

# Current Condition 2023 Alcohol and Drug Harm Informative Report

Researched by Emma Woods



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# Executive Summary

## Background

The purpose of the Alcohol and Drug Harm Prevention Steering Group is to provide a structure for collaboration between community organisations to address alcohol and drug harm in the Waimakariri District by supporting the objectives of the Waimakariri Community Action Plan for Alcohol and Drug Harm 2021 (Waimakariri Steering Group, 2021) using evidence-based practice.

In February 2023, the Steering Group undertook a review of the Waimakariri Community Action Plan on Alcohol and Drug Harm 2021. It was decided, at that time, to engage an intern to undertake a qualitative research project among the community's key stakeholders in order to ensure any changes to the Action Plan would effectively and positively impact the wellbeing of the Waimakariri community. This report is tailored where possible to align with the Waimakariri Community Action Plan for Alcohol and Drug Harm 2021 objectives.

## Research Methodology

From April 2023 to August 2023, various stakeholders provided a diverse platform of local, relevant knowledge regarding local alcohol and drug harm throughout the District. Information was gathered through group and one-on-one facilitated discussions with a total of 13 participant groups consisting of 52 individuals.

## Community Perspectives and Context

Waimakariri social development organisations, justice organisations, steering group members, education facilities, rural organisations, government organisations and non-government organisations are valued participants. Involving these stakeholders in the development of the report helps to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the real-time, locally relevant issues is clearly understood with the information in the right place.

## Ethical Considerations

Informed consent procedures were followed, and high value was placed on the privacy, storage and deletion of information. Organisation names and any other identifying details were removed. With these measures in place, the report is able to be collaborative, transparent and respectful, leading to enhanced outcomes.

## Key Findings and Themes

**Five key themes were identified through this report:**

1. The need for community education around drug and alcohol harm.
2. The need to empower individuals with the tools to make responsible decisions.
3. Societal trauma plays a significant role in the misuse of drugs and alcohol.
4. The cultural tendency to resist help exacerbates the problem.
5. Well resourced, locally relevant solutions to addressing Drug and Alcohol Harm should be collaboratively explored.

# Introduction

‘Current Condition’ aims to provide an overview of the relevant local knowledge collected from various organisations regarding alcohol and drug harm. The information gathered is intended to inform local government, associated working groups and partnering organisations about the specific challenges and behaviors that are being observed along with the consequences associated with drug and alcohol harm in the community.

Using a qualitative research approach, this report hopes to provide a narrative of key findings and, most importantly, a collection of voices across diverse, local community contexts, to gain an authentic understanding of alcohol and drug harm in the Waimakariri. It is tailored, where possible, to align with the Waimakariri Community Action Plan for Alcohol and Drug Harm 2021 objectives (Waimakariri Steering Group, 2021):

1. Minimise alcohol and drug harm through effective regulatory planning.
2. Where appropriate, undertake an advocacy role for change in alcohol and drug legislation and promotion for a safer outcome.
3. Educate and empower the community to make safe and responsible choices about alcohol and drug use.
4. Promote safe drinking, the principles of host responsibility and engage in partnerships with key stakeholders across Waimakariri District.
5. Engage with young people in the community through education and recreation opportunities.
6. Promote collaboration at local, regional and national level.

Overall ‘Current Condition’ aims to facilitate evidence-based decision-making, collaboration, and the implementation of targeted interventions to promote healthier and safer communities. Its intention is to effectively communicate the experiences, perspectives, and narratives surrounding alcohol and drug harm in the Waimakariri District. The report is intended to serve as a baseline for actionable steps while also providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics related to alcohol and drug harm.



# Methodology

In the context of communicating the Waimakariri drug and alcohol harm voice, the various stakeholders who contributed to this report provided a diverse platform of local relevant knowledge. Waimakariri social development organisations, justice organisations, steering group members, education facilities, rural organisations, government organisations and non-government organisations were valued participants.

