute phase. Enhanced cohesion is often seen in the initial response to major crises as communities pull together against a common threat. We have seen that members of communities with fewer socio-economic resources have responded to the crisis by drawing on their collective strength and by engaging in the wider community in new ways. Mutual aid*

*initiatives have been very apparent. But as the situation evolves over time, social cohesion risks being undermined, and may become worse than before the crisis.*

*“New Zealand may have been privileged with regard to pre-existing levels of cohesion, and the examples of enhanced social cohesion shown through the lockdown, but cannot afford to be complacent. Once social cohesion is lost, it becomes extremely difficult to restore, especially when there is both increased uncertainty and new forms of inequality. In sectors where it was already weak, lost opportunities will deepen already embedded inequities. We expect social cohesion to be threatened, especially if anger, frustration, depression and increased levels of anxiety occur and persist for some time, possibly years.”<sup>1</sup>Pg 4*

SociaLink in the Western Bay of Plenty, along with many other agencies in their regions around the country, have observed and reported on the many examples of social cohesion during the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021. There have been many local initiatives and much hard work of from social services, community groups, iwi agencies, hapu, marae, local government, neighbourhood groups, groups of different ethnicities, and individuals helping people struggling with the impact of Covid 19 lockdowns and other impacts.<sup>2</sup>These demonstrate the social cohesion reservoir of good will and capacity to support with fellow citizens.

However agencies report increased levels of demand for basics like food parcels, as well as financial stress and anxiety as the pandemic drags on amidst issues such as our major housing crisis that is affecting people’s ability to afford accommodation across generations. A recent Vital Update survey of Tauranga residents (pre-Covid) identified roughly 3% of the resident population were homeless (which does not take into account hidden homeless); 20% said they have no savings and 44% said they had savings for only a month.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Local communities, local government and other agencies proactively engaging to improve social cohesion**

It will be vital that at the local level we all continue to recognise, support and foster social cohesion in our increasingly diverse communities.

The Vital Update survey in Tauranga found that community connection and loneliness was a key focus for residents, including how people felt welcomed to the city. Access to technology, services, facilities and transport contributed to the feeling of connection. According to the 2018 census, one in five of Tauranga’s residents was born overseas and people belonging to ethnic communities and newcomers tended to feel more alone in comparison to Tauranga residents overall.<sup>4</sup> A third of the nearly 500 respondents from ethnic communities mentioned that if the community had greater awareness of cultures, and was more accepting and inclusive of different cultures and ethnicities, it would make others feel better about expressing their cultural identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Koi Tū: He Oranga Hou: Social cohesion in a post-COVID world, May 2020

<sup>2</sup>SociaLink A Scan of the Local Issues Social Service Providers are observing in Communities & their Organisations during Lockdown 2.0, August 2021; SociaLink Covid-19 Western Bay of Plenty Social Sector Survey Findings, April 2020; NZ Council of Christian Social Services, Briefing for Ministers and Ministries Covid-19 Lockdown Response of Community Social Services, April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Acorn Foundation, TECT, Bay Trust, Tauranga City Council (2020): Whakahou Take Vital Update Tauranga 2020 Main Report, Tauranga.

<sup>4</sup> Acorn Foundation, TECT, Bay Trust, Tauranga City Council (2020): Whakahou Take Vital Update Tauranga Ethnic Communities and Newcomers, Tauranga.

More emphasis on inclusivity and less racism featured in the top five 'one thing I would change' about Tauranga for all respondents, and more so for Māori and Pasifika respondents. While highlighting infrastructural issues such as traffic and roading; there was also considerable feedback about improving acknowledgement and access to Māori culture history and heritage in Tauranga Moana, and generally a greater focus on community wellbeing and connection.

There are some exciting initiatives in recognition of the importance of social cohesion such as such as Welcoming Communities initiative at local government level, in this region between Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Councils.<sup>5</sup>

Local communities will need to have national level leadership and supportive policy and funding to help their efforts to maintain and improve social cohesion locally.

### **3. Address ongoing inequities, especially housing**

Being able to afford decent and secure housing and call it home is a human right and provides an essential foundation for people and their families to feel a sense of place and belonging to a community.

Housing is New Zealanders' deepest concern according to Consumer New Zealand's sentiment tracking survey<sup>6</sup> and its unaffordability is considered to both illustrate and be leading to a deepening divide within Aotearoa New Zealand between the haves and the have nots.

Secure, equitable and ongoing access for all to housing, food and a liveable income, education and employment are basic components for people to have that will support a more socially cohesive society.

Having such a secure foundation helps people have the material, physical and psychosocial resources and energy to feel they belong, are valued and can participate in and contribute to their community.

