

# Horopaki mai i tō mātōu Kaiwhakahaere | Context from our Kaiwhakahaere Matua

Wisdom is with the aged, and  
understanding in length of days.

*Job 12:12*

When you think of an older person, who do you see in your mind? Is it a family member? A neighbour? Someone in your community?

Do they have value to you? Do you respect them? What is their place in your world? What is their place in our society?

As the proportion of our society that is older grows, it is crucial that we all have a good understanding of the context of ageing in Aotearoa.



**This context needs to be reviewed through a holistic lens, and at a societal and community level. Although we have known that our societal demographics were changing, we seem to have done little of the mahi to be ready for it.**

It is common for those advocating for older people to talk about the contributions those at this life stage have and continue to make. These include through the workforce, volunteerism, with knowledge, through taxes, community work, and many more examples. These contributions are held up as a foil to being seen as a burden, no longer useful or as a cost to the state. But surely as a community and as a society this contribution should not matter? People have inherent value, and that value should not have to be quantified in order to ensure that basic human rights and needs are met. For those who have empathy, this will not be a foreign idea, and nor will it be new thinking for many who have faith, cultural expectations around ageing or who are naturally generous.

And yet our shared value of care doesn't seem to translate into action. Treasury's first major report into our national wellbeing **Te Tai Waiora**<sup>1</sup> was published in 2022, and many headlines made a point of saying "most" older New Zealanders were doing very well. However, it also made the clear point, that those without home ownership were increasingly facing material hardship – particularly those with low incomes and low wealth. In June 2023, the Minister for Seniors advised a select committee<sup>2</sup> that 40% of older New Zealanders did not own their own home, and that this was expected to rise to 50% over the coming 10 years. I'll leave the reader to connect the two.

Further, loneliness remains a huge challenge for older New Zealanders. As our society changes how we interact, particularly in relation to technology, we actively

need to consider the impacts on all people. Older New Zealanders deserve to be treated as taonga, loneliness is the last battle that we would wish anyone to fight as they age. We need to consciously battle this as individuals and communities, but we also need to commit to this structurally. How we design our public spaces and housing, our legislation and policy, the funding we allocate and the energy we put into initiatives are all ways to actively combat loneliness, and show value for our older citizens.

This guide offers a start point to readers, to gain a good grounding in the strengths, knowledge, issues and challenges that exist in relation to older people. On the one hand, we have wonderful research, clear legislation and innovative practices. On the other, infrastructure, workforce and funding are in crisis. The issues faced in relation to supporting older New Zealanders are the same faced across the health, community and social services, irrespective of the age of the cohort. But are compounded by a lack of urgency, profile and action. These issues are largely out of alignment with how New Zealanders like to see themselves, or what we perceive are our values in relation to caring for our older people.

We need urgent action to challenge the structural issues facing our older people. The time is now.

Ngā mihi nui,

**Nikki Hurst**

Kaiwhakahaere Matua Executive Officer

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-report/te-tai-waiora-2022>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/53SCSS\\_EVI\\_c8ae4ce6-862f-46f6-da4c-08db57de42b0\\_SS7133/c96db9ebd92a9fb56e6aa7972dfff8da51c231](https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/53SCSS_EVI_c8ae4ce6-862f-46f6-da4c-08db57de42b0_SS7133/c96db9ebd92a9fb56e6aa7972dfff8da51c231)