



Te Rerenga

NEWSLETTER | SEPTEMBER 2026

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A medal shared with many



"This is a huge honour, but it doesn't belong to me alone. Everything the College has recognised is the work of a team. Our general practice teams, our PHO kaimahi and our community partners who show up every day for whānau. I just happen to be at the forefront of it sometimes."

— Dr Claire Isham.

— Dr Claire Isham with RNZCGP President Dr Luke Bradford at the ceremony. Credit: Smoke photography.

WBOPPHO Clinical Director Dr Claire Isham received the RNZCGP Community Service Medal for her contribution to communities across the Bay of Plenty.

Dr Claire Isham, WBOPPHO's Clinical Director and specialist GP at Ngāti Kahu Hauora ki Tauranga, has been awarded the Community Service Medal by the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (RNZCGP) at a ceremony in Auckland on Saturday 1 August 2026. The honour is presented to members who have made an outstanding contribution to the communities they serve.

Dr Claire said the recognition belonged to many. "This is a huge honour, but it doesn't belong to me alone. Everything the College has recognised is the work of a team. Our general practice teams, our PHO kaimahi and our community partners who show up every day for whānau. I just happen to be at the forefront of it sometimes."

The award reflects a long record of steady work across primary care in

the Bay of Plenty. Through her clinical leadership, governance and commitment to equity she has helped shape services to better meet the needs of Māori, rural and high-needs communities, embedding cultural safety and whānau-centred care across delivery.

Turning to the work that matters most to her, Dr Claire pointed to the communities she serves. "I'm proudest of the outreach clinics we run as a collaboration between Ngāti Kahu Hauora and the Hauora of Matakana and Mōtītī islands. That only happens because of the people around me and the trust of the communities we serve. This medal is really theirs to share."

A proud full-circle moment

As the president of the RNZCGP, Tauranga GP Dr Luke Bradford presented Dr Claire with her Community Service

Medal at the awards ceremony. It was a special moment for them both. Dr Claire was one of Dr Luke's teachers when he began his career as a first-year GP registrar at Ngāti Kahu Hauora. Their relationship has since grown into a lasting friendship built on deep professional respect.

"Getting to honour my teacher and mate was a real highlight of the night. Claire's dedication, brilliance and commitment to equity and justice set an example for every young doctor. I am thankful for the role she has played in my journey, and for the perseverance and patience she brings to so much important mahi. Not all heroes wear capes, but that night she did."

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A medal shared with many – continued

Leadership that matters

As Clinical Director at WBOPPHO, Dr Claire Isham led the development of integrated referral pathways and strengthened relationships between primary and secondary care, improving both access and quality across the rohe.

WBOPPHO Chief Executive Sarah Stevenson said her leadership makes a real difference. "Having a doctor like Dr Claire guiding our clinical direction is something we value deeply. She helps shape the standards and support that guide good care across our practices and services, always with equity and whānau at the centre. That kind of

leadership really matters for the health of our communities."

Her influence extends well beyond the region. As Chair of the Clinical Leadership Group for General Practice New Zealand (GPNZ), and through a range of other national forums and advisory groups, she has been a strong advocate for primary care and for high-needs populations in system design and funding.

She also spent ten years as part of the Forensic team at Tautoko Mai Sexual Harm Support, providing compassionate care to patients at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. More recently, she has contributed to the Atawhai research

group, helping to advance research into interpersonal violence and improve models of care and service responses.

Her journey

Originally from Jersey in the Channel Islands, Dr Isham has lived in New Zealand since 2003. She completed her medical training at Birmingham University in the UK and her vocational training in general practice in both the UK and New Zealand. At WBOPPHO, she leads the Clinical Advisory team, which works across the organisation to enable the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based and equity-focused programmes. She also works as a specialist GP at Ngāti Kahu Hauora ki Tauranga. ▲

Practice-side experience joins the Network Services Team

Rangipehi King (Rangi) has joined WBOPPHO as a Network Liaison, providing general practices with regular visits and ongoing, practical support across programmes, reporting, enrolments, funding and sector systems. With 14 years in primary care behind her, several as a practice manager, she knows the realities of the job first-hand.

