SocialLink Tūhono Pāpori | Western Bay of Plenty
Building a Thriving Social Sector

LOOKING AHEAD:

FUTURE TRENDS IN SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY

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SociaLink – Tūhono Pāpori is the umbrella peak body for the social and community sector in the Western Bay of Plenty.
SociaLink walks alongside community organisations, social service providers, and Kaupapa Māori organisations to strengthen their capability as they deliver services to their communities, as well as advocates for the sectors interests, social justice and equity of opportunity for all people living in the WBOP.
www.socialink.org.nz

Introduction

This report looks at the trends that are likely to affect the social service sector over the next 15 years when it will be 2040, the 200-year anniversary of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In fifteen years' time, what will the social sector look like? How will we be working? What challenges will we be faced with? What can we do now to work effectively and into the future? As the world around us is changing at breakneck speed, there is no doubt that there will be many changes and demands affecting the social service sector.

The purpose of this piece is to better enable for-purpose organisations to front foot and take advantage of developments and prepare for the future.

We hope this provides inspiration to dip your toes or further dip your toes into emerging new ways of working or technology that enhances the work you do and hence the impact of your organisation.

Many for-purpose organisations are already incorporating such trends such as:

- using artificial intelligence to save time on preparing reports and communications
- paying more attention to and using data to measure your impact, and/or to assist with informing the delivery of social services or
- co-designing services with those who use social services.

Seven trends are outlined based on a wide ranging international online search of future trends in social service delivery including using Chat GPT.[1] SociaLink was very grateful that the CEO of Te Pai Ora Social Service Providers Aotearoa, Belinda Himiona, kindly reviewed this report and provided very helpful and insightful feedback which helped guide the content in this report.

The social sector will be more important than ever

While there is always a hope that there is no need for social services, that success would be doing yourself out of a job, unfortunately there are no shortages of issues of concern and things to deal with. It can feel overwhelming.

Major challenges we face include:

- Poverty
- Violence
- Intergenerational income inequality
- The impact of colonisation
- Unaffordable and insufficient housing
- Structural racism
- Increasing mental health issues
- Threats to social cohesion
- Misinformation and disinformation
- Impacts of climatic change and weather-related events.

It is predicted that people will have increased access to internet, digital and social media generated information and advice. However for those with no or limited access, the digital divide will become even more marked as social and community services increasingly utilise technological innovations. Providers will therefore need to be very mindful of ways in which this increasing divide might reduce access to services and information.

The challenges outlined above mean the social service sector will be even more important. We help provide the glue to assist communities to function well and look out for each other. We provide many services essential for people and their whānau, from providing food, housing and shelter, counselling, health related help; practical support for people with disabilities, sport and recreation opportunities, spiritual support, reducing isolation and loneliness, help in emergencies and many more.

What will we need to do to be well placed to meet these challenges? How will we make the most of opportunities to improve efficiency, to work together better, to be effective? Some approaches like

[1] For example GovTech 5 trends driving the future of Human Services, Integral World – Innovative delivery mechanisms for social services, Transforming social care – Moving beyond 'better, faster, cheaper' – Deloitte Insights 2021, KPMG Connected Support and Care – the Future of human and social services

early intervention and working collaboratively, are well established as effective responses to social, health and community concerns. Other newer developments, such as the use of artificial intelligence are likely to have significant implications, both beneficial and disruptive.

The following sections outline six trends likely to impact the delivery of social services, and includes practical examples and potential downsides of these trends.

1. Increased focus on early intervention/prevention

It is well established that the foundations for good lives are impacted by social-economic determinants, including macro-economic and social policies. These impact on people's ability to earn liveable incomes, have safe, healthy homes, for children having a good start in life, access to education and health services, healthy natural and built environments and a safety net welfare system.[2]

Longitudinal studies such as the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study provide evidence that what happens at the start of life can have lasting impacts.[3] People with a poorer start in life are more likely to suffer poorer health, more unemployment, addiction issues, be be victims or offenders of abuse and crime and so on.

Policy and programmes that support good early life experiences and opportunities are also more cost effective to the state by spending less on prisons, hospital care and welfare.

There are many examples of early intervention and prevention efforts such as Te Whatu Ora's First 1000 Days[4] programme which focuses on hapūtanga (pregnancy), pēpi (babies), and new parents, to achieve equitable health outcomes across generations.[5] The Whānau Ora initiative takes a holistic approach to family wellbeing by placing decision-making power in the hands of whānau to determine their own needs and aspirations. Another example is Family Start, a targeted programme that provides intensive home visiting services to families with newborns who are at risk of poor health, education, and social outcomes.

[2] Marmot M and Wilkinson R (eds) (2005) Social Determinants of Health, Oxford University Press

[3] Eg Caspi A, Houts, RM et al (2016) Childhood forecasting of a small segment of the population with a large economic burden Nature Human Behaviour 2016. See for others https://dunedinstudy.otago.ac.nz/publications.

[4] 1000 days is from conception to second birthday

[5] First 1000 days.

What trends are we likely to see in the next 15 years:

- Technology-enabled early identification and assessment: With the advent of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, it may become easier to identify individuals or families at risk of social problems such as substance abuse, mental health issues, or domestic violence. Social service providers could use these technologies to screen clients more effectively, identify early warning signs, and develop appropriate intervention plans.
- Data-driven decision-making: Social service providers could use data analytics to identify trends and patterns in social problems, enabling them to tailor their prevention and early intervention efforts more effectively. By analysing data on factors such as poverty, education, and health outcomes, providers could identify communities or populations at higher risk of social problems and allocate resources accordingly.