- Education facilities are important due to their direct contact with young people and their wider environments, including whānau and their communities, risk factors, prevention strategies and effective, targeted educational programs. Partnering with education facilities may give a deeper understanding of the impacts to young people and their whānau.
- Rural organisations and community groups can offer valuable insights into the alcohol and drug harm behavior observed and the implications of those. Rural areas face unique challenges, for example aspects of isolation, access to services, and different social dynamics.
- Local Government has the authority to implement policies and allocate resources. They can provide valuable insights into the social factors that may be contributing to substance harm in the Waimakariri and hold a significant interest in developing strategies for prevention and intervention.

Informed consent procedures were followed, and high value was placed on the privacy, storage and deletion of information.

Organisation names and any additional identifying details are removed to ensure the report remains collaborative, transparent, and respectful, leading to enhanced outcomes.

The 'voices' reflected in this report were gathered via group and one-on-one facilitated discussions with a total of 13 participant groups consisting of 52 individuals. Open questions were used to gain deeper understanding and playing the role of the naïve enquirer. Robust healthy discussions were prompted with the following set of questions being asked of each participant/group:

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Alcohol and Drug Harm look like in your space?
  - Positive and negative aspects
  - Substances consumed
  - Behaviors observed.
2. What are the factors of your space that contribute toward positive outcomes? That is, people avoiding or recovering from long-term harmful consumption.
  - Positive aspects of environments
  - The capacities of people
  - What is helping people make good decisions?
  - What do they have?
3. What are the contributing factors you observe hindering positive outcomes?

Think... Wide.

- Incapacities of people and environments
  - What hinders people?
  - What don't they have?
4. If everybody has a part to play in prevention of alcohol and drug harm:
    - a. What do those positive outcomes look like?
    - b. What do service providers and users need?

Think... Aspirational, Accountability, Resources, Capacity.

These approaches encouraged open dialogue, inclusive participation, and meaningful interactions.

# Models

‘Prevention’ refers to a range of proactive measures and interventions aimed at reducing the occurrence or impact of various problems and negative outcomes. It involves taking actions and implementing strategies to prevent or mitigate potential harm before it happens.

There are three models that have been key to the analysis of this research. When used together, they help to build a holistic understanding about the role prevention plays in the alcohol and drug harm space.

## I. Te Whare Tapa Whā

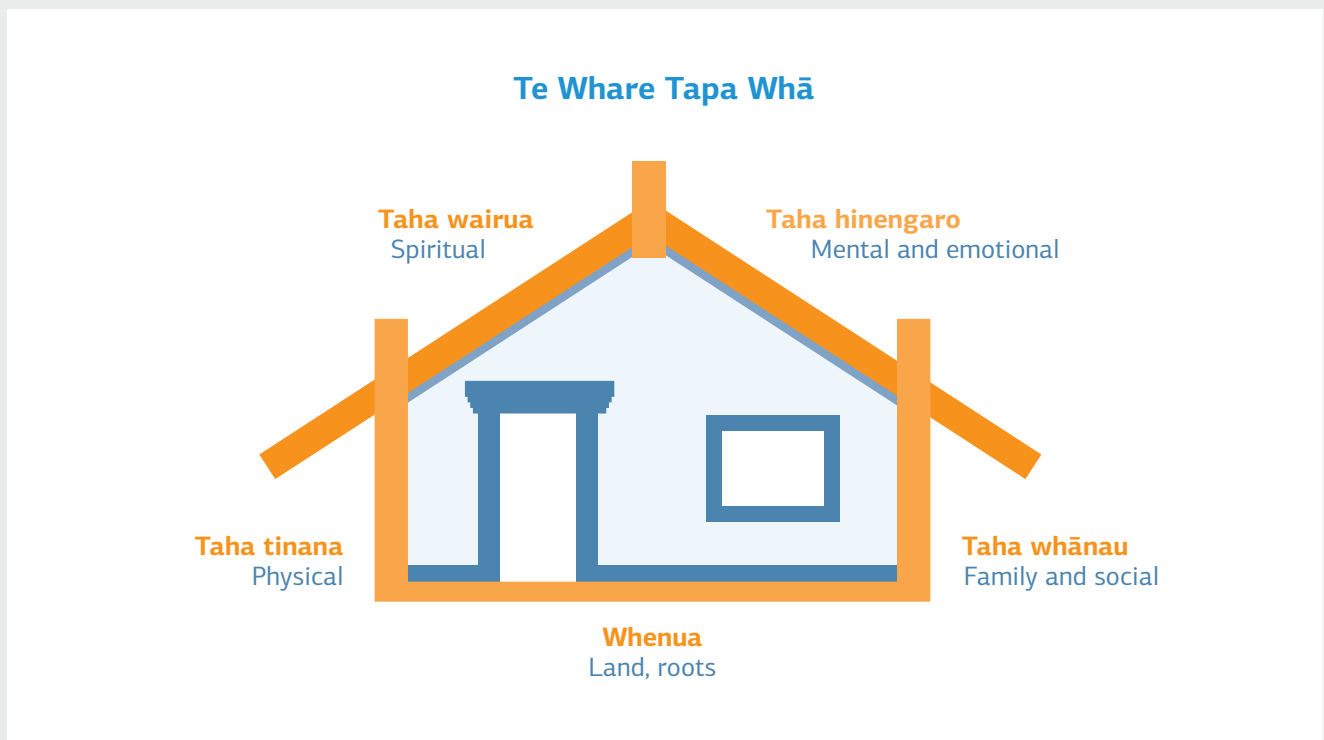
Te Whare Tapa Whā was developed by Māori health advocate Sir Mason Durie in 1984 (Mental Health Foundation, 2023).