Rangi works alongside Nick Page, Juniper Hamuera-Ozbolt, Becca Shooter and Bella Medeiros in the Network Services Team. Her experience will be valuable

well beyond the general practice teams she supports directly, strengthening what the wider organisation and the provider network can draw on.

"I have spent a big part of my working life in general practice, so I know how much these teams carry and how little spare time there is in a day," Rangi said. "I am looking forward to using that experience to make things a bit easier. This mahi matters to me. When practices are well supported, it is patients and whānau who feel the difference." ▲



— Rangipehi King (Rangi), Network Liaison.



Manaakitanga in action at Ngāti Kahu Hauora

When a local whānau lost their home in a fire in July, Health Improvement Practitioner Sharon Richmond, Health Coach Nia Dudson and the whole Ngāti Kahu Hauora practice team rallied and put out a call for help.

The response from the community was overwhelming, and the donations that came in allowed the team to wrap real, practical support around that family at one of the hardest moments of their lives. ▲



KEY HEALTH OUTCOMES

Best Mental Health Programme



BeingWell a national finalist for Best Mental Health Programme

Locally developed and co-designed with whānau, WBOPPHO's service is one of two shortlisted at the 2026 New Zealand Primary Healthcare Awards.

Western Bay of Plenty Primary Health Organisation (WBOPPHO) has been named a finalist in the 2026 New Zealand Primary Healthcare Awards | He Tohu Mauri Ora for its **BeingWell** service. The Bay of Plenty programme is one of two finalists for Best Mental Health Programme in the Key Health Outcomes category. The winners will be announced on 17 October.

Kiri Peita, WBOPPHO General Manager Hauora Māori, Equity and Community Wellbeing, said the recognition highlighted both the impact of BeingWell and the collaborative approach behind its growth.

"Our Health Improvement Practitioners, Health Coaches, counselling coordination team, social workers, general practice

teams and community partners work together every day to support and provide compassionate care to tangata whaiora. We are proud to see this locally developed, co-designed and integrated approach recognised nationally."

The New Zealand Primary Healthcare Awards | He Tohu Mauri Ora recognise excellence, innovation and collaboration across the sector. This year, 150 entries were received in 22 categories, with two finalists in each.

One integrated wraparound service

BeingWell in its current form launched in March 2025, following a redesign of WBOPPHO's mental health support to improve access, reduce barriers and strengthen early intervention.

The service's growth and impact since then come down to how it is coordinated and integrated locally, WBOPPHO Chief Executive Sarah Stevenson says. "What makes BeingWell work is that it brings our workforces together into one wraparound service. The whole team

works alongside general practice and is well connected to community providers, local services and secondary care, so whānau get the right support at the right time."

Increasing demand

The service is available to more than 210,000 people through 34 general practices. Since 2023, the number of people using the service has increased by 38% and visits have grown by 80%. More than 83% of people were seen within one week. In 2025, 8,820 people used BeingWell, resulting in 28,955 visits with Health Improvement Practitioners and Health Coaches. ▲

ADVOCACY IN ACTION:

Helping shape wider, fairer diabetes medicine access

Nearly 1,900 submissions nationwide informed the final criteria, protecting cover for Māori and Pacific Peoples, and extending it to thousands more.

WBOPPHO welcomes Pharmac's decision to widen access to four type 2 diabetes medicines from 1 September 2026. It responds to a key concern raised in the organisation's submission during the consultation period: that the changes must not reduce access for Māori and Pacific Peoples. Under the approved criteria, everyone covered by the previous settings keeps that cover, and an estimated 14,000 more people

are expected to become eligible in the first year.

Led by WBOPPHO Diabetes and Nutrition Services Lead Alice Talmage, the submission was one of nearly 1,900 nationwide that helped shape the final criteria. It backed wider eligibility while asking Pharmac not to achieve it at the expense of equity.

