



# REGIONAL ELDER ABUSE NETWORK EVALUATION

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Evaluation Report

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**Te Tari Kaumātua**  
Office for Seniors



**dovetail**  
the sense makers

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Background .....	7
This evaluation .....	7
<b>Regional Networks: Individual activity and outcome reports</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Bay of Plenty Regional Elder Abuse Network.....	11
Canterbury Regional Elder Abuse Network   Christchurch Resettlement Services .....	14
Horowhenua Regional Elder Abuse Network .....	17
Auckland Regional Elder Abuse Network.....	20
Cook Island Sub-network.....	20
Age Concern Auckland Sub-network .....	22
Te Ahi Kaa sub-network .....	26
Te Tai Tokerau Regional Elder Abuse Network .....	29
<b>General Learning: Findings to support future regional networks</b> .....	<b>34</b>
General Learning: Have regional networks been working as intended? .....	35
General Learning: What outcomes have been achieved as a result of the establishment of these networks? .	37
General Learning: What has been learnt about the prevention of AOP through these pilots? .....	39
<b>Recommendations for future regional networks</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Theory of Change</b> .....	<b>45</b>

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The evaluation team included Amanda Hunter, Kellie Spee and Adrian Field.



# Executive Summary

## Regional Elder Abuse Networks pilot and this evaluation

Since 2023, the Office for Seniors has piloted Regional Elder Abuse Networks across five regions to strengthen community-based responses to abuse of older people (AOP) prevention. The initiative aims to increase the number of organisations confident in preventing AOP, enhance regional collaboration, and contribute to building a cohesive AOP prevention system. Networks were established in Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Horowhenua and Canterbury, with one to three lead organisations within each network. Funding for the networks was provided by Te Puna Aonui, as part of Action Five of the Te Aorerekura Action Plan.

The purpose of this early-stage evaluation is to understand if the networks have been working as intended and what outcomes have been achieved as a result of the pilot networks so far. This evaluation has utilised a mixed-methods approach to data collection, which included document review, semi-structured interviews with contracted organisations and an interview with a representative from the Office for Seniors. Individual reports outlining the activities and outcomes for each regional network, as well as broader learning that can be taken into future regional networks, have been included in this report.

## The Regional Networks

**Bay of Plenty:** The Bay of Plenty network, coordinated by Family Focus and involving several local organisations, was established in mid-2023. Kaimahi from Elder Abuse Response Services (EARS) in the region met regularly, fostering connections across diverse communities, and completing the contracting period with a successful conference in Rotorua to raise awareness about AOP.

**Canterbury:** The Canterbury network, launched in January 2024 and co-led by Christchurch Resettlement Services (CRS) with Age Concern Canterbury, is building two complementary sub-networks focused on AOP prevention. CRS has developed a community-led model that actively engages diverse cultural communities. These sub-networks will share knowledge and resources through quarterly meetings, strengthening a longstanding partnership between CRS and Age Concern Canterbury.

**Horowhenua:** The Horowhenua network, coordinated by Age Concern Horowhenua, leverages the existing Safety Assessment Meeting (SAM) table in the region to streamline services, share knowledge, and rebuild relationships within the region. Age Concern Horowhenua saw the pilot as a chance to unify local efforts and avoid working in isolation, using SAM tables as a foundation to network and discuss AOP prevention. As the network continues to evolve, it aims to transition from the SAM structure into a more independent network.

**Auckland:** The Auckland network was piloted with three organisations across Auckland: Age Concern Auckland, Te Ahi Kaa, and the Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand (CIDANZ). Each organisation approached the pilot differently, developing unique sub-networks.

- **CIDANZ:** The Cook Islands sub-network, coordinated by CIDANZ, focused on AOP prevention within the Cook Islands community through a co-design approach with local



elders, or Pa metua. CIDANZ engaged metua in the design process, leading to a well-received expo that addressed issues such as financial abuse prevention, health and wellness, reaching both older people and their families.

- **Age Concern Auckland:** The Age Concern Auckland sub-network used the pilot period to explore and design a prototype model for a potential regional AOP network. Leveraging their extensive experience, Age Concern collaborated with Te Ahi Kaa and gathered insights from diverse stakeholders, including older adults, community leaders and professionals, to inform a report outlining key needs and considerations for a functional network.
- **Te Ahi Kaa:** The Te Ahi Kaa sub-network used a kaupapa Māori co-design approach to create a supportive, inclusive framework for AOP prevention, engaging kaumātua (elders) in discussions on their needs and challenges. Te Ahi Kaa integrated tikanga Māori principles, such as manaakitanga (hospitality) and whanaungatanga (relationship-building), into the network's design, ensuring that kaumātua had a meaningful role in shaping initiatives.

**Te Tai Tokerau:** The Te Tai Tokerau Regional Elder Abuse Network, a collaboration between Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi<sup>1</sup> and WotMatters Ltd, has created a kaumātua-led initiative grounded in the principles of He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This network brings together two kaumātua groups from Whangārei and the Mid North. Through hui and informal gatherings, the network has strengthened kaumātua connections and developed relationships with community partners, focusing on culturally grounded AOP prevention. The network is committed to evolving in response to the needs of kaumātua.

## Pilot Outcomes

The Regional Elder Abuse Network pilot established networks across five regions, each uniquely tailored to the needs and context of its local community. While all networks shared the overarching goal of AOP prevention, each approached this goal differently. Some networks embraced a co-design model, involving older people in shaping the network, while others utilised the expertise of existing staff, incorporating community voices in other ways.

The networks varied widely in how they formed and strengthened local connections: some fostered new relationships with community organisations and other contracted providers, creating collaborative pathways to expand their prevention efforts and grow their knowledge about AOP and AOP prevention, whereas others maintained a more independent structure with limited networking with other organisations.

Across all networks, there was significant knowledge generated about AOP and AOP prevention. Through workshops, community events, and regular discussions, the networks gathered insights into how AOP manifests within different cultural and social contexts and identified protective strategies that align with the values and needs of diverse groups. Some also identified gaps in services and skills within their communities and sought to address these gaps as a result of the pilot.

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<sup>1</sup> Phase one of the network was led by Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi, with phase two being led by Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services. This review primarily focuses on phase one of the network due to the timing of the evaluation.

## Key learning for future Regional Elder Abuse Networks

This pilot has highlighted areas that future work to initiate and sustain regional networks can consider in order to strengthen community-based responses to AOP prevention.

**Being purposeful in the way that organisations are selected and prepared:** When initiating a network in a new region, being intentional in selecting organisations that are well-positioned to collaborate effectively is key. Considering the organisation's expertise, reach, and approach, and how multiple contracted organisations may be able to complement each other is important. Communicating clear expectations from the outset regarding collaboration, shared responsibilities, and the intended outcomes of the network will support in ensuring selected organisations are prepared and will build unified networks.

**Prioritise culturally responsive, community-led co-design:** To build AOP prevention networks that resonate with local communities, ensure co-design processes incorporate culturally relevant methods and are paced to respect community needs. Engaging existing community groups and starting from broader safety discussions before addressing abuse can strengthen co-design efforts and create efficiencies. Setting clear expectations at the outset will ensure that regional networks have a shared understanding of co-design processes.

**Support flexible relationship-building timelines:** Developing meaningful, lasting connections in communities is essential but time-intensive. Allow for flexible contracting periods to give organisations the time needed to establish relationships and build trust, especially when entering new regions or working with groups new to AOP prevention.

**Build sustainability into network design:** Planning for sustainability from the outset will help networks continue operating beyond the initial funding period. Selecting organisations with a long-term commitment to networking activities in their region and supporting networks to secure resources for ongoing activities may be useful.

**Formalise knowledge sharing and consider a national forum for knowledge exchange:** Building in regular, structured opportunities for knowledge exchange among network members can strengthen cohesion and support professional development. Establishing a regular national forum where regional networks can convene may help align local initiatives with broader policy goals. Such a forum, hosted by a national agency like the Office for Seniors, could provide a regular touchpoint for collaboration and foster a sense of unity and commitment across regional networks.

## Conclusions

The Regional Elder Abuse Network pilot has demonstrated the potential of locally driven approaches to AOP prevention, underscoring the importance of flexibility, cultural and regional relevance, and community involvement. By allowing each region to design a model suited to its unique needs, the pilot fostered diverse approaches that collectively contributed to a broader understanding of AOP and effective prevention strategies. While there were challenges in some regions with establishing cohesion and sustainability, the pilot laid essential groundwork for future networks and collaboration between government and contracted organisations.