Prevention, using the perspective of Te Whare Tapa Whā, a Māori model of health and wellbeing, enables a holistic approach that addresses the dimensions of Hauora (health):

- Taha tinana (physical well-being)
- Taha hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing)
- Taha whānau (family and social well-being)
- Taha wairua (spiritual well-being).

From a prevention perspective, the Te Whare Tapa Whā model can be utilised to help individuals avert the onset of physical and mental health issues, including addiction, and promote overall community wellbeing.

This approach can be adapted to address a wide range of societal issues and challenges and regenerate capacities in our individuals and communities affected from drug and alcohol harm (Mental Health Foundation, 2023).



## II. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

This image of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory shows the relationship between people’s biology and the nested systems that exist in their day-to-day lives. The dynamic interactions between these concentric environments and their associated levels of influence can help provide a wider understanding in relation to the role alcohol and drugs can play in an individual’s life.

Alcohol and drug harm can have wide reaching effects on different levels of society, communities, and interpersonal relationships. In the context of alcohol and drugs, ‘harm’ can refer to the adverse consequences and risks associated with

the consumption and misuse of substances. The impacts may be extensive, affecting the strength and resilience of individuals within our communities. These consequences can stretch the resources and capacities of substance consumers, families and whānau, local organisations, ultimately leading to the destruction of individuals and the social fabric of the wider community.

Applying a wider environmental perspective provides us with a broad scope and a framework to act “...before the horse has bolted so to speak...” (Participant Voice, 2023).



Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory allows us to “... zoom out, as if using Google Earth” (Salem Press, 2022), gaining a more holistic view of the factors at play within this space.



### III. The Spectrum of Prevention

In 1982 Larry Cohen developed the framework the Spectrum of Prevention to guide and design the implementation of prevention programs (Cohen, L. 1982).

The Spectrum of Prevention is a comprehensive model that provides a framework for addressing

social health issues, including drug and alcohol harm. It consists of six strategies that consider the determinants of community health and can guide the development of an approach to prevention (Rattray, et al. 2002).



### Connecting the three

When used together, these three models offer a thorough and inclusive approach to alcohol and drug harm prevention.

- Te Whare Tapa Whā focuses on the necessity to look at everyone holistically when considering methods of prevention, support and treatment.
- Bronfenbrenner’s Theory then highlights the importance of considering the different societal levels of a person’s life, which may ultimately inform their decisions.

- The Spectrum of Prevention then moves us into the response—supporting the individual through diverse prevention strategies.

Together these models offer the opportunity for stakeholders to create a multi-pronged, effective approach to the issues within the drug and alcohol harm space.

# Key Discussion Themes

## 1. The need for community education about drug and alcohol harm

Throughout this study, participants were passionate about the need to empower Waimakariri communities through education. There was a strong desire for learning opportunities available to families, whānau, parents, young people, and educators themselves.