"Our submission recognised that the proposal would widen access for some people, but we could not support a change that risked leaving some Māori and Pacific Peoples behind," Alice said. "These medicines can help protect the heart and kidneys, as well as lower blood glucose. People should not have to wait

until complications develop before they can access treatment that may help prevent them."

Pharmac had first proposed removing ethnicity-based eligibility and lowering the cardiovascular risk threshold, a change that could have left some Māori and Pacific Peoples worse off than before. Following the collective feedback, the widened criteria now cover people with type 2 diabetes whose HbA1c remains above 53 mmol/mol despite treatment with other funded diabetes medicines. It is a reminder of what evidence-led advocacy can achieve alongside the voices of people living with diabetes, whānau, clinicians and providers. ▲

Stronger diabetes support for general practices and local whānau

Eloise Mitchell has joined WBOPPHO as a Diabetes Nurse Educator, supporting diabetes self-management groups for patients and whānau, and education sessions for general practice teams and hauora providers. She comes from secondary care diabetes services in Tauranga and Waikato, and brings that hospital-based knowledge into primary care.

Mitchell joins the diabetes team alongside Diabetes and Nutrition Services Lead Alice Talmage, Community Nutritionist Amy Allport and Community Dietitian Li Kee Chee. Practices will see her at network education sessions over the coming months, and she is happy to talk through how the groups and sessions can support their patients. ▲



— Eloise Mitchell, Diabetes Nurse Educator.

"I am looking forward to working with patients and other members of the multidisciplinary team, and to making a difference to people's lives within this area of health care."

Sharing practical health advice with South Asian communities

WBOPPHO joined Healthy Families, Strong Futures, a free evening health session focused on practical steps towards healthier lives, on 24 July 2026, at Merivale Community Centre. Organised by the Bay of Plenty Sports and Cultural Club, the event brought together local South Asian communities, including Punjabi, Hindi and Bengali-speaking whānau.

BeingWell Health Coach Abhi Whig and Diabetes and Nutrition Services Lead Alice Talmage contributed to the session alongside the Heart Foundation. Discussions covered heart health, diabetes management and simple changes families can make to support their wellbeing. ▲



– Health Coach Abhi Whig and Diabetes and Nutrition Services Lead Alice Talmage.

Kiri's Kōrero

The moments that bring it home

There is something special about hearing how the mahi of our WBOPPHO whānau – our Iwi, Practices, Providers and kaimahi – is making a difference in people's lives.

I see it in our provider reports and in the stories and outcomes we share with funders. I know there is incredible mahi happening across our rohe. But it hits differently when you hear it from your own whānau and community – often completely unprompted, and without them knowing where I may fit in their story.

Some of those comments have stayed with me. One was about the name BeingWell: "I love that the service is called BeingWell. It feels positive. It's about being well and knowing it's okay to need a bit of support along the way."

Another was about the relief of feeling understood by a Health Improvement Practitioner: "She told me she had been through what I was feeling, so I felt really relieved."

Someone else reflected on how it felt to be cared for by a Health Coach: "I loved the way she talked to me: 'Let's wānanga and kōrero about what support you need.' I'm used to caring for others, not being cared for. She was awesome."

And there was even a little shout-out for our locum GP: "I saw a doctor who was filling in at the practice. She was great, really thorough."

They may seem like passing comments, but they mean a lot. Our whānau don't necessarily know the thinking, kōrero

and mahi that happens behind the scenes. They simply know how the experience felt for them, and that is what really matters.

Recently, I took some of my whānau to the blessing of the new Fifth Ave Family Practice whare. Having my whānau share that moment and meet some of the incredible people I have the privilege of working alongside was pretty special. Hearing them afterwards reflect on the people, the kaupapa and the feeling of the new whare affirmed something I already knew but perhaps don't always stop to appreciate.

These moments bring our mahi home for me. They remind me that behind every report, measure and contract are people and whānau, and that is something our whole WBOPPHO whānau can feel incredibly proud of.