Examples:

Hauora Direct

Hauora Direct Te Whatu Ora Nelson Marlborough is delivering a digitally enabled 360-degree assessment, intervention and referral program for Māori health and vulnerable populations called Hauora Direct.

Hauora Direct links all of the health priority areas for Māori - such as GP enrolment, immunisation, cervical and breast screening, and smoking cessation - and puts them into one programme. The clinical team undertake assessments and on the spot interventions against all these priority areas in location (including people's homes, pop-up community events, workplaces, or health clinics).

Over 90 percent of health issues uncovered are addressed on the spot with the person and their whānau. For those that cannot be immediately addressed, referrals are automatically generated and sent electronically to other services for follow up[6].

Regional Data Explorer[7]

Developed by the Social Investment Agency, this digital tool aggregates social and demographic data to support decision-making in community services. It enables service providers and policymakers to analyse community-specific information, aiding in the design and implementation of targeted social interventions[8].

[6] https://www.hinz.org.nz/news/613159/Digital-solution-enables-comprehensive-Mori-health-assessment.htm

[7]https://www.sia.govt.nz/what-we-do/regional-data-explorer

[8] https://www.sia.govt.nz/what-we-do/analytics

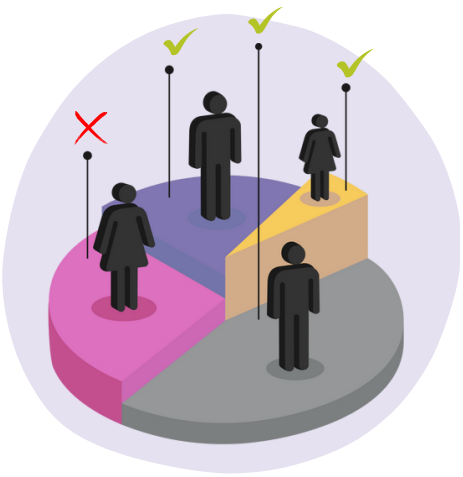
International examples:

In the United States, Allegheny County's predictive risk models have been used to improve child protective services by identifying high-risk cases more effectively[9]. rapidly integrates and analyses hundreds of data elements for each person involved in an allegation of child maltreatment. The result is a 'Family Screening Score' that predicts the long-term likelihood of future involvement in child welfare. By combining the insight gained through the score with other traditionally gathered information, a better prediction can be made of the long-term likelihood that the child will need to be removed from the home in the future.

Issues to watch out for:

One key issue is ensuring that data-driven risk assessments do not reinforce existing biases. If algorithms are trained on historically biased data, they may unfairly target specific communities such as low income and minority communities. Having said this, human judgements are also biased and imperfect. Regular auditing and human oversight is needed to mitigate potential biases.

There is also concern that technology enabled assessments result in resources being too targeted. for example, having risk factors for certain negative life . outcomes does not mean that they will experience negative outcomes. It also ignores those who do not have risk factors but do experience negative life outcomes. It is also a very 'individualistic' approach so risks blaming the individual and ignoring the social determinants that impact on people's lives.



There is also concern about data privacy and sovereignty.

The Social Investment Approach

The social investment approach is a key element of the current Government's social policy which has a focus on early intervention and prevention.[10] The Social Investment Agency SIA is tasked with managing it. It will influence the funding of interventions and programmes by government agencies and the for-purpose sector.

The approach emphasises using data and evidence to make decisions about where resources should be directed and invested to deliver long term benefits, such as early intervention programmes.

[9] Chouldechova, A & Putnam-Hornstein (2018) A Case study of algorithm-assisted decision making in child maltreatment hotline screening decisions. Proceeding of Machine Learning REsearch Journal 81:1: https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Services/Human-Services-DHS/DHS-News-and-Events/Accomplishments-and-Innovations/Allegheny-Family-Screening-Tool

[10] Social investment operates differently in other countries.

As part of social investment the Government is exploring introducing social impact bonds where the private or philanthropic sector may invest in funding initiatives and receive a financial return once outcomes of the initiative are achieved.

Social investments primary tool is the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI)[11],managed by Statistics New Zealand. The IDI holds vast amounts of anonymised data about people and households based on people's interactions(over time) with government services (e.g. Inland Revenue tax data, Ministry of Social Development financial support; use of health and education services and engagement with the criminal justice system). This information is referred to as Government (administrative) data. In addition Census data and increasingly data from non-government organisations is now also a part of the IDI.

What makes the IDI so powerful, is that all the data about each individual is linked, through a "data spine", (the integrated element of the IDI), and then this pool of anonymised data can be analysed to see impacts of interventions and policy initiatives for specific population groups - without the need to go back to individuals - whose data is already held within the IDI.

Access to the IDI is highly regulated, with tight security provisions allowing access to only carefully vetted researchers (so it is secure).

Issues to watch out for:

The IDI is based primarily on government administrative data so it is often skewed to focus on "deficit data" where state intervention has been necessary, and doesn't have as much data about what is going right for people (when they aren't in need of government support). This can particularly be the case for minority groups, whose data (because of historic impacts such as colonisation) often bears the footprint of negative systems failures that are then reinforced when these systems effects are not factored into the analysis of the combined (aggregated) data of individuals. It is when this data is then used as a "predictive indicator" of likely future outcomes that inherent danger exists. The data of minority groups is also more often analysed than other groups.