# Introduction

## Background

Since 2023, The Office for Seniors has piloted Regional Elder Abuse Networks in five regions, with the aim of:

- Increasing the number of organisations that are confident working to prevent the abuse of older people (AOP)
- Increasing regional collaboration between organisations
- Initiating investment in the development of an elder abuse prevention system
- Enabling older people to be part of the defining of the problem and solution
- Creating mechanisms for older people and organisations to provide a voice and feedback into Te Aorerekura.<sup>2</sup>

Networks were established in Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Horowhenua and Canterbury, with one to three lead organisations within each network. Lead organisations were expected to co-design the networks with older people, so they could identify and address their own prevention needs. It was also anticipated that they would build relationships with other organisations to increase collaboration, develop referral pathways and share knowledge and resources, as well as grow a shared understanding of the causes of the abuse of older people and effective prevention strategies. Each pilot was funded for approximately six months and two have since entered a second phase of activity.

The networks were funded by Te Puna Aonui as part of Action Five of the first Te Aorerekura Action Plan. Initial funding was provided for an engagement coordinator, with subsequent funding to trial the Regional Elder Abuse Networks in three regions. Additional funding was later provided to add two more pilot regions and move to phase two of the networks in regions that were showing early signs of success. The Office for Seniors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Te Puna Aonui, without whom the networks would not have been possible.

## This evaluation

### Evaluation purpose

The purpose of this early-stage evaluation is to understand if the networks have been working as intended and what outcomes have been achieved as a result of the pilot networks so far.

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) guided the evaluation and provided a structure for reporting.

#### 1. Have regional networks been working as intended?

- Are older people involved in the design and development of local prevention strategies?
- Have relationships formed between contracted organisations and between others in the community as a result?
- Have organisations been resourced to create connections with older people and other organisations?

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<sup>2</sup> This is the national strategy to eliminate family violence and sexual violence. See: <https://tepunaaonui.govt.nz/national-strategy/>

## 2. What outcomes have been achieved as a result of the establishment of these networks?

- Are government and community organisations sharing information and working together to prevent AOP?
- Do government agencies and community organisations have a better understanding of AOP and how it impacts diverse communities because of the pilots?
- Have protective factors been strengthened and/or risk factors reduced for older people involved in the co-design process?

## 3. What has been learnt about the prevention of AOP through these pilots?

- What has been learned about regional responses to AOP and the prevention of AOP generally?
- What has been the value of taking a regional approach to AOP networks?
- Were there challenges in the design and implementation of networks? How could challenges be addressed in future to support improved outcomes?

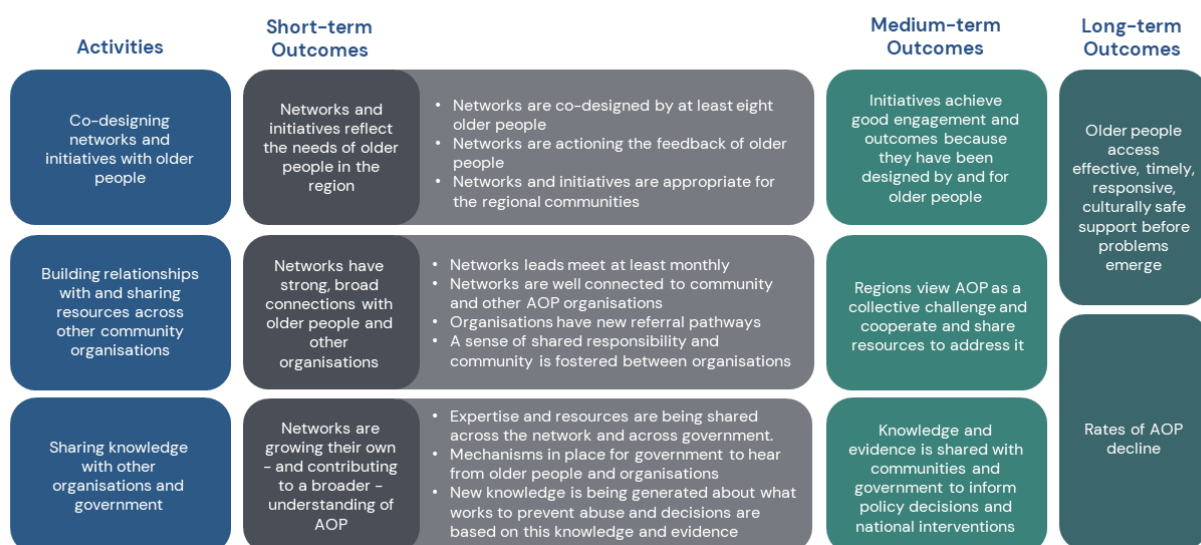
### Theory of change

A theory of change describes how a programme or policy will bring about change, and shows how resources and inputs such as funding, staff and knowledge support activities undertaken. It also shows how these activities create outcomes that in turn, may support wider impacts for participants, communities and society.

The following theory of change builds on the original version developed by the Office for Seniors prior to this evaluation. The theory of change has been adapted to provide more detail around the activities and short-term outcomes of the regional network pilot identified through the evaluation planning process. This theory of change is also available in [Appendix 1](#).

### Theory of Change

Regional Elder Abuse Networks: focus on activities and short-term outcomes





## Evidence gathering

This evaluation has utilised a mixed-methods approach to data collection:

- **Document review:** Dovetail reviewed key project documents provided by the Office for Seniors, including project proposals, accountability reports and other relevant documentation.
- **Interviews with contracted organisations:** Dovetail carried out nine interviews with contracted organisation representatives. These semi-structured discussions explored the design and development of the networks, successes and challenges of implementation, community engagement and partnership, emerging outcomes, and lessons for future implementation.

A representative from each of the five regional networks took part in an interview discussion, however, one contracted organisation from a fledgling regional network was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. A flexible approach to interview booking was taken and most interviews were conducted online, but two contracted organisations opted to have discussions face-to-face in their region. Two regional networks also opted to include kaumātua from the network co-design process in interviews.

- **Interview with the Office for Seniors:** One interview was held with a representative from the Office for Seniors to provide context on intended outcomes and design and contracting for the networks.

Participation in the evaluation was optional. Participants chose to participate, having been informed in writing of the evaluation objectives and their involvement in it. Participants signed a consent form prior to taking part in an interview. Participants were also provided with a copy of the individual, identifiable report for their regional network and offered an opportunity to recommend changes prior to this being shared with the Office for Seniors.

## Analysis, sensemaking and reporting

**Analysis:** Interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken. This method is used to systematically explore, identify, and map out themes. The approach taken followed a process of familiarisation with the interview data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing and mapping themes. Themes were generated for each individual network against the specific outcomes. There were also general themes that spanned across all networks.

**Sensemaking:** Initial themes and regional network activities were shared with the Office for Seniors in a 90-minute sensemaking session. The session provided an opportunity for the Office for Seniors to provide additional context or information that could inform the evaluation and check the preliminary findings against their subject matter expertise knowledge and understanding of the pilot.

**Reporting:** Themes were then used to create individual reports for each regional network, which was reviewed and approved for publication by each regional network prior to being shared with the Office for Seniors. Next, the broader themes and learning from the pilot was collated and reported in the learning section of this report.

## **Regional Networks: Individual activity and outcome reports**

## Bay of Plenty Regional Elder Abuse Network

### Introduction

The Bay of Plenty network was developed and piloted by Family Focus in mid-2023. Family Focus have held the funding for coordinating the network, but the network membership itself is comprised of Elder Abuse Response Services (EARS) kaimahi across the region from the following organisations:

- Manaaki Ora
- Whaioranga Trust
- Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau
- Whakatōhea, Ōpōtiki Health and Social Services

The EARS kaimahi met regularly during the networking period, travelling to different locations to acknowledge the different geographic areas where participating organisations operate. At first this occurred monthly and became more frequent toward the end of the networking period. At the end of the pilot period the network held a one-day conference in Rotorua for older people in the community, which was attended by 147 community members including kaumātua.

*“I think that was a perfect way to end the project. They were able to create that awareness around elder abuse to a multitude of people. We had organisations who worked in the aged care sector, they set up stalls. The stall holders were things that the kaimahi and all their meetings over the year had identified were important to older people.”*

### Designing the network

The EARS kaimahi formed the base of the network’s membership and drove the design of the network and its activities. Although no formal co-design process was undertaken with community kaumātua, some of the kaimahi themselves are older people and, given the close relationships they hold within their respective communities, they felt able to bring the voices of the older people they work with to the activities and design of the network.