Kiri Peita – General Manager Hauora Māori, Equity and Community Wellbeing.



Demand grows for school health services across the Western Bay

School Based Health Services across the rohe have seen 1,926 students so far in 2026, already 84% of all of last year, with half of Term 3 and all of Term 4 still to run.

For a growing number of rangatahi in the Western Bay of Plenty, the first door to health care is not a general practice or a hospital. It is a room at their school. A room where a School Health Nurse or General Practitioner (GP) sees students free of charge, no appointment or referral needed. And more of them are walking through it each year. So far in 2026, 1,926 students have used the service, 84% of last year's total, with a term and a half still to run.

Western Bay of Plenty Primary Health Organisation (WBOPPHO) runs School Based Health Services in 12 secondary schools and alternative education centres from Katikati to Te Puke. The programme is available to 12,207 young people from Years 9 to 13, a combined roll that has grown by 10.8% in three years. Behind the figures is a clear pattern: young people are not only coming in greater numbers, they are coming back. They have made close to 6,900 visits, with return visits up 18% on the same period last year.

Sarah Stevenson, WBOPPHO Chief Executive, says the figures show the

important role the nurse-led service plays in helping young people access care. "The trust our nurses have built in these schools took years, and you can see it in how many young people keep coming back. We are proud of that. As our communities grow, we want to continue working with our funding partners so the service can grow with them."

Students come through the door for many different reasons. So far this year, the service has responded to 2,368 general concerns, 1,736 related to sexual health, 776 to mental wellbeing and 510 to accidents or injuries. It has also supported 743 student visits to the School Health GP and completed 184 structured wellbeing assessments, known as HEEADSSS checks. These assessments give young people a confidential opportunity to raise something they may not otherwise discuss.

The needs young people bring to the service are also becoming more complex, often involving mental health alongside other concerns, Sarah notes. "A rangatahi may come in for one reason, but as the conversation unfolds, the team often finds there's more going on. Our role is to understand the whole picture, see the different health needs someone might be bringing to us, and connect them with the right support as early as possible."

Equity built into the service

WBOPPHO provides the service in schools across different decile levels, with extra support directed where need is greatest. This recognises a school's decile does not reflect every student's circumstances. A young person may attend a higher-decile school while still being part of a lower-income household, and this particularly true in the Western Bay.

The figures show this approach is working. Rangatahi Māori make up 43% of students seen this year, compared with under 30% of the combined school roll. Other priority groups are young people from Pacific, rainbow and disabled communities, young people who have grown up in care, and those not yet enrolled with a general practice.

Connecting to ongoing care

Care at school removes immediate barriers to getting help, including cost, transport, needing a caregiver to take them or having to explain at home why they need support before they are ready. Its role also goes beyond the immediate need. By connecting students with general practice and community services before they leave school, the service helps reduce the risk that they enter adult life without a regular practice or a clear pathway to ongoing care.



Childhood vaccination progress reflects strong local support

WBOPPHO has seen continued progress in both the volume and timeliness of referrals to the Outreach Immunisation Service (OIS). Data from the final quarter of the 2025/26 financial year reflects this shift: very few children are now overdue in general practice, with most of those needing follow-up actively supported through the mobile service.

“Earlier referrals are giving providers more time to engage with whānau, build trusted relationships and reach children who might otherwise miss their 24-month milestone,” explained Tori Macartney, Primary Care Support Services Team Lead.

Behind this progress is a year of work strengthening connections between general practices, OIS and the referral management team for the Aotearoa Immunisation Register (AIR). This has helped build a more responsive pathway so tamariki and whānau receive timely support to access immunisations.

“It’s a great example of what a local, coordinated and proactive approach can achieve. Everyone involved should feel really proud of the difference we are making in the community,” said Tori. ▲

Demand so far in 2026

JANUARY TO AUGUST

1,926

students seen across 12 schools and alternative-education settings

With a term and a half of the year still to run.