[11] https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/integrated-data-infrastructure/

Social Investment does offer a promising framework for addressing social issues but for it to work, it has been pointed out that it must be flexible, culturally responsive and mindful of the complexities of social issues[12] Social investment opportunities and challenges are outlined below.[13]

Opportunities for Communities	Concerns about Social Investment
• more targeted support for vulnerable populations • evidence based decision making (rather than based on assumptions or ideologies), • Long term financial savings • empowerment of communities with whānau centred and community led approaches. Needs to be led and shaped by communities, Māori and Pasifika providers. • innovation in addressing social challeges, through for example impact investing, supporting new technology to improve mental health care accessibility or funding start-ups.	• Requires leadership that fully understands how system approaches to social change works (ie cause and effect can be complex, long term, not always measurable or visible). • Should address root causes of inequality and not blame individuals. Can get too distant from knowledge, compassion, humanity and expertise in communities. • Over reliance on data and metrics, such as using Social Return on Investment (SROI) reporting- a calculation on what the $ return was for every $ invested. This has been criticised as dubious in trying to reduce complex impacts to a simple number and funding on this basis. • Privacy and security of data - crucial for agencies using IDI and other data to safeguard it and maintain their social licence to use it. • Limited capacity in many for purpose organisations to meet data collection and reporting requirements, especially in the current funding environment.

[12] LEAD – Centre for not for profit governance and leadership
[13] Sandy Thompson,(2024) The Emperor has some new clothes, LEAD Centre for Not for Profit Governance and Leadership, November.

2. Increased collaboration and partnerships on social and community issues

Many issues such as alleviating housing shortages, improving food or digital insecurity require multi-faceted efforts across sectors.

Organisations working together to address these complex social issues are not new and the focus on collaboration will continue to improve effectiveness, reduce duplication and waste, get 'better bang for buck' and to make it easier for people to get support.

Anecdotally it is understood that contracting for social investment are likely to favour larger providers which is another reason for smaller providers to consider how they can collaborate to be better positioned to secure funding.

Many examples exist of effective collaboration. Community agencies, local and national government have swung into action together in response to national or regional emergencies, for example during COVID 19 lockdowns or in response to weather events. Other examples are evident in the environment and food action areas e.g. Environment Network Manawatu see here; or community action e.g. through Focus Paihia see here or the Community-Led Development Trust with Whanganui Awa communities see here [14].

These examples identified how nimble responses and working together can be achieved but collaboration needs to be resourced and enabled. This will be helped by having more flexibility in contracts and to focus more on holistic and integrated responses when funding organisations.[15]

What trends are we likely to see in the next 15 years:

Digital and information technology can enable effective communication between providers and for service users/communities. Sharing of data and resources in real time can help reduce 'waste', streamline service delivery for individuals and for family/whānau

Example:

Digital Stuff We Love

Digital Stuff We Love[16] show cases many tools that offer a wide range of functions that can enable collaboration including:

- Allows 'to do' lists to be shared with others
- Online white boards to brainstorm ideas together
- Platforms for social media sharing
- Online tools to schedule meetings

[14] See more about these and others in Inspiring Communities/Powerdigm (2024), Powering up Communities to Deliver Local Wellbeing.[Link]
[15] Office of the Auditor General (2023) How well public organisations are supporting Whānau Ora and whānau-centred approaches. Wellington
[16] https://digitalstuffwelove.org.nz/browse-tools/category/planning-and-collaboration

- Online tools to schedule meetings
- Tools to make collaborative decisions around money and resources
- a collaboration platform that helps groups make decisions, discuss ideas and collaborate online
- Secure centralised cloud storage for file storage and sharing
- Collaborative work management platforms.

Data Exchange

The Social Investment Agency has helped develop a secure data exchange[17] - DX (since 2021 managed by commercial technology provider Eightwire). This platform provides a safe, secure and controllable method for government and service providers to transfer data, alongside clear guidelines about how data is used. The representatives of each organisation using the Data Exchange retain full control of the data they hold and share with others on the exchange and can stop sharing at any time.Using the Data Exchange means evidence based social support decisions can be made sooner by NGO's often using near real-time information.

Issues to watch out for:

Collaboration must be resourced with skilled facilitators. Having the skills and outlook to build and manage successful relationships is the key.[18] Data protection, privacy and sovereignty is also often a concern with data sharing. Encryption of information to be shared and use of multi-factor security mechanisms are now standard practice where data and information collaboration between and across organisations is happening.

While partnerships can enhance service delivery, power imbalances often arise when large government agencies collaborate with smaller community organisations. Ensuring that these partnerships are equitable and that smaller entities have an equal voice in decision-making is critical.

Sustainability is another challenge. Many partnerships rely on short-term funding arrangements or political will, making it difficult to ensure continuity when government priorities change. Establishing long-term agreements and embedding collaboration into policy frameworks can help mitigate this issue.

[17] https://www.sia.govt.nz/what-we-do/data-systems/data-exchange

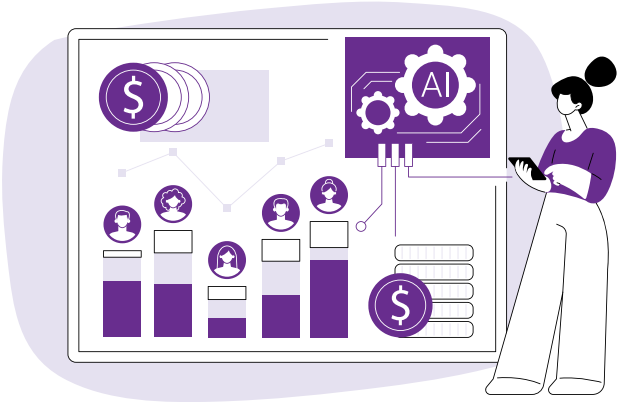
[18] Inspiring Communities/Powerdigm (2024), Powering up Communities to Deliver Local Wellbeing.

