

# 5000 years of migration has significant implications for Māori and Pasifika health today

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Dr Geoff Chambers, an expert in genetics who is based at Victoria's School of Biological Sciences, has led the project, which has spanned more than 25 years.

Now the conclusions are set to be published in four international academic journals which Dr Chambers says marks the culmination of his decades of hard work.

In a paper just published in the *Global Journal of Anthropology Research*, Dr Chambers investigates the Austronesian Diaspora settlement voyages.

"This really is the big picture story," explains Dr Chambers. "There are many theories and accounts of Pacific voyaging, but this is the first that brings it all together and provides the only complete description of the origins of Polynesian peoples, their complex ancestry, and how genetic variation was lost as people migrated across the Pacific."

In another study yet to be published, Dr Chambers explores how these ancient migration events caused the gene pools of Māori and Pasifika people to diverge markedly from Europeans, and explains why this has significant medical implications for present-day New Zealand.

"That genetic distinction explains why people of European descent are

more prone to certain diseases than Māori or Pacific Islanders are, and vice versa," he says. "This research argues strongly for a special, ethnic view of medicine in New Zealand in order for the health system to be effective and equitable."

Dr Chambers worked on another paper (alongside researchers Paul Callister and Robert Didham) for *New Zealand Sociology*, which cautions of the complexities around official data-gathering.

"Having firm ethnic boundaries doesn't provide the full picture," says Dr Chambers. "The Government collects statistics via the census or its various agencies based on people's self-declared cultural affiliation—people might be living and identifying themselves as Māori even though they have a relatively small percentage of Māori genes. That's where this starts to get complex, because that data doesn't take into account what we now know about the important role genetics plays in a range of health issues."

A fourth paper Dr Chambers has completed was carried out in collaboration with researchers at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Kelantan, and reconstructs the population history of Malaysia.

**More information:** The Austronesian Diaspora: A Synthetic Total Evidence Model. [www.cosmosscholars.com/phms/in...jar/article/view/515](http://www.cosmosscholars.com/phms/in...jar/article/view/515)

Provided by Victoria University

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