Consensus Statement:

Kawa Whakaruruhau and Cultural Safety

New Zealand
College of Midwives
Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa

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Tauākī | Statement

The New Zealand College of Midwives | Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa (the College) considers Kawa Whakaruruhau and Cultural Safety to be integral to midwifery practice and the role of the organisation.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is an inclusive document which recognises Māori as tangata whenua and non-Māori communities as tangata tiriti. Midwives give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi through Tiriti-honouring actions, including integrating Cultural Safety into practice for all those accessing midwifery care.

Cultural Safety[1] was developed by Irihapeti Ramsden (2002), who explained that in a relationship where you have institutional power, Cultural Safety is the moment of trust that occurs leading the client/patient/customer to not needing to protect their difference from you (Treaty Resource Centre, 2009. It involves midwives in all settings taking responsibility for applying a dynamic process of self-reflection throughout their careers, to build self-awareness and "acknowledge and address their own power, privilege, biases, attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and characteristics" (Curtis et al. 2025, p. 4) that may affect the quality of their care provision. This ongoing process has the potential to bring about the attitude required for Cultural Safety in the provision of care (Ramsden, 1990).

Culturally safe relationships acknowledge indigeneity, ethnicity, age or generation, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual belief, disability and socioeconomic status. As such, Cultural Safety applies to midwifery care for everyone within Aotearoa's diverse communities. Women, gender diverse people and whānau define what Culturally Safe care means for them (Curtis et al. 2025; Ramsden, 2002) and may be more likely to accept and maintain engagement in healthcare relationships that are Culturally Safe.

The College supports Ngā Māia Māori Midwives o Aotearoa education on Tūranga Kaupapa (Ngā Māia Trust, 2024) to promote midwives taking transformative actions that uphold the rights of Māori as tangata whenua, with the aim of improving hauora Māori.

Culturally safe health professionals recognise inequities for many communities and "influence healthcare to reduce bias and achieve equity within the workforce and working environment" (Curtis et al. 2025, p. 4).

[1] Ramsden suggests that Cultural Safety is a proper noun with a specific meaning, emphasising the radical process of "self-reflection, transformation and powerful action and reaction [it] requires" (Ramsden, 2002, pp. 169-170).

Cultural and clinical safety together contribute to optimal health outcomes for whānau and health equity in the population. Culturally safe care enables the provision of clinically safe care.

Whakawhanaunga | relationship building, and partnership between the midwife, woman and whānau, allow the space for Cultural Safety to positively impact midwifery care.

Embedding Cultural Safety in the College's ethos positively influences midwifery education and practice. The overall aim is to contribute to health equity through the provision of culturally safe midwifery services.

The College recognises culturally and clinically safe midwife-woman-whānau relationships are key to building mutual trust and respect, which in turn can support whānau satisfaction with care as well as midwifery job satisfaction and sustainability.

Whakamārama | Background

Kawa Whakaruruhau and Cultural Safety was developed by Irihapeti Ramsden (Ngāi Tahu, Rangitane) in the 1980s and 1990s to improve care and outcomes for Māori and all health service users. Irihapeti Ramsden was given the term Kawa Whakaruruhau by her grandfather Te Uri o Te Pani Manawatu Te Ra. The concept and kaupapa of Cultural Safety was supported by her kaumātua, including Hohua Tutengaehe of Ngai Te Rangi, until their passing (Ramsden, 2000).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which sets out the relationship between tangata whenua and the Crown, including the rights and responsibilities of Māori and tauiwi to co-exist on this whenua, whilst maintaining their difference. Article 2 of Te Tiriti guarantees Māori the right to live as Māori, including the exercise of Tino Rangatiratanga and the protection of taonga, which includes hauora (Ramsden, 1990). Culturally safe healthcare provision upholds Article 2 and supports Article 3 – the right to health equity for Māori and tauiwi (Ramsden, 1990).

Culture is a broad concept, described by Irihapeti Ramsden (1990, p. 35) as "the way in which people measure and define their humanity". Its tenets include indigeneity, age or generation, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religious or spiritual belief and disability.

Partnership is a term used both in reference to Tiriti relationships and within midwifery frameworks; it is a term that recognises the mana of both partners. The principle of partnership, as outlined by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and within the Wai 2575 Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry (Waitangi Tribunal, 2019), Whakamaua Māori Health Action Plan (Manatū Hauora, 2020) and Te Pae Tata Interim New Zealand Health Plan (Te Whatu Ora, 2022), intentionally enables Cultural Safety.