3. Greater emphasis on data and analytics

Data can be used for multiple purposes from monitoring someone's health to identifying changes in service referral patterns, tracking peoples progress, or for comparing before and after results and the impacts of interventions.

Using data to help identify your impact, will continue to be important for social and community sector organisations.

Analytics is the process of examining data to uncover patterns, trends and insights that can be used to make informed decisions. This can complement other forms of evidence such as qualitative data and people's lived experience.[19]



Predictive analytics, referred to earlier, is the use of data to predict future trends and events and is often used to identify 'at-risk' populations and intervene proactively. It uses historical data to forecast potential scenarios to help inform decision making.[20] It uses techniques like data mining, statistics, data modelling, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

While undertaking complex data analytics is not something most for purpose organisations have the expertise or resource for, it is important to be aware of how analytics are being used across the wider social and community sector. Like any new technological development, as it becomes more commonplace it does become more accessible for non-experts as well as more affordable.

In the meantime, improving data capability and the consistency of internal data systems and processes to help measure your impact and to inform the delivery of services is a necessary step in the right direction. Reliable organisational data will not only provide important insights for your organisation, but with the coming of social investment, organisations that are data-informed will likely be looked upon more favourably.

Resources

Community Insights, a service of SociaLink, is focused on building capacity in the sector to collect and use both internal (organisational) data and external (publicly available) data. [21] Community Insights also hosts a wide range of up-to-date sources of social data.[22]

[19] https://www.sia.govt.nz/what-we-do/analytics

[20] https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/predictive-analytics

[21] https://www.communityinsights.org.nz/services/

[22]https://www.communityinsights.org.nz/data-resources/

Examples:

Auckland City Mission uses data analytics to analyse their data in order to ascertain trends in service use to then be able to identify gaps or areas where more resources are needed.[23]

The New Zealand Department of Corrections employs predictive analytics to assess the likelihood of reoffending among prisoners through the Risk of re-Conviction x Risk of re-Imprisonment (RoC*RoI) model. This statistical tool calculates the probability that an individual will be reconvicted and re-imprisoned within a five-year period. The RoC*RoI score is derived from various factors, including the individual's criminal history and demographic information, and is utilised to inform sentencing, parole decisions, and the allocation of rehabilitative resources.[24]

Issues to watch out for:

Data analytics involves a specialised skill set that many for-purpose organisations, particularly smaller organisations, will not have at hand.

The reliability and validity of data analytics is very much influenced by the quality and interpretation of data. If the data is not cleaned properly, consistently entered and/or is interpreted with biases it is far less reliable.

Data analytics also relies on the accessibility and availability of data analytics cannot be derived where data does not exist.

Data security is also extremely important to ensure individuals' personal and identifiable information remains private.

In addition, if the assumptions underpinning data analytics (particularly predictive analytics and modelling) aren't transparent, the outcomes of analysis are much harder to critique or challenge. This becomes particularly problematic when these outcomes are being used as the basis of resource allocation or future policy direction. When only the technocrats and not subject (or community) experts are able to fully understand the methods used, their limitations and/or to see any errors in their use, the power and agency of communities and impacted individuals is reduced.

[23] https://www.recordbase.co.nz/customer-success/auckland-city-mission?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[24] Inspiring Communities/Powerdigm (2024), Powering up Communities to Deliver Local Wellbeing.

4. Greater Use of Artificial Intelligence, Digital/Information Technologies

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy. Generative AI (the creation of new content) and natural language models are the newest iteration of machine learning. These technologies are likely to have increasing use and application across the social sector[25]. The table on the following page outlines.

[25] For more explanation of types of AI see https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence

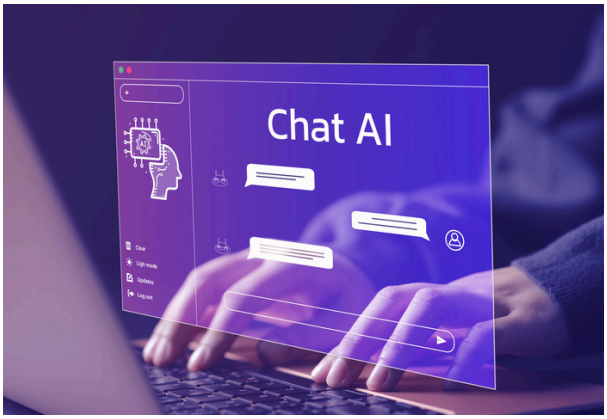
Operational Tasks that AI can assist in to help with efficiency and free staff up for more complex nuanced work with people or in problem solving. *(see Our Community Pty Ltd (2024) artificial Intelligence and the Community Sector. A guide to the new frontier. Melbourne)*	
Administration	Meeting recording, summarising and transcripts (eg through Otter.ai, Verbalize Microsoft Office transcript service). Task allocation, optimising calendar and roster schedules. This type of use can free up frontline workers from long admin tasks to spending more time on the frontline. OT and MSD have been exploring automated tools and digital assistance to do this with social workers
Budgeting and Finance	AI can be used for shorter term tasks like cost management, performance tracking and resource allocation. Human insight and judgement is still needed though on broader strategic plans.
Communication	Kickstart writing of documents, grant proposals, donors' notes, policies and procedures and so on with ChatGPT. Google Workspace and Microsoft Office can help craft presentations, respond to emails and schedule meetings.
Data Analysis	AI algorithms can quickly process and analyse data, both internal and external, to support planning, service improvement, evaluation, identify trends, insights and patterns. Tableau is just one AI powered data analysis example that can link and analyse datasets, produce dashboards and presentations.
Fundraising and donor management	Inexpensive AI data analysis systems can analyse donation patterns and support with fundraising planning and tailoring messages.
Marketing	Applications like Canava and Copy.ai can help develop flyers and tailor copy for specific audiences.
Privacy of records	Blockchain technology can securely store and share sensitive information like medical records or financial data, while maintaining privacy and control over the data. New Zealand based Centrality has partnered with HealthChain to explore using block chain for storing health data securely and the University of Auckland is looking at its potential for managing and sharing patient information across health and social service sectors.
Programme Evaluation	The use of AI supported tools such as SurveyMonkey, Microsoft or Google Forms can help get feedback and insights form clients, staff and volunteers. For example, SurveyMonkey includes built in analytic tools that highlight patterns and provides graphs to help staff unfamiliar with or without the time for data analysis.
Project management and planning	Monday.com and Trello.com are project management tools to facilitate collaboration and workflows, with tasks and follow-ups between team members