#### ***Q1b. Does the definition of social cohesion resonate with you?***

SociaLink broadly supports the definition of social cohesion outlined in the RCOI report developed by Professor Paul Spoonley, Robin Peace, Andrew Butcher and Damian O'Neill, which describes a socially cohesive society as one in which all individuals and groups have a sense of:

- belonging – a sense of being part of the community, trust in others and respect for law and human rights;
- inclusion – equity of opportunities and outcomes in work, income, education, health and housing;
- participation – involvement in social and community activities and in political and civic life;
- recognition – valuing diversity and respecting differences; and
- legitimacy – confidence in public institutions

We would also like to see an acknowledgement in the definition that fostering and developing social cohesion is strongly affected by systems, policies and structures established by governmental and other agencies and that these should support social cohesion and not undermine it. This would

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.westernbay.govt.nz/community/cultural-diversity>

<sup>6</sup> RNZ 7 September 2021 (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/450962/many-homeowners-couldn-t-afford-to-buy-their-houses-if-purchasing-now>)

include enhancing the capacity for self-determination and the sharing of power underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Socialink therefore would like to see a definition include something along the following lines:

- Aotearoa New Zealand as a socially cohesive society is one in which Government and other agencies at national and local levels proactively invest and engage in developing and implementing policies and programmes that will maintain and further develop social cohesion by reducing material inequities and improve wellbeing. Te Tiriti o Waitangi must underpin these efforts.

#### **Q1c. How will we know if we are making progress?**

There are many indicators that can be used eg <https://statisticsnz.shinyapps.io/wellbeingindicators/> Also we endorse the submission from Inclusive Aotearoa Collective and its discussion of how we will know we are making progress.<sup>7</sup>

##### **a) Position of women, girls and children in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Socialink draws particular attention to the need to vastly improve attitudes and behaviour towards women and girls who are half of the population, if social cohesion is to be more than just a term. Our current statistics demonstrate that the behaviour, attitudes and experience of violence towards women and children are unconscionable and unacceptable.

The following are some indicators where progress could be measured or described:  
Reduction in

- family violence incidents on women and girls
- sexual assault and related incidents on women and girls
- expressions of fear of violence and sexual assault by women and girls
- use of women's refuges
- violence/abuse of children
- expression of feelings of safety and freedom from violence and abuse by children
- achievement of pay equity for women

##### **b) Consider the impact of intersectionality on fostering and measuring social cohesion**

Socialink recommends the impact of intersectionality be considered in efforts to enhance social cohesion. There are groups (eg young people, non-European, single parents; refugees, people with disabilities) in Aotearoa-New Zealand who are less likely than others to feel they belong, are included, can participate in society, feel valued or have confidence in public institutions such as government agencies to help them<sup>8</sup>.

Research and thinking on the concept of intersectionality; which, broadly, maintains that gender, race, age, (dis)ability, ethnicity, class, sexuality and similar phenomena can't be analysed in isolation

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<sup>7</sup> Inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand Submission on Social Cohesion by Anna Burgin, Graeme Store, Ara Alam-Simmons and Anjum Rahman, 2021

<sup>8</sup> Statistics New Zealand 2016 General Social Survey, Wellington

but “signal an intersecting constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups positioned within them.”<sup>9</sup>.

As Maroto et al put it in discussing the economic insecurity of disadvantage: “Disability intersects with race and gender to expand the accumulation of disadvantage, shaping everything from educational attainment to the kinds of jobs people have, the neighbourhoods in which they live, their access to credit markets and social services, and their health over their life course... there is compelling evidence of the ways in which stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs based on the intersection of multiple social categories contribute to inequality, marginalization, and disadvantage.”<sup>10</sup>

**c. Need for more local, granulated official data available for local regions and communities to use.**

Local communities need better access to local official data in planning and monitoring initiatives.

A lot of data is collected in Aotearoa New Zealand by government and other agencies and is available through the Integrated Data Infrastructure database or through ministries such as MSD.

Regional level data, eg for the whole of the Bay of Plenty area, is far too broad to be of help for the diverse towns, cities and rural communities wanting good local information for situational analysis, planning and development, gaining insights into issues, measuring and describing trends and evaluating initiatives that support social cohesion.

The ability to get more granulated administrative data at territorial authority, Statistical Area 2 or meshblock level or at Statistical Area 1 level would be very helpful for local agencies.

It would also be helpful to have more data collation, analysis and extraction expertise available at a local level.

### **Q 3 Taking action to strengthen social cohesion**

SociaLink suggests the following should be priorities:

- Raise the standard of living for people and their families living in poverty/low incomes and implement action to improve access to housing, food security; education and employment.
- Reduce inequities for Māori that have been well documented.
- Support parents and caregivers to set children up to have a good start in life.
- Engage in and support initiatives, including through co-design, with groups and communities, to enhance socially cohesive attitudes, understanding and behaviour and to reduce discrimination, bigotry and violence.
- Fund more local initiatives and community projects to facilitate positive interactions at local and neighbourhood level.
- Reduce siloed thinking and encourage integrated bold action within national and local government on this issue.

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<sup>9</sup> Collins, PH and Chepp, V. (2013), part of a working definition of intersectionality, quoted pg 42 in Joy, E (2019) “You cannot take it with you”: Reflections on Intersectionality and Social Work, Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work, Vol 31 (1), pp 42-48.

<sup>10</sup> Maroto, M Pettinicchio, D Patterson, A (2019) Hierarchies of Categorical Disadvantage: Economic Insecurity at the Intersection of Disability, Gender and Race. Gender & Society, Vol 33(1) pp 64-93.

- Use and enhance the capacity, knowledge, wisdom and ability of local communities and organisations around the country including through funding that are working on these issues.
- Create friendly streets and neighbourhoods for all and access to natural green places.
- Invest in reducing loneliness and isolation and fostering belonging and being valued among priority groups ( eg people on very low incomes, unemployed, Māori, young people under 24; single parents, migrants, new immigrants, refugees and older people living alone).