

Consensus Statement:

Kawa Whakaruruhau | 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 | Cultural Safety¹ to be integral to midwifery practice and the role of the organisation.

Cultural Safety was developed by Irihapeti Ramsden (Ngāi Tahu, Rangitane), 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” (Ramsden, 2002). It involves midwives in all settings taking responsibility for applying a dynamic process of self-reflection throughout their careers, to build self-awareness and understand their own culture, values and biases, and how these influence 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 (Ramsden, 2002) and may be more likely to accept and maintain engagement in healthcare relationships that are culturally safe.

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 Kawa Whakaruruhau | Cultural Safety into practice for all those accessing midwifery care. Kawa Whakaruruhau is Cultural Safety as it pertains to Māori.

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.

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 that 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.

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).

Te Reo | Language

College statements utilise words from Te Reo Māori to acknowledge and respect the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whakamārama | Background

Kawa Whakaruruhau | Cultural Safety were developed by Irihapeti Ramsden in the 1980s and 1990s to improve care and outcomes for Māori and all health service users. Te Tiriti o Waitangi sets out the relationship between Tangata Whenua and the Crown, including the rights and responsibilities of Māori and tauwi 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 tauwi (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 and enables Cultural Safety. The principle of partnership is outlined in several documents: Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Wai 2575 Report (Came et al., 2020), Whakamaua Māori Health Action Plan 2020-2025 (Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health, 2020) and Te Pae Tata Interim New Zealand Health Plan (Te Whatu Ora, 2022), intentionally enables Cultural Safety. Kawa Whakaruruhau is embedded in Tūranga Kaupapa (Ngā Māia Māori Trust, 2024), the Midwifery Partnership (Guilliland & Pairman, 2010), the Midwifery Handbook for Practice and Philosophy (New Zealand College of Midwives | Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa, 2015) and the Statement on Cultural Competence (Midwifery Council | Te Tatau o te Whare Kahu, 2012). It can be considered implicit within the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (Health and Disability Commissioner | Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga, 1996).

Cultural Safety within healthcare can support whānau empowerment and self-determination, which can have a longer-term positive impact 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 health equity improvements at a population level.

Cultural Safety involves an ongoing process of regular self-reflection about the midwife's own culture, how it forms their worldview (for example, individualist versus collective) 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).

Midwives are regardful of who the woman/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 1995; Ramsden 1990). This process should be framed in optimism and aspiration as one embarks on a journey of self-awareness and accountability for the provision of Cultural Safety.

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., 2019).

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
Kupu	Word/s
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill from a te ao Māori perspective
Tangata Tiriti	People of the Treaty, refers to non-Māori citizens and residents of Aotearoa New Zealand, recognises the Tiriti o Waitangi relationship between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti
Tangata Whenua	People born of the land, indigenous first peoples of Aotearoa
Taonga	Treasure, property, goods, possession, effects, object
Tauīwi	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 (from 2024) Competencies and Framework seeks to broaden the practical application of these values into midwifery practice
Whakawhanaungatanga	The building and maintaining of relationships. This can include people and organisations
Whānau	Family group, extended family as determined by the wahine, woman or pregnant person
Whenua	Land, placenta

Rārangi Tohutoro | References

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Whakamana | Ratification

This statement was ratified at the College's SGM on 31 March 2026.

Arotake | Review - August 2030

The purpose of the New Zealand College of Midwives Consensus Statements is to provide women, midwives, and the maternity services with the profession's position on specific situations. These guidelines are designed to educate and support best practices, and are regularly 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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