AI Platforms

There are a number of AI platforms which will undoubtedly grow over time, each have their own strengths and weaknesses so the best platform will depend on your needs.

Examples of platforms include:

- Chat GPT
- NotebookLM
- Perplexity
- Gemini
- Claude
- Microsoft Co-pilot



Issues to watch out for:

AI may hold some bias given it is dependent on the information that is fed into it.

Data privacy is not guaranteed so it is strongly recommended to not input confidential information.

Human oversight is still required as data accuracy is often not accurate.

The usefulness of AI is somewhat dependent on the prompts you provide to elicit the information you want, training in framing good prompts will improve the effectiveness of AI.

AI, particularly generative AI, has significant energy requirements due to the computational power needed for training and inference. These requirements are projected to increase dramatically in the coming years, potentially leading to substantial energy demand growth in data centres with subsequent environmental impacts.

AI as companions and therapists

AI appears to be increasingly used by some people as a companion to combat loneliness or even are being used as a therapist. According to the Harvard Business Review therapy/companionship is the top reason people use AI, replacing generating ideas as the top use of AI in 2024[1]. The emergence of AI therapy chatbots has the potential to reduce the widening gap between the demand for psychological support today and the limited availability of professional care[2].

While AI companions can offer emotional support and potentially alleviate loneliness, particularly for those with limited access to traditional mental health services, studies have also shown that excessive or inappropriate use can lead to negative outcomes such as increased loneliness, dependence, and even depression[3]. Until further research is undertaken to better understand the impact of AI as a companion and particularly as a therapist, AI should be treated with caution.

[1]Bermand, B (June 2025) Harvard Business Review Research Finds the Top Use of Gen AI in 2025 is 'companionship and therapy'.
[2]Ophir, Y, Tikochinski, R, Elyoseph, Z, Efrati, Y and Rosenbergy, H. (May 2025) Balancing promise and concern in AI therapy: a critical perspective on early evidence from the MIT-OpenAI RCT. Frontiers in Medicine.
[3]Ramirez, V (May 2025) A glimpse into the future of AI companions. AI Frontiers

Potential Benefits:

- **Accessibility** - AI chatbots can provide 24/7 support, potentially bridging the gap for individuals who face barriers to accessing traditional mental health services, such as geographical limitations, financial constraints, or social stigma.
- **Personalized Support** - AI can analyse user data and tailor interactions to individual needs and preferences, offering personalized strategies for stress management, relaxation techniques, and self-care activities.
- **Confidential Space** - AI-powered tools can offer a private, judgement-free and confidential space for individuals to discuss emotional concerns without the fear of judgment or stigma.
- **Combating Loneliness** - AI companions can offer a sense of connection and reduce feelings of isolation, particularly for individuals who are socially isolated or lack strong social support systems.

Things to look out for:

- **Dependence** - Excessive reliance on AI companions can lead to emotional dependence, potentially hindering the development of healthy social relationships and coping mechanisms.
- **Negative Psychosocial Outcomes** - Studies have shown that extended daily interactions with AI companions can, in some cases, reinforce negative psychosocial outcomes, such as loneliness, dependence, and even depression.
- **Erosion of Human Connection** - There is a concern that over-reliance on AI companions could diminish the value of human interaction and interpersonal relationships.
- **Ethical Considerations** - Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for misuse of AI in mental health require careful consideration and ethical guidelines

Digital/Information technologies

Social media, use of devices, "Apps", telemedicine, virtual assistance, chatbots, virtual/augmented reality are just some of the developments being increasingly integrated into most people's everyday life, with both favourable and concerning consequences.

It is predicted that there will be improvements in digital inclusion with the expansion of mobile applications ("Apps") and digital platforms to provide accessible services, especially for marginalised communities.

Examples:

- Chatbots or conversational interfaces are used in social services, education and healthcare to answer questions and provide advice on websites for example. It is important that clients know they are dealing with a bot, not a human.
- Online portals and platforms like Healthpoint, MyMSD, Health 365 provide information, service access and support. Logging in for self-service options includes online applications, scheduling appointments or connecting to a health professional or support.