Kawa Whakaruruhau and Cultural Safety is embedded in Tūranga Kaupapa (Ngā Māia Trust, 2024), The Midwifery Partnership: A model for practice (Guilliland & Pairman, 2010), Midwives Handbook for Practice (New Zealand College of Midwives |Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa, 2015), and the Statement on Cultural Competence (Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu | Midwifery Council, 2012). It can be considered implicit within the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga | Health and Disability Commissioner, 1996).

Cultural Safety within healthcare can support whānau empowerment and self-determination, which can have longer-term positive impacts than the care interaction itself (Guilliland & Pairman, 2010; Ramsden, 1990). Cultural Safety supports healthcare accessibility and acceptability for individuals and communities in their diversity. Therefore, for outcomes which are amenable to improvement through healthcare engagement and health promotion uptake, Cultural Safety is expected to contribute to better health for individuals and whānau and to health equity improvements at a population level.

Curtis et al. (2025) suggest three core aspects of Cultural Safety: "the need for self-reflection, acknowledgement of power differentials, and taking transformative action" (p. 4). An ongoing

process of regular self-reflection includes the midwife's own culture, how it forms their worldview and how this may influence their care provision. Cultural Safety encourages the practitioner to recognise the power dynamic of each midwifery relationship, both with clients and colleagues. Midwives "must be prepared to critique the 'taken for granted' power structures and... to challenge their own culture, biases, privilege, and power rather than attempt to become 'competent' in the cultures of others" (Curtis et al. 2019, p. 14). Taking transformative action means using one's influence to advocate for changes that promote health equity.

Tūranga Kaupapa framework (Ngā Māia Trust, 2024) guides midwives through three levels of competence:

1. *Mōhio (Knowing) Cultural Competence: Demonstrates a knowledge of the theoretical learning*
2. *Mātau (Action) Cultural Safety: Applies theory through reflective practice*
3. *Mārama (Activator) Te Tiriti Honoring: Takes action that guides practice, influences service improvement and leads system change.*

Midwives are regardful of who the wahine, woman or person is (Miller & Bear, 2023; Ramsden, 2002) within their cultural and whānau context and are accountable for providing Culturally Safe care. Practising Cultural Safety involves curiosity and openness to understanding one's own culture and creating a safe space to ask about what is important to the woman, person and whānau engaging in care. Each partner brings their knowledge, expertise and mātauranga, actively participating in the relationship (Guilliland & Pairman, 2010; Ramsden, 1990).

Cultural Safety is defined by those receiving care. This may be measured through women's, people's and whānau feedback to midwives, member engagement with and feedback to the College. At a health system level, Cultural Safety contributes to progress towards achieving health equity (Curtis et al., 2025).

Ngā kupu | Glossary

Kupu | word(s)	Whakamārama | explanation/meaning in the context of this statement
Hauora	Health
Kawa Whakaruruhau	Cultural Safety from a Māori perspective
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill from a te ao Māori perspective
Tangata Tiriti	People of the Tiriti: non-Māori people who belong to Aotearoa New Zealand by right of te Tiriti o Waitangi | the Treaty of Waitangi.
Tangata Whenua	People born of the land, indigenous first peoples of Aotearoa
Taonga	Treasure, property, goods, possession, effects, object
Tauiwi	European, non-Māori, person coming from afar
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi text and the preferred version, under contra proferentem (Came et al., 2020)
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government, domination, rule, control, power
Tūranga Kaupapa	A set of philosophical principles that express a Māori values system in relation to childbirth. The Tūranga Kaupapa Education Programme (Ngā Māia Trust 2024) seeks to broaden the practical application of these values into midwifery practice

Whakawhanaunga	The building and maintaining of relationships. This can include people and organisations
Whānau	Family group, extended family as determined by the wāhine hapū | pregnant woman or person.
Whenua	Land, placenta

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Whakamana | Ratification

This statement (uploaded 17 October, 2025) will be ratified at the College's AGM 2026.

Arotake | Review - August 2030

The purpose of the College guidance statements is to provide midwives, women, whānauand the maternity services with the profession's position on any given situation and provideguidance for practice. This guidance is designed to educate and support best practices and isregularly reviewed and updated in line with evidence-based practice.

Please note: Statements may be updated within the review period. We recommend midwives refer to the College website for the most up-to-date versions. https://www.midwife.org.nz/midwives/professionalpractice/guidance-for-practice/

Tūtohu | Suggested Citation

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