

Pacific rainbow+ communities face discrimination, conversion therapy

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Manalagi Project. Credit: University of Auckland

The need to increase Pacific and Rainbow+ leadership was a major

finding in the [Manalagi project](#), the first and largest research of its kind addressing the health and well-being of Aotearoa, New Zealand's Pacific Rainbow+ community.

A three-year long study backed by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, Manalagi is led by Seuta'afili Dr. Patrick Thomsen of Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Developed in partnership with F'INE Pasifika Aotearoa Trust and Pacific Rainbow+ [community members](#), the project concludes with the Manalagi Survey Community Report being gifted to the community on November 14 in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland.

Dr. Thomsen says the study showed more health and service organizations need to be Pacific-led, given discrimination was an all-too-common experience for Pacific Rainbow+ communities. Of the 750 respondents, 60% encountered discrimination in the form of racism and homo/transphobia, with many subjected to culturally unsafe practices when seeking [health care](#).

Although Pacific Rainbow+ community members live across the country, support was thin on the ground. Whānau Ora currently fund only one Pacific-led Rainbow+ [service provider](#)—F'INE Pasifika Aotearoa Trust in Manukau. More than half of participants felt safer with a health professional from their own cultural background, who had a strong understanding of their Pacific and Rainbow+ worldview.

"Health professionals are currently ill-equipped to best support our communities, there needs to be training in areas of cultural competency and ways to also affirm the Rainbow+ identity and experiences of our communities," said Dr. Thomsen.

The survey also showed high costs and a lack of awareness around available services were barriers to health care. Two thirds were unaware

of the type of services available to them regarding mental health support. Instead, respondents relied on close friends, and to a lesser extent family members, during times of stress and crisis.

Dr. Thomsen said it was time to make [mental health care](#) affordable with many already foregoing general practitioner visits. Lifting health literacy levels was also crucial to empower Pacific Rainbow+ members to have confidence navigating the health care environment.

"It is imperative that support services be made free or available at a very low cost. In talanoa, many participants indicated that access to mental health services were too expensive, which compromised their ability to seek out on-going care when needed."

There was also a call to action for families and churches to provide support, especially when it came to individuals disclosing their sexuality. While over half had "come out" to their families, a third had not as they feared being disowned and 14% had been subjected to [conversion therapy](#) despite the practice outlawed early last year.

Dr. Thomsen said considering the significant emphasis respondents placed on their families, and their Pacific cultural identities, there was a need to acknowledge the contribution of individuals.

"Many Pacific Rainbow+ individuals play core roles in the family and in promoting and preserving our cultural practices and knowledge. It's crucial to acknowledge this and to also support our families to learn how to better hold and affirm the aspirations of their Pacific Rainbow+ children. You can't have it both ways, where we beautify a space for a major family event but then are noticeably left out of the acknowledgements and passed over for leadership roles."

Provided by University of Auckland

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