- AI companions, robotic care givers and home-monitoring technologies will continue to develop to support ageing at home.
- Apps can provide information to help individuals access social services and resources such as foodbanks, shelters, healthcare services, job training programmes and so on. Examples include: Here2HelpU (heretohelpu.nz) operating in the Waikato and Western Bay of Plenty and Te Ara Pae Ora (tearapaeora.nz) covering Kapiti, Porirua, Wellington and Wairarapa. Other apps provide support, tools and resources, for example on mental health and wellbeing (e.g. Mentemia/Groov) and for parents and children with an autism spectrum disorder (e.g. Autism).
- Video and other platforms can provide online real-time consultations with health professionals, social workers and others, particularly helpful for rural and remote communities or people constrained by disabilities. Organisations using it include Te Whatu Ora Canterbury and Whānau Ora.
- Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies that simulate real life scenarios can help people develop skills and confidence in a safe and controlled environment. This might be to reduce phobias, or to help people manage being in a social environment, when dealing with substance-related harm from alcohol and/or other drugs, or for assistance in assessing risk and safety in a hazardous workplace.
- Technology in the form of smart home devices such as voice activated home assistants can support people with a disability
- Wearable technology can monitor health metrics and alert caregivers to a vulnerable person's need for help.

Issues to watch out for

For the social sector, trying to keep up with the opportunities, development and risks of emerging technologies is a challenging task.

The pace of digital innovations often out distances the capacity to use and adopt. Cyber security threats, upgrading aging technology, scams, training, funding options, and ensuring privacy of client data are some of the operational issues they will need to be continuously addressed.

People with limited access to technology, and data and those without digital literacy skills may be unable to use technological initiatives so it is important access to services is not solely reliant on technology.

5. Ongoing focus on person-centred practice

The long-term focus on person-centred practice will continue. It means working collaboratively with the person or whānau and supporting people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to more effectively manage and make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

Experience-based co-design or co-creation of services with people, whānau and communities is empowering and helps ensure services are tailored to people's specific circumstances. Culturally sensitive care will require a well-trained workforce and the capacity to support our increasingly diverse population.

There will be more options for self-diagnosis and self-care such as sensory clothing technology that can monitor blood pressure.

While technology and AI may augment the delivery of services it can never replace face-to-face delivery of services. It will be increasingly vital for social services and community organisations to be trusted sources of accurate, curated information, provide face-to-face expertise, compassion and support and be centres for fostering social cohesion.

Examples:

Tools such as Smaply (https://www.smaply.com/) visualise the user experience by mapping different people's journey through a service which helps service users share their personal experiences and identifies "pain points" and opportunities from the user's perspective.

In Canterbury, the health system employs electronic Shared Care Plans (SCPs) or Personalised Care Plans to support individuals with complex health needs. Shared care plans enable coordination and improved communication between primary, secondary and community health services and real time information sharing. These plans document the person's current issues, desired health outcomes, and the actions both the patient and care team will undertake to achieve these goals. The Plans are shared electronically across the Canterbury health system, (and with the client) ensuring coordinated and person-centred care.[26]

[26] Canterbury Clinical Network (https://www.pegasus.health.nz/health-provider-information/shared-care-planning)

Issues to watch out for:

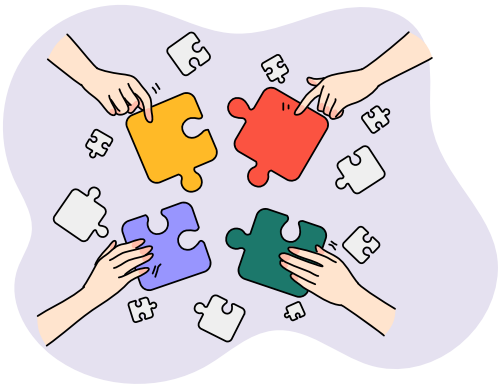
Many tools require the collection of sensitive personal data. If this data is not properly protected, this can lead to breaches of confidentiality.

Tools may not be sensitive to the cultural values or communication styles of diverse communities.

Some tools are not adaptable to different service contexts or individual situations.

Another possible trend on the horizon…peer driven change

It might not be an identified trend yet but the next development from client-centred practice may be 'peer-driven change', looking for communities to support each other and not rely on government or not for profit interventions. Similar to community-led development approaches, peer-driven change is focused on peer-to-peer support for individual change.



Mauricio Miller has led and established the Center for Peer-driven change in the U.S. The basic premise is to create an environment where people in low income communities can help one another and lead their own change.

This occurs by finding the positive influencers in communities and directly transferring responsibility and resources to enable residents to share, grow and own the solutions.[27]

Another variation of peer-driven change is UpTogether[28] which recognises that it is the systems, not individuals that hold people in poverty. The initiative creates a community to support and help one another, offers financial support to families with no strings attached (often in the form of a guaranteed income) and works to achieve systems change breaking down the barriers that trap people in poverty.

6. Climate Change Disruption

The changing climate includes increasing temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and storms, sea-level rise, increased risk of infectious diseases and poorer air quality. Natural hazards such as earthquakes and flooding will continue and wildfires will become more frequent

There will be damage to infrastructure such as water, housing, sewage and transport systems disrupting communities and incurring significant costs to councils, businesses and residents. The effect of weather and

[27] https://peerchange.org/pdc/

[28] https://www.uptogether.org/approach/

climate changes to horticulture will impact on the wellbeing and incomes/costs of living for seasonal workforces, some of whom will be living in the WBOP. Māori communities are being impacted because many live close to the coast, infrastructure, as well as tapu places like urupā or burial grounds, are particularly at risk from sea-level rise and coastal erosion[29].

Turbulent weather and associated events will increasingly impact on communities, especially the vulnerable who are:

- less able to escape heat-related illnesses such as heatstroke
- more susceptible to respiratory issues due to air quality
- likely to have fewer choices to relocate or cover costs associated with loss of homes and other damage.