*“I know some of the kaimahi are older people. I don't know if there were older people. I don't think they were participating on these meetings, but kaimahi were certainly bringing their voice into those meetings.”*

### Connections with other organisations

The EARS kaimahi that formed the network held strong connections with relevant groups and organisations in the community prior to the network pilot. This included organisations such as Dementia Services, St John’s Ambulance, and Building Financial Capability providers. The network was seen as an opportunity to strengthen and formalise these existing relationships.

This was exemplified in the end-of-project conference, when a range of organisations were brought together to provide information and knowledge to older people in the community. The network was pleased with the range of providers that presented on the day. The event also supported the network to identify gaps in relationships, such as housing providers, which the network will look to address as they continue their work in the Bay of Plenty community.

*“I don't think they came across our radar for a while, but they're an important one because we are seeing, through our Budget Advice Service, more and more older people struggling, financially struggling to eat, struggling to pay their rent.”*

### **Learning and sharing information**

Network members successfully shared knowledge and information at regular meetings, identifying areas where they could improve services for older people in their communities. The network discussed trends within the industry as well as the specific needs for older people in the Bay of Plenty and how these could be better met. Training for kaimahi was a key area for development that was identified through the networking activities, specifically in dementia care.

*“A lot of knowledge sharing, a lot of discussions through the hui or community groups they held. Big learnings from that is that our older people can keep safe if they are a part of a community. So that was a strategy they identified: if older people are part of a community, they are safer.”*

The network used the knowledge and information generated in their discussions to form the foundation of the conference at the end of the networking period. The conference was an opportunity to bring organisations from the community together to provide knowledge and tools. It was also an opportunity for those close to older people to learn about prevention measures such as Enduring Power of Attorney documents, creating wills, and supporting older people in their lives to keep themselves safe.

*“Things that have been identified were housing issues for our older people. They're in cold homes. One of the speakers that they brought in works for Healthy Homes, so she was able to talk about how older people can access assistance with getting to a healthy home.”*

The Bay of Plenty network also spoke about the ways in which the pilot has supported them to communicate insights into the abuse of older people to those who can influence policy. Regular contract meetings and accountability reports were one way that their findings were communicated. As a next step, the network may look to create a needs analysis document, collating the knowledge and information gained in their ongoing networking activities to share with broader audiences.

### **Value of a regional approach**

The regional nature of the network allowed the kaimahi on the ground to seek knowledge and solutions that made sense for their own communities. Within the Bay of Plenty region, there is a diversity of needs, and the network felt well-positioned to understand the complexities and nuances across the different areas.

*“Each community is different. If you look at a place like Kawerau, Kawerau's a, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau is a little place. They have their own issues and Ōpōtiki's the same, we're the same.”*

*“This was largely kaimahi-driven, I think that is why it was as successful as what it was because kaimahi are at the frontline, they know the client and they know the target market, they know the older people. They have the skills to work in this*

*industry and it was only right that they lead this whole project and that's what they did. I think that's why it was successful."*

## **Conclusions**

The Bay of Plenty Regional network brought together kaimahi in the region to share knowledge and work together to prevent the abuse of older people in their communities. While an official co-design process with older people was not undertaken to design this network, the kaimahi brought the voices of the older people they work with every day to their discussions and activities. This was evident in the success of their final output, the Rotorua Conference, which had great engagement, raised awareness of the abuse of older people, and provided tools and knowledge to kaumātua in the community.



# Canterbury Regional Elder Abuse Network | Christchurch Resettlement Services

## Introduction

The Canterbury network began in January 2024, with funding awarded to Christchurch Resettlement Services (CRS) and Age Concern Canterbury. Both organisations have a history working in abuse of older people prevention and response in the Canterbury region.

Age Concern Canterbury has taken a staff-led approach; CRS has employed a community-led method, each creating a sub-network. The two organisations are working together to establish quarterly networking meetings between their sub-networks, exchanging knowledge and training to enhance each other's capacity. The network is still being formed and CRS is excited about the potential for this collaboration, viewing the differences in their target populations as a strength. This approach is expected to enrich the relationship that has existed between CRS and Age Concern Canterbury for many years.

*“We've talked about quarterly meetings with the networks, so there's an exchange of ideas and being able to educate one another about the needs of all of the community, not just the parts of the community that each of us work with respectively. That also comes with professional, collegial support for our staff and that exchange of ideas and information and best practice.”*

This report speaks to the sub-network designed by CRS. The Age Concern Canterbury network was in development during the time of the evaluation. The evaluation was not able to draw on the expertise of Age Concern Canterbury staff due to unforeseen circumstances.

## Designing the sub-network

The design of the CRS sub-network began in early 2024 with the appointment of a project coordinator and assistant coordinator. The coordinator reached out to relevant organisations in the community to coordinate meetings with stakeholders and kaumātua to discuss their needs and the network concept. Meetings were also held with organisations with potential interest in the network, including the Multicultural Council in Christchurch, the Canterbury Refugee Resettlement Resource Centre and Pura Pura Whetu.

The engagement sessions provided information and feedback from a range of groups within the community including Egyptian, Bhutanese, Somali, Afghan and Chinese communities. As a result, a number of kaimahi have expressed an interest in becoming a part of the network.

*“Even though they're not necessarily older people they are really key to those communities. We don't know how many people want to be involved, but I think if we can keep that Network alive and have those people that have come along to those initial meetings as part of it, that builds the strength of the Network.”*

Following initial engagement and relationship building, CRS have determined that the network will comprise around 10-12 people, with a larger group around the core network informing the information and knowledge that network members bring to meetings and activities. Now that the foundational work is coming to a close, CRS are progressing a continuous co-design approach to network development with kaimahi who have expressed an interest in becoming

members. Building a co-design process into the network was seen as important to ensure that network members and their communities have ownership of the process.

*“I think the people who want to be part of this need to actually set that scene as well. It's really what do they want to see happen here. We've all got the end goal in mind but how do we get there. We want them to have as much say as possible around those processes.”*

This co-design process will include kaimahi, some of whom are older people themselves. CRS plan to continue engaging community members in the process but have found the stigmatised and confronting nature of the topic of abuse can make it difficult to engage these groups. CRS will continue working to engage older people as well as men – another hard-to-reach group for the network – as the co-design process continues.

### **Connections with other organisations**

Prior to developing the network, CRS already had strong, established relationships within Canterbury, particularly in the elder abuse space, and connections with key organisations such as the police, health services and banks. CRS noted that this is a result of their collaborative way of working as well as the strong connections within the sector as a whole, and that their relationships existed prior to the regional network pilot. The network is seen as an opportunity to strengthen these connections and formalise their relationships.

### **Learning and sharing information**

Setting up the network has created an opportunity to learn more about abuse of older people prevention, and CRS are eager to understand how they can continue to learn and grow in this space as the network development continues. For CRS, the network is an opportunity to better understand and communicate different groups' experiences of abuse, and to build expertise in the ways that different world views and cultures require different approaches.

*“We can always keep learning about the needs of older people. And from our point of view, it's not just the needs of older people, it's the needs of older people from the Bhutanese community for example, or the needs of older people from the Afghan community or the needs of older people from the Chinese community, because it would be quite different. We need to get that understanding to be effective.”*

CRS is yet to put formal mechanisms in place for sharing tools and knowledge among its members, a project they will progress as the network develops. The team already deliver family harm modules to the community through their broader offerings. Leveraging communication tools like their existing modules in abuse of older people prevention is one way they plan to formalise knowledge-sharing.

CRS saw the network as contributing positively to their ability to gain and share knowledge, and their ability to communicate it to people in a position to make and influence policy. Contract meetings, accountability reports and evaluation processes gave CRS opportunities to communicate their approach to the Office for Seniors. This was thought to be particularly important as the communities they support and represent often speak English as a second language. If time and care isn't taken to understand their perspectives and accurately translate concepts, their voices may not be heard by government.

*“A lot of things I've been involved with over the years, the community people who are involved in initiatives are people with reasonable English and what that does is excludes people who can't communicate. We need to have a commitment to supporting with language support for those people. We'll always support that.”*

### **Value of a regional approach**

CRS spoke to the value of networking at a regional level, highlighting the benefit of the knowledge they hold as a local organisation working with their specific communities. Having relationships at this level allows organisations like CRS to work with leaders within smaller communities to understand their specific needs. Their relational approach allows them to break down language barriers and other access barriers, which can include transport needs and support with navigating IT systems. Without their relationships and local engagement, this may not be possible.