84%

2025 total

6,896

visits to the nurse

+18%

return visits, year on year

Why rangatahi come in

General health **2,368**

Sexual health **1,736**

Mental wellbeing **776**

Accident or injury **510**

Equity in who is seen

43%

of students seen are Māori, compared with under 30% of the roll.

Beyond the nurse’s room

743

visits by students to the School-Based Health Service GP

12

secondary schools and alternative-education centres, Katikati to Te Puke

12,207

students in Years 9 to 13 have access to the service through their school

+10.8%

growth in the combined school roll over three years



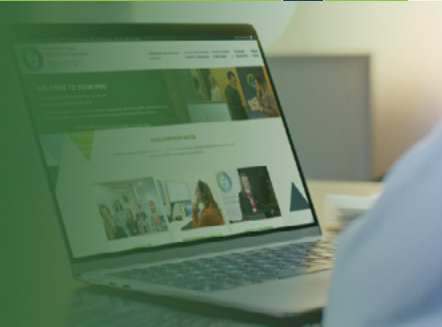
A new digital home for local providers



COMING SOON

Your portal, reimagined...

Loading...



WBOPPHO is preparing to launch a completely redeveloped Provider Portal for general practice and community partners across the Bay of Plenty. Designed to become the team's everyday go-to, the website will bring programmes and services, resources, events, training and updates together in one place. The standout feature is AI-powered search: ask a question in plain English, from any page, and get a straight answer.

One of the changes likely to make a significant difference for providers is the programmes and services directory. Instead of a PDF, each guide now has its own page, with sections outlining all the information general practices need, from eligibility to claiming details. Teams can work through the content whichever way suits: browse by section, print a page for the desk or ask the AI assistant directly.

A new resource library will make policy templates, forms, guides, tools and visual communications easier to find. The events calendar will bring together education sessions, meetings and hui, with options to filter events,

save individual sessions or import the full calendar. Recordings will also be available for selected past events.

Updates from WBOPPHO and the wider sector will sit in the News section, together with the latest newsletters. Nothing needs to be tracked down in an inbox. It is all in one place, ready to read, search or ask the AI assistant about. Knowing where to look matters just as much for the wider content, so experimental guided pathways pages gather in one spot what is most relevant to a role or interest, such as practice managers, clinicians, Māori health and equity.

What comes next

The new Provider Portal has been built in stages. Phase one, now in its final adjustments, is the open knowledge base: programmes and services, resources, events and news, free to use with no login. It is there for our network, for community providers and all local practice teams. Phase two will add the member side, a secure area where our network and contracted providers manage the practical side of working with WBOPPHO and access member-only content. ▲

WBOPPHO's commitment to equity continues

WBOPPHO received with disappointment the passing of the Healthy Futures (Pae Ora) Amendment Act 2026, in July. It reduces the statutory provisions for equity and Te Tiriti o Waitangi that sat at the heart of the 2022 legislation, and resets the purpose, objectives and functions of Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand.

WBOPPHO's submission was one of 1,787 received on the Bill. It joined the majority of submitters in opposing the proposed changes. The submission called for the Bill to be abandoned, warning that it would weaken the legal foundations for equity and Te Tiriti, move away from the Waitangi Tribunal's Wai 2575 recommendations and reduce Iwi-Māori Partnership Boards to an advisory role.

The Act does introduce timely access to quality health services as a purpose. WBOPPHO supports this goal, but access and equity cannot be separated. Timely, quality care must reach the communities that continue to experience the greatest barriers.

The WBOPPHO Board has since confirmed that the organisation's commitment remains unchanged. WBOPPHO's Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Equity Position Statements remain in place and continue to guide its mahi. This includes improving Māori health outcomes and supporting general practice to strengthen access and culturally responsive care. ▲



Western Bay of Plenty
Primary Health Organisation

TŌNGIA TE URURUA KIA TUPU
WHAKARITORITO TE TUPU
O TE HARAKEKE



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