We are already seeing the mental health impacts of climate change:

- anxiety, stress, and mental health issues related to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and uncertainty about the future
- for those who have experienced severe flooding, rain can trigger anxiety,
- there are many people who also have generalised anxiety about the impact of climate change going forward and as impacts become more severe, anxieties may worsen

Weather/climate and natural hazard related shocks will require local responses and will result in increased insurance and other costs. Rising insurance and household energy costs, relocation of some communities that will be affected will mean more demands on community cohesion and services.

Our Pacific Ocean neighbours will be affected by turbulent weather, rising sea levels which may mean more come to Aotearoa New Zealand as well as more rescue efforts which NGOs and New Zealand communities will be involved in

Trends:

- Increased requirements and interest by organisations to reducing carbon emissions and waste. This will include continuing to use online meetings to reduce travel.
- There will be fewer petrol cars and transport relying on petrol, with a majority of cars electric and the use of hydrogen and plant fuel.
- Emergency management will be needed more often, along with support from social and

[29] https://niwa.co.nz/climate-change-information-climate-solvers/climate-change-and-possible-impacts-new-zealand

community agencies, marae as community hubs and volunteers.
- Plans and places will be needed to support people on low incomes to deal with weather related events and the community sector will have ongoing roles to support these.
- Insurance costs for structures leased or owned by not-for-profit organisations will increase and will need to be built into budgets. Some organisations will need to move from buildings and locations threatened by flooding.
- There will be more older people with limited mobility as well as people with disabilities or suffering from health related issues who will need more assistance in emergencies as well as after event support.

Examples:

Iwi, hapū and Māori responses

Iwi, hapū and Māori communities have consistently demonstrated an ability to effectively engage in readiness, response and recovery for catastrophic hazard events in Aotearoa New Zealand. These actions are operationalised, both independently and in collaboration with local Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) groups[30]. Māori have played an important role in emergency management for a number of natural hazard events including the 2010–11 Canterbury and 2016 Kaikōura earthquakes, the Edgecumbe flood in 2017, the 2019 Tasman Nelson bushfires and the 2023 Cyclone Gabrielle severe weather event. Examples include:

- **Te Runanganui o Ngāti Porou** provided emergency accommodation, meals and worked to support vulnerable members of their community, including the elderly and those with disabilities[30]
- **Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Porou** are two iwi that are installing emergency management containers at marae that are stocked with supplies such as generators, blankets and food as well as installing Starlink satellite communication systems for marae [31]
- **Ngāti Hine Health Trust** Established a welfare centre in Northland, providing temporary accommodation, meals, and other essential supplies, and coordinated with emergency services[30]
- **Te Riu o Waiapu Trust Board** Supported vulnerable community members, including the elderly and disabled, in Waiapu, offering transport for evacuations and essential supplies[30]

Community responses

There are 1000's of community groups in Aotearoa and many step up to provide vital support to those in need in a natural disaster, they know their communities and how to reach them

[30] Community-Led Disaster Response: The role of small charities and marae in New Zealand's Floods and Cyclone Gabrielle (February 2023) HuiE! Community Aotearoa.

[31] Emergency Managers' perspectives on Māori response and recovery approaches: managing catastrophic hazard events in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aprilm2025) Australian Journal of Emergency Management

them so can often deliver support more quickly than the official systems. For example in response to Cyclone Gabrielle the following organisations, offered crucial support:

- **Aotearoa Africa Foundation and The ARK Collective** helped with evacuations and clean-up efforts in Auckland.[32]
- **Rural Support Trusts -** Provided on-the-ground support for farmers and rural communities, assisting with needs like stock movement and financial aid.
- **North Shore Sikh Society -** Cooked thousands of meals for those affected by Auckland's flooding[32]
- **The Rotorua Pacific Island Development Trust** was ready with an emergency plan and emergency shelter in place and prepared food packs and staff ready to respond in Pacific languages[32].

Issues to watch out for:

Iwi, hapu and community organisations are often not recognised or resourced by Civil Defence Emergency Management in Aotearoa so in the event of an emergency are often not effectively utilised to reach communities.

With so many organisations already having too much on their plate and some being in survival mode, considering their role in climate change and its impact on the communities they serve can be seen as too far into the future and so goes in the 'too hard' basket. The exception to this of course are organisations who stepped up in natural disasters and extreme weather events who are only too aware of the impact these events have on communities.

7. Sector Funding

Securing sufficient, long-term funding is a constant, ongoing issue for most providers of social services in the face of growing demand and increased complexity of need.

What trends are we likely to see in the next 15 years:

1. Social Impact Bonds, impact investing, or Pay for success contracts

The government is seeking private and philanthropic investment as part of its social investment approach. These a

{32] Community-Led Disaster Response: The role of small charities and marae in New Zealand's Floods and Cyclone Gabrielle (February 2023) HuiE! Community Aotearoa.

If a predefined social outcome is achieved, funders recoup their investment plus a reasonable rate of return.

While there has been interest in social impact bonds that have been used in the U.K, and the US, limitations such as administrative cost (e.g. cost of the evaluator, an intermediary, setting up the bond) has meant a limited roll out internationally of this type of financing.

Example:

A Social Impact Bond was piloted in 2017 to reduce recidivism called 'Pathway Reintegration'. The Pathway Reintegration programme (run by the Pathway Charitable Group, henceforth PCG) is a programme that seeks to successfully reintegrate prisoners back into society. This programme is based around individualised social work support and counselling as well as assisting clients with employment, accommodation and other practical support.