*“I think you lose that local knowledge. There are many wonderful initiatives, but they only have English-speaking people, and we are working with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, multilingual, multicultural people. At a national level, that seems to be the way it goes. There doesn't seem the ability to support the language needs of the people participating.”*

CRS also spoke about how the local knowledge is accessible when taking a regional approach like this one. Their history working in Canterbury means they understand the profile of the city they are delivering in.

*“You can't do the work without that person to person stuff. It's also knowing who is here, who lives in this place, what are their lives like. Very different living here to living in Auckland, for older people who are really marginalised and probably very isolated. Here it's a smaller place.”*

### **Conclusions**

CRS have embraced the opportunity to develop a sub-network for the Canterbury region that will support knowledge generation and exchange across a range of groups in addressing the abuse of older people. The network is still emerging, but the groundwork has been laid to support further co-design and implementation. The commitment to addressing language barriers and cultural differences will ensure the initiative is inclusive and representative of the diverse communities it serves. In future the two Canterbury sub-networks will meet regularly to form a network for the region that brings together the knowledge and expertise of both organisations.

## Horowhenua Regional Elder Abuse Network

### Introduction

The Horowhenua network is coordinated by Age Concern Horowhenua who saw the network pilot as an opportunity to bring together a group of individuals working in abuse of older people prevention to share knowledge and streamline service outcomes such as referrals and response times. The pilot was also seen as an avenue to re-establish and re-build relationships within the region.

*“Instead of us all working in our little silos, it's trying to bring us together to just make it a more fluid and connected space.”*

### Designing the network

Age Concern Horowhenua is part of the network responsible for coordinating the Safety Assessment Meeting Tables (SAM tables) for their region, which give an overview of trends and needs within the area, and includes representation from many community organisations such as the police, social services, and iwi. As part of the SAM table, the organisations meet monthly to discuss broader community needs and trends. Rather than building a new network from scratch, which would require additional investment from organisations and kaimahi, Age Concern decided that the SAM table would serve as the basis for the network initially and content relating to preventing abuse of older people would be incorporated into the existing structure.

*“Having that meeting every morning, where we were talking about what was going on in our community, identifying which of our kaumātua needed support, what was happening with them, and then also we have the HAAG meeting once a month. There were those things already in place. I thought now how do I use something that's already working, draw from that so that it's not extra that people feel like they're having to do.”*

Following the decision to use the SAM table as the core of the network, Age Concern Horowhenua looked to gather information from the community about their general safety and comfort within the region. This took the form of two “Feeling Safe in our Community Hui”, each of which included around 40 people from community watch groups and other members of the public. The discussions were about general safety rather than the abuse of older people, to ensure people felt comfortable attending and contributing.

*“We organised Neighbourhood Watch to come and speak to us and Compassion Housing because that's where a lot of the incidents occurred. We got somebody to talk about their own experience of not feeling safe in their community. We started from the community aspect, like what is happening in our community that is making people feel unsafe.”*

The piggyback approach to the network has been an effective way to get the network started, but Age Concern would like to eventually see a separate forum for conversations about abuse of older people prevention.

*“I'm new to get the momentum going, to get people on board, to start being ready to have those conversations, and now actually having a network meeting and group*

*would be great, to form our own group, not just piggybacking off the other but use the information from all the other groups.”*

### Connections with other organisations

The network is still developing, but a lot of foundational work has been done to build the relationships with relevant organisations in the Horowhenua community. At the beginning of the regional network pilot period, Age Concern Horowhenua met with local iwi authorities and community organisations with kaumātua connections to bring them to – or back to – the SAM table. As a way to repair some of the more fraught relationships, Age Concern Horowhenua worked with organisations to put together a memorandum of understanding and terms of reference that would lay the foundation for their mahi going forward.

*“Before we even thought of getting the funding, I went over, introduced myself, and just started forming relationships with the community. I started attending the different outreaches that they had to the community and going there without there being a transactional thing, just going there to support so that when it came to having conversations about what we do, there was already a relationship.”*

As a result, Age Concern Horowhenua feels that the network has the right people at the table and is well-positioned to have conversations about the needs of older people within the community. This has taken time but will support meaningful engagement and constructive conversations about abuse of older people prevention. As a next step, the network may include other organisations in conversations about preventing abuse of older people, such as banks and the Public Trust.

*“It can take longer but sometimes the longer you take, the better the outcome in the end. And you know, that's a learning. I think going ahead, if I said to these people, hey, I really want to have a meeting, now we'd get buy in, because I have joined this and done that and been there.”*

### Sharing knowledge

The Horowhenua regional network is now well-placed to share knowledge across the network. There are early-stage examples of this happening. For example, the network was able to provide wrap-around support to meet the needs of an older person in the community, which helped to identify a service gap for Horowhenua which can now be explored further:

*“We helped her get a total mobility card so she could come in and out of town. Then she went over to the library and the library helped her reconnect her electricity and then got hold of Muaūpoko. They helped her with batches of food. We would communicate with each other at the monthly meeting about who's doing what for her this month. What this did for us was highlight the need for an independent supported living contract or service that can help our older people stay in their homes safer for longer.”*

Laying the groundwork for their network has also given Age Concern tools to communicate the needs of the Horowhenua community to people who can potentially influence policy. Specifically, monitoring reports and contract meetings with the Office for Seniors. The network pilot has highlighted the different approaches that different organisations and groups in the community use to address and prevent the abuse of older people, specifically across cultures.



*“We need to value and respect the way people work with the culture. We've got a big migrant community coming in and they have ways that they support their older people. Liaising with them and saying what can we do to help older people? We can't just say, well this is the way we do it. You've got to value the way other people do and reach the same goal in the end.”*

### **Value of a regional approach**

Age Concern Horowhenua appreciated the regional approach to abuse of older people prevention as it allowed for a range of smaller organisations and people close to the communities impacted to take part and share their own insights. Taking a regional approach to the networks also means that local knowledge and contextual understanding can support delivery tailored to what specific communities need. In Horowhenua, this means understanding the dynamics between Levin and Ōtaki and being able to navigate these successfully to work together toward a common goal.

*“I think if it had been national, you wouldn't get buy-in from all the smaller organisations and the community groups. It would just, if you don't have somebody who's involved in the community, got the community at heart, and you just come in with a blah and disappear, you're not going to get anybody on your side. Every region has their own approach to things, it works much better.”*

### **Conclusions**

The Horowhenua network is still developing but is already benefiting from the formalised opportunity to build connections and relationships with other organisations working in the abuse of older people space within the community. The network, which has used the local SAM table network as a starting point, is well positioned to begin its own activities and potentially become an independent network in future. Age Concern Horowhenua have found the regional approach to the network valuable for ensuring that different communities' particular needs and concerns are understood.

## Auckland Regional Elder Abuse Network

The Auckland Regional Elder Abuse network was piloted with three organisations across the Auckland Region: Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand (CIDANZ), Age Concern Auckland, and Te Ahi Kaa. The organisations work in different areas within Auckland and have connections with different communities in the area. Each organisation approached the pilot differently, developing unique sub-networks across the Auckland region. This section provides an overview of each distinct sub-network.

### Cook Island Sub-network

#### Introduction

CIDANZ offers a range of services aimed at improving economic wellbeing for the Cook Islands community by supporting individuals and families to actively participate in initiatives that support financial wellness. Although their previous work was not in the prevention of the abuse of older people, CIDANZ has close ties with older people in Auckland's Cook Island community. Every Tuesday, CIDANZ runs sessions with Pa metua (Cook Islands elders) across Auckland. This is an opportunity for the metua to come together, share meals and enjoy outings. The existing relationship with metua in the community was leveraged to run a co-design process, resulting in an expo event as the final output for this regional sub-network.

#### Designing the network

The sub-network was co-designed with the Pa metua groups across Auckland. CIDANZ engaged with metua to understand what abuse of older people means for their community and what a network approach to sharing knowledge and information about abuse could look like. The initial conversations signalled to CIDANZ that older people in the Cook Islands community were less likely to experience some types of abuse than the general population. The cultural position of metua as treasured and protected within Cook Islands communities means that abusive situations involving neglect, for example, are less likely. However, other forms such as financial abuse do occur within the Cook Island community.