*We need real information in schools about the real hard harms drug and alcohol harm produces” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“More conversations in schools about the consequences, like the smoke packets” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“What worked so well for drink driving to change through the generations... Let’s repeat that somehow” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Start this education young... age appropriate of course, like I’m talking preschool with children and their whānau” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Parents are perhaps experimenting with a ‘They’ll learn’ culture this tells me parents have lost the confidence to provide education on alcohol and drugs with their children. So, they have relinquished control. They don’t know what they don’t know” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“It’s just like talking about sex with them” (Participant Voice, 2023)*

*“Vaping and smoking weed are surely gateways to other sources and types of drugs. More serious ones... if that’s okay to say?” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“There is so much denial evident and it has turned into substance use being normalised. I’m talking about vape stores, these substances are the precursor to the next substance, the next high. The brain becomes wired for a better result. Their addiction behaviors are now activated” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Break times, in class, in toilets, before school, on the way to school. It happens all over the place” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“People can’t be bothered to find other ways of coping” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Vape is easy to get, easy to hide, easy to share” (Participant Voice, 2023“)*

*“Parents use vapes as rewards” (Participant Voice 2023).*

## 2. The need to empower individuals to make responsible decisions

*“Ultimately there is no safe amount of anything... No safe amount of steak, no safe number of cigarettes, no safe amount of road crossings. However, if we provide the resources communities have capacity”* (Wasted Wisdom Symposium, 2023).

This statement reminds us of the importance of being mindful and educated when it comes to the choices we make. It also underscores the role of individual responsibility in prevention efforts, education, and harm reduction strategies.

*“Alcohol harm is everywhere. It’s how harmful they choose to make it, or how harmful their environment is making it, I mean the drinkers”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

By promoting a culture of responsible decision making and awareness, we can work towards minimising the risks associated with harmful substances and behaviours, ultimately fostering healthier and safer communities.

Strengthening individual knowledge and skills involves direct interactions with individuals to provide information and promote behaviour change. Interactions between service users and providers can enhance their understanding of social issues and develop the skills for maintaining their wellbeing.

## 3. Societal trauma plays a significant role in alcohol and drug harm

It has been international news that the people of Aotearoa New Zealand have experienced a series of traumatic events in recent years, including the devastating Christchurch earthquakes in 2011, followed closely by the Mosque shooting in 2019. Later in 2019 another 22 people were killed in the volcanic eruption on White Island. Only months later the Covid-19 pandemic, with thousands of deaths and forced isolation for millions of people (Kiyimba & Anderson, 2022).

Unresolved pain and distress, despair and hopelessness can push vulnerable individuals to seek an escape from the harsh realities of their lives. Kiyimba & Anderson (2022) explains that trauma is not new for Aotearoa New Zealand and that the long term effects of intergenerational influences can impact the values and experiences of our individuals and their communities.

Challenges can create unstable environments, making it difficult for individuals to access safe spaces for protection within the community. Left unchecked, these environmental impacts leave individuals vulnerable and can create vicious cycles in their lives. These impacts ripple through communities, tearing apart social structures, breaking hearts and eroding trust and safety.

*“As a community we have the choice to recognise the relationships between these issues or ... not”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

*“Trauma is rife. Historical, daily, violence, poverty... I cannot list them all”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

*“Unfunctional in society, society becomes foreign. This is relevant in our rural isolated pockets of the Waimakariri”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

*“There are teams of three in the gyms of Waimakariri. They circulate to sell. They are targeting new Mums”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

*“Problem drinking as opposed to addiction”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

*“They are under the influence of alcohol, weed, MDMA, LSD under our watch. Do we have any idea where they get the need to be addicted comes from?”* (Participant Voice, 2023).

#### 4. The cultural tendency to resist help is exacerbating the problem

*“Do we have addiction culture, or do we have you can’t ask for help culture?” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“It’s hidden in plain sight” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“High functioning addicts are very hard to work with. The smarter they are the better they are at hiding it and prolonging getting help. The more judgemental their environment is the more they hide it” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“It’s abnormal to ask for help. Particularly in our rural settings” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Rural women are afraid of the implications of asking for help” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

#### 5. Well-resourced, locally-relevant solutions to addressing drug and alcohol harm should be collaboratively explored

There was a high level of communication received about accountability and the capacity for education delivery across our District. Ensuring our community and organisations have the necessary resources and relevant information is vital in addressing these challenges effectively.