What to look out for

'Pay for success' or social impact bonds can be time consuming in terms of determining outcomes and how to measure whether outcomes have been achieved that can be attributed to the funded intervention. Interventions with more complex cases may be de-prioritised compared to more straight forward cases where outcomes are quicker and easier to reach.

2. Increased Māori and Iwi-Led investment

As more iwi complete Treaty Settlements and as the return on investments of existing Treaty settlements grow, many iwi are increasingly investing in their people through health and social services, kohanga reo, kaumatua programmes etc.

Example:

Ngāti Whatua Ōrākei as part of their extensive Toi Ora programme offer all registered hapū members in New Zealand free health insurance.

3. Charitable bequests could be a significant source of funding

People leaving bequests to the for-purpose sector could become significant as part of the 'unprecedented' intergenerational wealth transfer from the baby boomer generation over the next 20 years, according to JB Were.[33] The number of deaths in New Zealand will double over the next 50 years.

The estimated value of inheritances in 2024 was $27 billion, compared to the annual income of registered charities of $25 billion (in 2023). JB Were expect cumulative inheritances to total around $1.6
trillion by 2050. Part of this will be in the form of bequests in wills to for-purpose organisations such as individual charities or family foundations (e.g. Tindall Foundation,

[33] JBWere NZ Bequest Report, February 2025

JR McKenzie Trust) and community foundations (e.g. Acorn in the Bay ofPlenty). Currently the bequests as a proportion of total charity income is about 1.3% in New Zealand, below values seen in the USA (1.8%) or the UK (4.5%).

JB Were believe the rate and benefits of bequests to the for-purpose sector could be increased. Such philanthropic funding would be well placed to fund innovative initiatives as well as provide support to the most vulnerable. Organisations should consider how their work resonates with people considering bequests.

4.Community Devolution

Over the years there has been discussion and some attempts at devolving central and/or local government powers and responsibilities to local communities or community groups. This can involve giving communities more control over local decision-making, resource allocation, and service delivery. The aim is to empower communities, enhance local leadership, and improve the relevance and effectiveness of policies and services. This discussion is likely to continue and trialling of devolution initiatives.

Examples:

Iwi -Crown ownership, governance and management of natural resources

Iwi -Crown ownership, governance and management of natural resources There is a growing list of examples of iwi co-owning, co-governing and/or co-managing natural resources or taonga in their rohe, as a result of Treaty Settlements, for example:

- Tūhoe and Crown practice joint-governance over Te Urewera, which has its own legal entity[34]
- Whanganui iwi and Crown practice joint- governance over the Whanganui river, which has its own legal entity[34]
- Tauranga City Council transferred to Mauao Trust the title of Mauao on behalf of the iwi of Tauranga Moana to protect and preserve the mauri of Mauao, both TCC and Mauao Trust jointly administer Mauao[34]
- Ngāti Tūwharetoa own the Lake Taupo seabed and Waikato Regional Council transferred to the Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board all water quality monitoring of Lake Taupo[35]
- Crown-iwi co-management of the Waikato River catchment[34]
- Te Maru o Kaituna River Authority, iwi co-govern and co-manage the river alongside local councils, focusing on restoration, protection, and enhancement of its environmental, cultural, and spiritual health[34]

[34] https://www.tiritibasedfutures.info/current-co-governance-projects

[35] Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board Media Release (2020) Section 33 Transfer with Waikato Regional Council

Focus Paihia Community Trust

Focus Paihia was a realisation that it was time to stop waiting for someone else to fix the town's problems and for the town to work together and 'get their hands dirty' and make positive change happen.

Focus Paihia projects are volunteer-led and driven by community champions, with local businesses, iwi, community groups (such as Rotary and Lions) and local residents collectively getting in behind to support with their time, equipment and resources.

The Far North District Council have devolved some contracts to Focus Paihia e.g. cleaning and created a targeted town rate that provides grants for Paihia activities[36].

Mclaren Park Henderson South Community Trust (MPHS)

MPHS is a responsive, community-led development organisation that has over the last 20 years gone from strength to strength, actively supporting the wellbeing needs of their local community through diverse initiatives, projects and programmes.

They hold a number of contracts that have devolved responsibility down from Auckland Council and the Massey Henderson Board to MPHS e.g. the running of Hub West community Facility, management of Tipping Pont (a resource recovery centre at ta Council owned Refuse Transfer station, and a shaping up Neighbour's contract (place making and street clean up events)[37].

What to look out for:

With regard to community devolution it is critical to ensure the community and/or iwi has the capacity (skills, resource and support) to effectively take on the devolved powers and that resourcing matches the responsibilities the communities, iwi or community groups take on. In times of government cuts, public services can lean more heavily on communities, iwi and community groups with no resourcing or support, which is not so much devolution but abrogation of responsibilities.

[36] Powering Up Communities to Deliver Local Wellbeing." Author: Inspiring Communities/Powerdigm, 2024.
[37] ibid

So, what does this all mean?

The challenges facing us mean we need to be sharing, collaborating and trying to become more efficient to enable us to spend more time and skill on where it's really going to make a difference.

If you are not already considering and adapting to these trends and new developments, perhaps you could start with small actions e.g. do some training in AI, much of which is online and free. Hold discussions with your Board and team about these trends and how they could be utilised by your organisation.

SociaLink would love to hear about how you may be responding to these trends and if you have any suggestions or needs we may be able to assist with, for example in building data capability.

"The best way to predict the future is to create it."
– Peter Drucker

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