*“Within our Cook Islands community, when it comes to our metuas, we treasure them. There is no neglect that we see, it's financial abuse to our parents. But in terms of leaving them on their own or fending for themselves, the majority of the Cook Islanders don't do that.”*

Protective factors to prevent financial abuse can include knowledge and information sharing and end-of life preparation such as Enduring Power of Attorney planning and well-drafted wills. With this in mind, CIDANZ sought to design and deliver an expo for older people to learn about these prevention strategies. The expo would also provide other health and wellness knowledge and tools to support older people to stay well, another area that Pa metua identified as important in preventing abusive situations from arising.

*“It was me and my colleagues going to them and saying, okay, what would you like to have happen? What would you like to see at this expo? They were the ones that came up with the idea of, can we please get all these medical people, medical*

*organisations come through, especially bowel cancer, breast cancer, 'cos these are all the top of the list."*

The heavy involvement from the Pa metua group from co-design to execution was seen as a strength of the sub-network approach within this community. The engagement meant the event was catered to the needs and interests of the specific older people CIDANZ were looking to serve, and ultimately culminated in a successful event.

*"It made it easier, to be honest, because it's what they want. It's not what we think they want. Especially coming from our Pa metuas who have been around longer than we have, so words of wisdom coming from them."*

### **Connections with other organisations**

Because it was already established and well-connected with other organisations in the community, CIDANZ was able to draw on their pre-existing networks to bring other community organisations together to support the expo. They saw the regional sub-network as an opportunity to strengthen their connections and bring them together around the topic of abuse of older people.

*"We have a close relationship with all the providers that were there. It was just reconnecting, to be honest. We have a network that we've already set up with all our social services as well as government, so we tap into that. You've got to make do what you have and who you're connected with, that's what I love about working within an NGO. You may have a little but once you get together, you've got a lot."*

When it came to connections with the other two organisations funded to take part in the Regional Elder Abuse Network pilot, CIDANZ spoke about the new connections that have been formed with Age Concern Auckland and Te Ahi Kaa. CIDANZ and Age Concern Auckland connected initially and exchanged ideas for working in AOP prevention. While discussions took place about opportunities for professional development and training exchanges, CIDANZ ultimately decided to run the expo in line with their co-design process, and ongoing contact with Age Concern Auckland has been somewhat limited during the pilot period.

CIDANZ have also connected with Te Ahi Kaa, who came to the expo and presented to the metua about their own work and services in abuse of older people prevention. The relationship has continued, and the two organisations are now working together to discuss a Pasifika module as part of the Māori Strategy Plan for elders at Te Ahi Kaa.

*"[The meeting with Age Concern Auckland] gave us insights on how they did things, and we just took that away, we thanked them and walked away. With Ahi Kaa, we invited them to the event. They came in full force, and we were actually quite astonished and happy that they were there."*

### **Sharing knowledge**

CIDANZ used the network pilot opportunity to run the expo as a way to generate and share knowledge across their community. The event supported CIDANZ themselves to learn more about the abuse of older people within Cook Islands communities and allowed them to share

information and knowledge back to Pa metua and their families. Family and friends of the metua were encouraged to attend the event, so the knowledge was further reaching than just the older people themselves.

*“It actually not only educated them, but it also educated the staff as well and also the carers that were present on the day. We pushed out to our community, especially to our Pa metua, don't just come with your group, come with someone from home.”*

As a result of the information shared through the expo, a number of metua and their families have taken steps to put the knowledge into action, including reaching out to a Justice of the Peace and making end of life plans.

*“One of our metua that passed away... So, the son came and said oh my gosh, thank you for being our eye opener to view, if this Expo didn't happen, then they wouldn't have thought about preparing themselves for when the worst comes.”*

### **Value of a regional approach**

CIDANZ saw value in taking a regional approach to preventing the abuse of older people, particularly because the drivers of abuse can differ between areas of New Zealand. For example, older people in Auckland tend to have access to a broader range of services that smaller communities outside of the city may not have access to. Their participation in the pilot prompted them to think about how they can deliver similar expos in more rural parts of the country to support metua that are a part of the broader CIDANZ network. From here, they will look to connect with national leaders across the country to understand how this could be achieved.

### **Conclusions**

CIDANZ took a strong co-design approach to their network, drawing on the knowledge and needs of Pa Metua groups that they work with regularly. As a result, CIDANZ understood an expo to generate and share knowledge about the abuse of older people would be an effective way of reaching the older people and their families in their particular region.

CIDANZ already had established and formalised networks across New Zealand. This pilot enabled them to leverage their existing connections to begin work in the abuse of older people prevention space. While the approach taken by CIDANZ is not that of a traditional network, it met many of the intended outcomes of the pilot and laid the groundwork for abuse of older people prevention work to begin in Cook Islands communities in New Zealand.

## **Age Concern Auckland Sub-network**

### **Introduction**

The Auckland Regional Elder Abuse Network was piloted with three organisations across the Auckland Region: Age Concern Auckland, Te Ahi Kaa, and the Cook Islands Development

Agency New Zealand (CIDANZ). Each organisation approached the pilot differently, developing unique sub-networks across the Auckland region.

Age Concern Auckland is a charitable organisation that has been delivering a range of support services for people over the age of 65 for over 75 years. Their work spans intervention services, aging well services, social connections services and dedicated Asian services, alongside advocacy and lobbying activities.

*“We've been doing it for 75 years. We've got an excellent team of highly professional, highly trained, highly developed social workers and support staff and we are highly multicultural. We are, I think, the largest organisation in New Zealand providing specialist services for older people.”*

Age Concern Auckland reported that a regional elder abuse network was not the primary focus of the pilot from Age Concern's perspective. Rather, Age Concern sought to explore the need for AOP support and identify existing barriers that prevent effective provision of such support.

Age Concern Auckland used the regional elder abuse network as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the sector and create a prototype model of what a network of providers in the Auckland region could look like. It was identified by Age Concern Auckland that a network would be an effective model, but they feel that this would only be successful with a central core around the network.

### **Design of a potential regional network**

In designing their contribution to this pilot, Age Concern Auckland – with support from Te Ahi Kaa - utilised a range of data collection methodologies to inform a report detailing the needs of a regional elder abuse network. This included drawing on the wealth of experience and expertise within Age Concern Auckland, in-house desktop research, and interviews with a range of stakeholders including individual older people, recognised community leaders, community organisations and professionals working with older people such as GPs and physiotherapists.

*“It was just ourselves and Te Ahi Kaa and we worked on the project together, we produced a report, that basically says, if you wanted to have an effective regional network in Auckland, this is what you need to do.”*

Age Concern Auckland integrate co-design approaches that include the voices of older people into all of the work they do, and this was a feature of the report exploring the potential shape of a regional elder abuse network. Older people are not a homogenous group and the interview process that informed this work was a way to ensure that a representative range of voices were heard through the process.

*“You've got urban, suburban, rural, multiple different ethnicities, multiple different age groups, multiple different financial circumstances and economic levels, multiple different educational levels, you cannot have a tokenistic gesture of having one or two older people sitting as part of the conversation, assuming that that is going to be a truly representative view. You have to be able to have conversations with multiple older people.”*



## Connections with other organisations

The other contracted organisations in the Auckland region opted to create sub-networks with the funding. Age Concern Auckland built a reciprocal relationship with Te Ahi Kaa as a result of the pilot. However, the primary output of the pilot period for Age Concern Auckland was the learning and insights report, rather than a traditional network.

## Value of a regional approach

Age Concern Auckland spoke to the value of a regional approach to networking, so long as each regional network is coordinated by a central organisation with the resource, skills, and knowledge to bring together the smaller providers in the region. From here, the central organisation would be well-placed to network at a national level. The rationale for this is two-fold. Firstly, having one contracted organisation in each region to coordinate the network would reduce the number of relationships that relevant agencies and organisations (such as banks) would need to hold.

*“The banks are not going to want to have a relationship with half a dozen or a dozen different organisations about the same subject. They're going to more have one conversation with the regional network and whoever represents the regional network.”*

Secondly, having one resourced and skilled coordinating organisation would enable effective linking between the regional networks to create a national network that represents the interests of all participating organisations. This approach would also enable resources to be effectively shared across the networks on a national level. Age Concern Auckland note that the most effective way for this to be delivered is through a regional hub model that provides a tangible, strategic centre-point for training, development, supervision, and coordination.

*“If you're sitting in Christchurch, you're not going to have a lot of choice to go to a Chinese speaking social worker or a Hindi speaking social worker. If there is, it's going to be by luck. But if you are part of a regional network in Christchurch who was looking after some part of the South Island, you could also link with the other regional networks to say okay, we've got a Cantonese speaking older person here who needs help with elder abuse.”*

## Learning and sharing information

The pilot has provided an opportunity for Age Concern Auckland to share information and learning with broader audiences. There were two primary findings that were seen to be important in considering how a regional network could function effectively in Auckland: the need for a range of options and the fragmented delivery environment in the region.