*“Are we putting our money in the right places?” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“The Waimak needs to provide for the residents. There’s something about the option to be in your space, to protect your space, to hold your space and to receive from your space. It’s in the heart and gut and having the option to receive from their places and people provides a deep kinship...Kaitiakitanga” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*We want to take an opportunity and build a guard rail. Why wait? We want to plug people into projects that deliver” (Participant Voice 2023).*

*“We need a place to do this well, one place, a one stop shop” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“A walk in Community Hub. I’ll even make a name for it” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

*“Hot desk rostered clinical practitioners, parenting programs, mental health support, yoga, music classes, cup of tea, a walk in 9-5 support service one stop shop” (Participant Voice, 2023).*

Note: This situation may highlight the need to assess resource allocations and provides us with a glimpse of the reality individuals and whānau in our communities may be faced with.

*“And this is only the beginning of help for some, sigh...” (Wasted Wisdom Symposium2023).*

By promoting accountable practice, we can empower stakeholders to actively participate in improving education and other essential services. Properly resourcing these efforts enables us to harness the full potential of our community, organisations, and individuals, leading to more impactful outcomes.

It is through collaborative efforts and informed decision-making that we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for the Waimakariri District ensuring that every individual has access to the opportunities they need to thrive.

# A Word on Vaping and Weed

## A word on vaping

While other substances were also discussed during the research phase of this report, vaping was consistently brought up by participants.

Vape shops have become a concerning aspect of the alcohol and drug harm landscape.

The presence of such shops within or near communities amplifies the risk of teens experimenting with e-cigarettes and other vaping devices, potentially leading to long-term health effects, and perhaps reinforcing substance misuse tendencies. These establishments often glamorise vaping products with appealing flavours and packaging.

## Ongoing New Zealand research

Dr Kelly Burrowes, Associate Professor in the Bioengineering Institute of Auckland University New Zealand is undertaking a significant research project using computational modelling, medical imaging and experimental measures to measure and understand the impacts on lung function from the effects of exposure to e-cigarettes (Radio NZ, 2021). Dr Kelly Burrowes states in her research she has discovered that over 40,000 Kiwis are vaping daily and there are over 15,000 flavours available to ingest through the process of oral inhalation.

## 2023 Legislation

With the submission of the Smoked Tobacco Regulatory Scheme Proposal aiming to strengthen tobacco control measures and safeguard community wellbeing, advocacy efforts in influencing policy and legislation have been instrumental in driving significant changes in vaping regulations at a central government level. As a result, new legislation was introduced in August 2023 to tighten regulations on vaping products, including restrictions on flavors and locations targeted at minors.

*“From August this year, all vaping devices sold in New Zealand will need to have removable or replaceable batteries. This limits the sale of cheap disposable vapes that are popular among young people.”*

*“We also want vapes as far from the minds and reach of children and young people as possible, so any locations within 300 meters of school and marae will be off limits for new shops” (Verrall, 2023).*

## A word on weed

Ahead of the 2020 New Zealand cannabis referendum, research was undertaken to examine the developmental patterns of cannabis use across Dunedin and Christchurch (Poulton et al. 2020).



Approximately 1,000 people were studied from birth into their 40's. The findings identified that cannabis use in the Christchurch cohort began relatively early, with 15% having used the substance by age 15, and rapidly increasing to 80% by mid-twenties.

As cited in Poulton et al. (2020) by (Silins et al. 2014) a study conducted with information from the Christchurch study along with the data from two Australian cohorts reported that daily use of cannabis before 17 years was associated with a much higher chance of using other illicit drugs by 30 years of age.

Cannabis users are more likely to try other drugs because of their relationships with other substance using peers or contacts through drug dealers. There may also be neurobiological effects from cannabis that lead to their illicit drug use (Silins et al. 2014 as cited in Poulton et al. 2020).

# Looking Ahead

While alcohol and drug harm and the societal challenges feeding it are numerous and complex, there are a number of community support organisations and resources across the Waimakariri District whose work engages the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the model of Te Whare Tapa Whā.

