

Media statement for Mama Aroha research report launch

New research on Māori breastfeeding app highlight need for accurate, accessible, Māori digital resourcing

The latest research from a group of wāhine Māori provides new insights into creating relevant, digital breastfeeding resources for whānau and health professionals. To celebrate World Breast Feeding week, these new findings will be released at Hāpai Te Hauora, marking two years since the launch of *Mama Aroha*, the first indigenous designed app for supporting breastfeeding. This new research confirms that effective digital health resources that support Māori with breastfeeding need to have a holistic Māori approach. Hāpai research unit lead, Dr Felicity Ware, states “waiū (breastmilk) is a taonga (treasure) and fundamental aspect of ūkaipō requiring protection and promotion as part of whānau ora. Although there is still more work to identify effective breastfeeding support for Māori, we hope that this app and our new findings help address some of the many challenges that hinder Māori babies receiving breastmilk.”

To design the app, Hāpai Te Hauora collaborated with Amy Wray, a wahine Māori and a qualified Midwife and Lactation Consultant, as well as a research team of representatives from the New Zealand Breastfeeding Alliance, Women’s Health Collective, Ngā Wānanga o Hine Koopu, Mokopuna Ora Collective, and Massey University. *Mama Aroha* is the newest iteration of the ‘Breastfeeding Talk Cards’ Amy developed 12 years ago. Amy states “The intention behind the Mama Aroha resources has always been to provide a resource designed with whānau that is easy to use for health professionals too. The whānau insights and feedback help with future development to enrich the app experience as it continues to take shape based on whānau needs - making it more effective.”

By July 2023 the App had been downloaded nearly 15,000 times almost entirely from Aotearoa and mostly from mobile devices (90%). When the App was first launched it was the highest-ranking education app in New Zealand. Steve Renata from Māori tech company Kiwa Digital states: “Making health technology relevant for whānau is an important and emerging field. The findings of the research reinforce that mobile resources for whānau need to showcase text, illustrations, and audio in a mana-enhancing manner and have a high level of cultural integrity and authenticity as well as be easily accessible, engaging, and interactive.”

The research report recommends investing in the Mama Aroha app to update the content. It also recommends adding a user tutorial and creating new interactive functions that enable whānau to self-determine and track their own progress in regard to health and wellbeing. The research highlights that the app will also need further promotion with additional online support, integration into local and national breastfeeding services, and use within training and education for health professionals. The research team hopes to collaborate with other indigenous groups about the use of digital resources such as apps to support breastfeeding.

Research has highlighted the importance of better support for new māmā, where most Māori women intend to breastfeed and achieve high rates of exclusive breastfeeding prior to leaving a maternity facility, however this rate drops off dramatically by the time pēpi reaches 3 months of age, with less than 50% exclusively breastfed (and at 6 months only 20%). According to the Rautaki Whakamana Whāngote National Breastfeeding Strategy for New Zealand Aotearoa “increasing the exclusivity and duration of breastfeeding is a key determinant of public health and one of the most significant and cost-effective ways to improve equity”.

“He aroha whaea, he pōtiki piripoho”