### **Older people require a range of options when it comes to accessing support:**

There is a need for communities to have a range of options when it comes to accessing support. While some may want to access support from a specialist provider, others may feel more comfortable accessing general support that is not linked with their own culture or religion for example. This is not to say that general support isn't culturally and linguistically appropriate, but that these service providers have a range of practitioners capable of working with people from a range of cultures and backgrounds.

*“This is suggesting that there is a binary choice, that you can access general ‘mainstream’ support, or you can access specialist, cultural/linguistic support. This is not and should not be the case. Age Concern Auckland provides support to ethnic communities as a ‘specialist’ provider, able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support. We need to end the false narrative that is suggestive that ‘general/mainstream’ means white & English speaking. Roughly 50% of Age Concern clients are broadly European in origin, with 14% being older Māori, 20% being Asian or South Asian, 11% being Pacific. This is mirrored in our staffing, with slightly less than 50% being broadly European, with the majority being Asian, South Asian, Māori or Pacific, speaking multiple language and coming from multiple cultural backgrounds. This means that, for example, as well as being a ‘general/mainstream’ provider, Age Concern Auckland is also a specialist provider and has the highest levels of Asian and South Asian clients among Auckland’s specialist providers. While not suggesting that other, smaller organisations do not and cannot have a very important role to play in any regional network, it would be useful to ensure that Age Concern Auckland was recognised as catering to the needs of ethnic communities not as a general provider, but as a specialist provider in our own right.”*

A networking approach that looks to improve outcomes for older people should aim to bring up the collective capability and competency of all of its members working to prevent and respond to the abuse of older people across the region – rather than siloed services to create division and competition for clients based on demographics.

*“So, our view is there should be a one regional network, but what that effectively means is there are multiple front doors to walk through and you get the same level of support no matter which front door you go through. The individual older person can choose whichever front door they feel most comfortable walking through.”*

There is seen to be merit in diversifying the providers in the community, as well as the skills to deliver to diverse audiences within all organisations, to ensure response and prevention services that are tailored to the needs of their communities. However, prevention and response to the abuse of older people is a specialist field and there is a need to ensure that those who are starting work in this space have the requisite skills and knowledge to work safely.

*“Our concern is that, as much as having other organisations and increased number of organisations providing elder abuse response, provides that element of choice, there is no sense of are we providing any consistent level of service, because there’s no training or development.”*

### **Competitive contracts have created a fragmented delivery environment in Auckland**

The regional network pilot has been introduced into a contracting environment in which providers are directly competing with one another for resources and delivery funding. Such competition is antithetical to many of the core activities expected of a successful network, such as initiative collaboration, sharing of resources and reciprocal training, shared referrals, and capacity building. To build a well-functioning regional network, there is a need to consider the impact of the funding environment in an area like Auckland where there is a need to work at scale and cater to the needs of a wide range of communities.

*“We are competing directly with one another, all of the time. Although we are always saying, these are our colleagues, these are our friends in other organisations, when it comes down to funding rounds, we [do whatever it takes] to get the funding, because we need it for our organisation. So, there is no sense of the natural, organic collaboration because the Government funds it in such a way so that you're all competing for individualised funding.”*

## Conclusions

Age Concern Auckland have used the regional network as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the sector and develop a prototype model for a well-functioning network of providers in the Auckland region. The process has included data collection from a range of stakeholders and provided insight into elements that would support an Auckland network. Although there were limited traditional networking activities carried out during this period, Age Concern Auckland has carried out co-design research which could inform future networking work.

## Te Ahi Kaa sub-network

### Introduction

The Auckland Regional Elder Abuse Network was piloted with three organisations across the Auckland Region: Age Concern Auckland, Te Ahi Kaa, and the Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand (CIDANZ). Each organisation approached the pilot differently, developing unique sub-networks across the Auckland region.

Te Ahi Kaa is a Kaupapa Māori provider located in Te Puaha O Waikato and borders on the boundaries of Auckland and Waikato. Te Tari Kaumātua / Office for Seniors approached Te Ahi Kaa, along with Age Concern Auckland (Age Concern), providing an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges and strengthen collective responses to AOP across Tāmaki Makaurau. Although Te Ahi Kaa was new to working in the AOP sector, they were well established in Pukekohe, with some positive relationships already developed with kaumātua and other services.

### Network design

Involving kaumātua (older people) in the design and development of local strategies, programmes and services is essential to the way that Te Ahi Kaa work. The co-design approach was grounded in the foundations of tikanga Māori, ensuring the work is tika (right), pono (honest), and based on aroha (compassion). Key goals of the co-design process were to amplify kaumātua voices, to understand their aspirations and the challenges they face.

The resource provided Te Ahi Kaa with the means to engage kaumātua and break down barriers of participation by providing transport, a warm safe space and healthy kai. Manaakitanga and whanaungatanga supported kaumātua to open up and share their experiences. Te Ahi Kaa provided comfortable and safe spaces, acknowledging the mātauranga (knowledge) of kaumātua and the value of their life experiences. Kōrero occurred on the marae with approximately 50 kaumātua, Māori and non-Māori. Age Concern were also conducting their co-design processes with kaumātua. These two information sources were brought together to

explore synergies and develop three priorities for the network. These priorities included access to and understanding of legal services, transport barriers and community connection.

Through this process Te Ahi Kaa were able to build a deeper understanding of specific needs of kaumātua and how to best prevent and respond to issues like elder abuse. It was essential kaumātua and whānau had a “seat at the table” and any solutions were developed in partnership.

*“The ultimate goal I think when we were working [and] codesigning with our own community [is] we were interested in what actually matters to them.”*

### **Strong relationships support knowledge and information sharing**

As a result of the network, a relationship has developed between Te Ahi Kaa and Age Concern Auckland. From the perspective of Te Ahi Kaa, this relationship has helped to create opportunities for sharing knowledge, resources, and training opportunities.

Setting up the network has supported learning and information sharing between Te Ahi Kaa and Age Concern Auckland. Knowledge from te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā has helped to broaden an understanding of abuse of older people and strategies to support prevention approaches. For Te Ahi Kaa the network is an opportunity to learn from experienced providers in this space, and ultimately develop support for kaumātua in need.

*“It’s about our kaumātua and I really want to tap into knowledge and resources. I want to tap into the networks, because that can only benefit and impact our whānau out here.”*

With open communication and robust honest kōrero the network partners have coalesced on their shared philosophies and commitment to support kaumātua. Age Concern Auckland have provided policy support and training in AOP while Te Ahi Kaa has contributed cultural competence training and supervision.

*“[The] kaupapa provided an intentional response to an area that is often individualistic. We have regular connections and are quite conscious in how we work together. For example, because we’re only just recently come into the Elder Abuse Response Service and they’ve been delivering it for some time, they’re allowing our team to go in and shadow their team. They invited us to a lot of their onboarding training; they’ve given us a lot of their policies and we have a regular fortnightly hui. We have a relationship where we actually just ring each other if we have a question or anything like that.”*

Te Ahi Kaa have also assisted Age Concern Auckland with other aspects of their mahi, including acting as kaikaranga, supporting a Request for Proposal (RFP) response, and linking other local kaupapa Māori organisations which helped to extend the reach of Age Concern Auckland and referral pathways.

### **Fostering a regional approach supports sector growth**

Collaborations between Te Ahi Kaa, government agencies and community organisations are emerging, and the sharing of information has improved. As momentum has grown, natural relationships are growing with other providers, including Hohou te Rongo Kahukura (a

charitable trust focused on preventing and addressing violence experienced by Takatāpui and Rainbow people); and Vaka Tautua (a national ‘by Pacific, for Pacific’ mental health, disability and social services).

Protective factors have been strengthened through the Te Ahi Kaa and Community Law collaboration. Kaumātua and whānau are able to receive legal support and are taught how to complete relevant forms. As a direct response to the feedback from kaumātua, Te Ahi Kaa is looking to establish a new transport service called ‘Kuber’. It will provide kaumātua a free service to get around the community, to marae, supermarket shopping, etc.

Kaumātua shared how involvement in the kaupapa has supported positive hauora (health and wellbeing), increased community connection, sense of purpose and independence. The kaupapa has also been a way to recognise, affirm and strengthen the work that is being done to grow the understanding of abuse of older people and support kaumātua.