*"1kg meth – about \$350 000. This is why the financials are so affected and crime is prevalent and prostitution"* (Participant Voice, 2023)

Engaging and collaborating with existing organisations working to meet the whole needs of the individual can help to ensure an effective, holistic prevention strategy in the alcohol and drug harm space.



# 2021 Action Plan Objectives' Alignment with Research

## 2021 ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. Minimise alcohol and drug harm through effective regulatory planning. (See Theme 1 and 5.)
2. Where appropriate undertake an advocacy role for change in alcohol and drug legislation and promotion for a safer community. (See Theme 1, 2, and 5.)
3. Educate and empower the community to make responsible choices.
4. Promote safe drinking, the principles of host responsibility and engage in partnerships with key stakeholders across the Waimakariri District.
5. Promote collaboration at local, regional, and national level.

## KEY DISCUSSION THEMES

1. The need for community education about drug and alcohol harm. (See AP Objectives 2, 3 and 4.)
2. The need to empower individuals to make responsible decisions. (see AP Objectives 2, 3, and 4.)
3. Societal trauma plays a significant role in drug and alcohol harm.
4. The cultural tendency to resist help exacerbates the problem of drug and alcohol harm.
5. Well-resourced, locally-relevant solutions to addressing drug and alcohol harm are collaboratively explored. (See AP Objective 1,2, and 5.)

These are potential gaps in the 2021 Action Plan Objectives.  
See Observations and Recommendations.

# Observations and Recommendations Based on the Data

Overall, the objectives of the Waimakariri Community Action Plan on Alcohol and Drug Harm 2021 align with the Key Themes identified through the 2023 research undertaken through this report. However, there is an obvious gap around societal trauma and empowering people to ask for help.

Based on this alignment, below are some initial recommendations for the Steering Group's consideration:

- Professional development opportunities to “educate the educators.”
- Prioritise education opportunities for the wider community and for individuals to equip people with knowledge of alcohol and drug harm as well as tools to make responsible choices. This aligns most closely with the needs identified by the community.
- Explore ways to incorporate Key Discussion Themes 4 (societal trauma) and 5 (resistance to help) into the action plan. These could be through targeted education programs, support services, etc. Using the models included in this report while integrating these themes into a plan will help ensure a holistic approach.
- Ensure effective community collaboration by continuing to build relationships with key stakeholders across the Waimakariri. This can be facilitated in several ways:
  - Community workshops/forums
  - One-on-one discussions
  - Invitations to join or present to the Steering Group
  - Inviting stakeholders to participate in specific projects.



These recommendations could form a review of the current Action Plan, as well as priorities for its implementation going forward.



# Conclusion

The pressing need for immediate support facing drug and alcohol dependencies in the Waimakariri and the South Island is evident.

The reality of limited resources highlights the need for collaborative action and prioritisation of effective, locally-relevant responses.

Alcohol and drug harm in communities are deeply concerning issues, further exacerbated by various social factors prevalent in the Waimakariri District such as poverty, violence, addiction, trauma, and other challenges. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that involves recognising the relationships between these interconnected problems.

- Substances and behaviours such as vaping, drug use and alcohol misuse may be used as mechanisms to escape from harsh realities. Understanding the underlying causes and addressing inter-generational influences is crucial to breaking the cycles of addiction and harm.
- Vape shops and the availability of various substances can contribute to the concerning behaviours being observed in our young people. The legislative changes in August 2023 are vital in preventing harm.
- Effective communication and community education about substance use and the risks associated with it, play an important role. They also can play a part in breaking the stigma in seeking help and creating a more supportive and understanding community, where the individual is recognised and valued.
- Promoting accountable practice and proper resource allocation in the Waimakariri can lead to more impactful outcomes. By working collaboratively and making informed decisions, we can create more equitable solutions to local alcohol and drug harm.

Addressing alcohol and drug harm requires a collective effort. By recognising the complex interplay of factors contributing to substance dependencies and addiction, we can build a stronger foundation for a healthier and safer community, where individuals can seek help without fear of judgement. Together, we can create a society that values every individual, ensuring that no one is left behind on the path to a better tomorrow.



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215 High Street  
Private Bag 1005  
Rangiora 7440, New Zealand  
**Phone** 0800 965 468  
waimakariri.govt.nz

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