*“And I think too, it really helps with our hinengaro. It really helps because you're not feeling left out, you're not feeling alone and it's things like that that make you close down. But you get yourself involved in things like this, it helps your body. It helps you to get out there. It helps you to get to know people. It's good for ourselves. Health wise, it's very good.”*

## Conclusions

Te Ahi Kaa confirms the importance of taking a preventative, strengths-based approach which builds on the mātauranga and experience of kaumātua. There are service gaps that lead to vulnerabilities for kaumātua, such as transport, legal services, and housing. The siloed way of working is also confusing, and kaumātua find it hard to access help and the support they need. Therefore, an AOP response needs to offer wrap-around whānau ora services to strengthen and protect overall hauora.

Through the network, organisational leaders can learn from one another and build reciprocal relationships drawing on their organisation's skills and knowledge. It feels like other government agencies know very little about AOP, making a holistic approach to prevention and response challenging. In some cases, government agencies continue to refer to more experienced providers like Age Concern Auckland, rather than Te Ahi Kaa as a new provider in this space.

Importantly, the network approach highlights the importance of integrating cultural values of whakawhanaungatanga (relationship-building) and manaakitanga into AOP prevention efforts. This complements clinical approaches and other sources of information and ensures that AOP services will reach all kaumātua in the region.

## Te Tai Tokerau Regional Elder Abuse Network

### Introduction

The Te Tai Tokerau network is a collaboration between Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi and WotMatters Ltd, grounded in He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Based on the principle of whakawhanaungatanga, building positive and reciprocal relationships, kaumātua were brought together to design and form the basis of the network, and to work with existing networks and groups across Whangārei and Mid North.

The network is kaumātua-led across two cohorts: Te Korowai Manaaki Kaumātua Terenga Paraoa and Te Rōpū Kaumātua o Te Whare Tapu Ō Ngāpuhi (TRAION) Mid North. Although in different localities, they are connected by whakapapa, whenua and whanaungatanga. Through honouring the voices of kaumātua, the network hopes to grow a shared understanding of the causes and issues surrounding elder abuse. It is also committed to engaging diverse membership that represents the communities of Te Tai Tokerau.

### Design of the network

The design of the network is premised on being kaumātua-led and driven, and provides opportunities for them to connect with each other, the community and existing services and supports. Kaumātua involvement was critical to the establishment of the network, as well as the ongoing sustainability of the kaupapa. The design and development phase focused on honouring their voices and making them central to any solutions or local prevention approaches developed.

Kaumātua were invited into welcoming spaces to share their insights, ideas, and aspirations. The intention was to create comfortable, safe environments and then offer the opportunity to form a group where more challenging conversations could happen, like elder abuse. Trust developed over kai and casual conversations, and everyone present engaged in open, honest dialogue.

Collectively, Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi and WotMatters Ltd planned two foundational hui that occurred in Whangārei and Kaikohe. Both hui were based on E Tū Whānau values of aroha, whanaungatanga, whakapapa, mana manaaki, kōrero awhi and tikanga.

*“We were facilitating conversation through E Tū whānau, six values, [and] each table had a value and then questions. It wasn’t a lesson out of familiarity, it was familiar through those value-based conversations. They were familiar words [a] prompting, going back, what does a value-based proposition look like for them.”*

Importantly, the starting point of the design was celebrating kaumātua, who they are and their contributions over the years. With clear intentions, Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi and WotMatters Ltd facilitated kaumātua to come together with the clear intention that kaumātua would create the foundation of the network.

*“It was a calling really, a karanga, for those kaumātua and others who would like to be a part of codesigning this kaupapa, with the support of our whānau kaimahi of the*



*Rūnanga at the time, as well as some of the providers in Whangārei. [Nobody] got in the way, they were just holding space, the voice came from kaumātua kuia.”*

Kaumātua feedback highlighted the effectiveness of the approach and how they were able to work in a way that was culturally relevant and grounded in values and practices that matter to them. Common themes and directions for the network were identified, including ideas for further discussion and activities. The values resonated with kaumātua and helped to facilitate open, familiar, and meaningful conversations. This value-based approach also provided a solid tūāpapa or foundation for engagement.

### **Whakawhanaungatanga builds meaningful relationships**

As a result of the network, the relationship between Te Runanga ā Iwi ō Ngāpuhi and WotMatters Ltd has strengthened, with each other, kaumātua and other providers in the rohe. They have been able to develop a clear path that reflects the aspirations of kaumātua across the region. Partnerships are also developing within the network and external agencies, including E Tū Whānau, ACC, TPK, Kainga Ora, Māmā Neke Maunga, Hapai te Hauora, and Regional Councils. The network serves as a platform to socialise ideas and the work being done through agencies like Mate Waewae.

*“We’re forming a package up that we will go and present to Age Concern [and] some of those well-established rūpū. We’ve got some good talkers and good orators in our group, and we’ll equip them to be able to socialise [the information] and bring more people in. But we’re not looking too much at numbers, it’s more quality of conversation [to] get into a design conversation, a design zone and then we’ll test it and adapt it.”*

The network is also helping to create connections and relationships between kaumātua and external community organisations. Through providing a warm introduction, external services are meeting kaumātua and hearing first-hand what is important to them. They are becoming familiar faces and trusted individuals from within the sector. A key aspect of developing these relationships is ensuring that people who enter the space do not take over but help to facilitate the process of designing solutions.

*“It’s about introducing some of our sector [through] warm hands, people that I know to come in this space and not take over. Then we can start to sort of build more courageous conversations around in safe spaces, safe hands.”*

The resource supported a strengths-based approach grounded in whanaungatanga, whakapapa and manaakitanga. Given the challenging nature of discussing topics like elder abuse, the network could develop this discussion in a positive way focusing on the aspirations and well-being of the kaumātua. A more holistic approach allowed for positive solutions and creative thinking.

*“When you’re talking about something quite heavy and not an attractive conversation to have, you have to be really gentle in how you approach it, [but] without sanitising it as well. Like you had to say this is what we’re about, but we don’t start with the mad, bad and sad approach. We don’t start at the disparate [or]*

*the sharp end. If we do that we become reactionary and we're not offering anything new for our kuia, kaumātua.”*

### **Connections are developing across the region**

With the resourcing the network has been able to create meaningful connections in a thoughtful and culturally responsive way. The resource helped to ensure kaumātua could participate in designing the network, as well as their continuing involvement as active network members. To ensure they could participate without experiencing any financial burdens, they were offered petrol vouchers, transport to hui and good kai. Throughout the design process, comfortable and welcoming environments in informal and public settings, like local restaurants, were also used. Holding the hui and having kōrero in public spaces encouraged others to listen in and join the discussion. This approach also helped to increase the visibility of kaumātua within the community and gave them a chance to relax and feel nurtured. Kaumātua are deeply motivated by their mokopuna, aiming to build a legacy that will benefit future generations. They often place the needs of others above their own. Therefore, providing spaces where they can focus on their needs, recharge, and reconnect is important to the ongoing success of the network.

*“We asked the questions around the value based proposition, every single one of them said their mokopuna, it's creating that legacy or that world for their mokopuna and that still stands today. Our kaumātua always see what they can do for others and often put themselves last. If we can create a space where they can put themselves first and be okay to do that, we've done a good job because they're always giving the very best, they can and often leaving no residual for themselves.”*

Positive responses were also received from places like restaurants, which embraced the purpose of the kaupapa.

*“We went to our local restaurant, which they loved, and the restaurant loved them to pieces. It was out in the open [and] we went to public places to have this conversation deliberately so that people can hear what we're talking about. If we get tucked in the marae or in a meeting room or behind closed doors, we don't necessarily get the beauty of people listening and joining us.”*

### **Sharing knowledge and information**

The network has successfully been sharing knowledge across kaumātua, community and government organisations. Kaumātua have shared experiences and insights about maintaining cultural legacy and supporting mokopuna (grandchildren) throughout the process. This is helping to establish a shared understanding of the broader cultural and intergenerational goals of kaumātua. The kōrero has also provided insights into areas in which kaumātua could need support. Sharing these insights with organisations like ACC Hapai Services, Te Puni Kōkiri Alzheimer's North, Jigsaw North, mirimiri and rongoā providers, helps to facilitate conversations about ways to address their concerns, including the creation of appropriate wrap-around services.

## Value of the network

The establishment of the networks has fostered strong relationships with kaumātua, and development of a diverse rōpū which includes kaumātua and representatives of agencies and communities committed to addressing elder abuse. A collaborative plan has been facilitated through the network which will continue to:

- sustain a network of practice that is underpinned by He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- develop shared understanding of the causes and issues surrounding elder abuse
- provide kaumātua voice and advice into Te Aorerekura Strategy.

Additionally, through the collaborative efforts of the network, kaumātua, government and community organisations are beginning to have courageous conversations about elder abuse, including tailored preventative responses.

Key outcomes identified by the network partners include:

- **Strengthened social connections.** Kaumātua have built stronger connections with each other and their whānau, reducing isolation and enhancing well-being.
- **Improved engagement.** Kaumātua feel valued and have a clearer understanding of available supports, leading to better access to services.
- **Culturally responsive approaches.** The network has integrated E Tū Whānau values into the design process, ensuring that prevention strategies are culturally relevant and resonate with Māori communities.
- **Ongoing adaptation and learning.** The network is a living entity that will constantly reflect and adapt to the needs of kaumātua and their communities.
- **Intergenerational connections.** The network is fostering and affirming connections between kaumātua and younger generations, promoting cultural transmission and mutual support.

*“We’re looking at the two bookends, our māmā, their pēpi and our kaumātua. That first conversation with our kaumātua, [they said] “we want to dance again in harmony with our mokopuna.” So that is holding the kete together and balancing in harmony? When the going gets rough, I’ll take the weight, but when it’s tough for me, you take the weight. We’re putting that into action now with our māmā and our kaumātua. That’s what we’ve been investing in.”*

Protective factors have been strengthened throughout the process and for kaumātua involved in the design process. Kaumātua feel less isolated with hui fostering a sense of belonging and community. They also feel their mātauranga and lived experience are valued and respected. Also, the network has helped to improve kaumātua awareness of available supports and services, which may lead to better access and engagement.

## Conclusions

The network partners shared that co-design is essential to the network’s success. It ensures that kaumātua are active participants and that the region’s response is built on lived experience. The key is enabling kaumātua to lead the kōrero. This approach requires going at

the pace of the kaumātua and ensuring that their voices are prioritised when developing strategies and solutions.

The network partners shared that rushing the engagement process or focusing on quantity rather than quality engagements could lead to a network that feels like an institutional space for organisations rather than a genuine community initiative. It is also critical the engagement approach focuses on wellbeing and engaging kaumātua in ways that “fill their cups”.

Another critical factor is managing the role of the sector (the organisations and service providers) so they do not dominate the conversations or undermine the leadership of kaumātua. The network partners play an important role in holding space for kaumātua to engage safely and setting clear expectations of services participating in the discussions.

*“It’s about making sure that you set it up, so we don’t unintentionally suffocate the beauty of the kōrero by trying to give out pamphlets first thing. That they listen and absorb.”*

## **General Learning: Findings to support future regional networks**

## General Learning: Have regional networks been working as intended?

The Regional Elder Abuse Network pilot intended to provide organisations within different regions of Aotearoa New Zealand an opportunity to become more confident to work in the prevention of AOP space, become better connected with organisations in their region and enable older people to feed into the ways that the networks are shaped and the problems and solutions they look to address. Each regional network was given the space to determine what a network could look like for them, and as a result each network has taken a unique and tailored response to the design and setup within their region. Specifically, this section looks to capture insights about how the networks have:

- Involved older people in the design and development of local prevention strategies
- Formed relationships between contracted organisations and between others in the community
- Resourced organisations to create connections with older people and with other organisations.

### Involvement of older people in the design and development of local prevention strategies

To some extent, the regional networks have all been co-designed with the voices of older people. Some organisations utilised traditional co-design methods, drawing on existing kaumātua or older person groups in their communities to unpack what a regional network could look like and what issues and gaps such a network should address. Other organisations have opted to include the voices of older people in different ways – for example, through kaimahi or through research methods.

Those working with older people in the community found that starting the co-design process with discussions about general safety rather than starting with AOP was beneficial. This allowed these organisations to create safe spaces and build rapport with older people before launching into more sensitive content. Future networks may wish to take this approach but should ensure they plan for these conversations about AOP to happen with older people at some stage during the co-design. This will ensure older people feel safe to have discussions during the co-design phase, but that they also have an opportunity to feed into discussions about AOP as well.

Some networks were able to draw on existing groups of kaumātua to co-design with which simplified and strengthened the co-design process. For some, this meant having a group connected with their existing mahi, and for others it meant drawing on external pre-established groups, such as older peoples networks within local councils. Co-designing with people who already knew each other and, in some cases, already met on a regular basis strengthened and created efficiencies in the co-design process. Future networks that do not already have access to a group of older people may benefit from being connected with organisations who do, or seeking out existing groups in their communities.

The different regional networks all took unique approaches to co-designing with older people in the community. Organisations commissioned to create a regional network in future should be provided with clear guidelines and expectations about what an ideal co-design process looks



like. This could include guidance on the number of older people to engage, recommendations on the extent and length of engagement and topics that could be covered through engagement.

### **Forming relationships between contracted organisations and between others in the community**

The regional network pilot provided an opportunity for contracted organisations to broaden their relationships within their communities, both with other contracted organisations where applicable, and with relevant organisations such as banks, police, and other community groups. In general, organisations that had a history of working in AOP were already well connected with relevant organisations in their communities but saw the pilot as an opportunity to strengthen and formalise these existing relationships.

For those who were new to working in AOP, the opportunity to form new connections was highly valued. This pilot created opportunities for these organisations to build connections with more established AOP prevention providers as well as community organisations such as healthcare organisations, banks, and lawyers. There was also one organisation in this pilot that had a history working in AOP but took time to rebuild relationships within the region that had been lost prior to the pilot beginning. For them, the pilot was an excellent opportunity to formalise this process and begin this journey.

In the case of two networks with multiple contracted organisations, there were separate sub-networks formed. While one of these networks plan to join the two developed sub-networks together at a later date, the other didn't make any plans for a joined-up future network. Future regional networks may benefit from setting clear expectations around the extent to which contracted organisations should work together. Clear communication about the reasons why contracted organisations have been selected and the ways in which they may be able to work together to achieve outcomes could aid this process.

### **Resourcing organisations to create connections with older people and other organisations**

Most regional networks reported feeling that they had been well-resourced to create connections with older people and other organisations in their regional communities. Some of the networks that sought to carry out an activity such as a conference or expo appreciated being able to access additional funding to support these activities.

One organisation spoke about the important conversations that were had during the networking period and reflected that it would have been good to have a note taker present to capture some of this information to support knowledge sharing. A future network process might look to support contracted organisations with ideas for capturing impact throughout the process, for example, taking meeting notes, generating needs assessment reports for a region based on network activities and findings and creating surveys that can be used to collect impact data at events and activities. One way of doing this could be to connect organisations with strong existing processes with those that are looking to develop in this space.

## General Learning: What outcomes have been achieved as a result of the establishment of these networks?

The networks have all worked in unique ways to meet the specific needs of the communities they operate in and support. Specifically, this section looks to capture insights regarding:

- Government and community organisations working together to prevent AOP
- Government agencies and community organisations having a better understanding of AOP and how it impacts diverse communities
- Protective factors having been strengthened and/or risk factors being reduced for older people involved in the co-design process

### Government and community organisations are sharing information and working together to prevent AOP

The establishment of the regional networks has created a foundation for potential collaboration between government and community organisations in the future. While it is early in the life of these networks, initial connections have been formed, allowing the Office for Seniors to engage with organisations that may not have previously been involved in AOP prevention. This engagement has enabled conversations about the unique needs of older people within each region to be started, providing an important first step toward a more collaborative approach to addressing abuse.

*“I think we've got much better understanding of the dynamics of abuse, but also more about prevention, because a lot of the organisations used to do prevention work, but that was awareness raising. And there are many more prevention approaches that you can take than just awareness raising. There's been huge benefit for us in seeing like how that programme design has developed over time and what it practically looks like.” – the Office for Seniors*

As the networks develop, they could play a role in fostering a more unified approach to AOP and more formal structures could be established to support regular interactions and exchange of information between government and network representatives, helping to align resources and strategies at both local and national levels. Potential initiatives such as regular forums for government and network participants, or the development of needs assessment reports specific to each region, could offer valuable insights and inform government policies and investments in AOP prevention.

However, it is important to note that these networks are still in their formative stages, and not all participating organisations have the capacity or have expressed an interest in taking on a collaborative leadership role in prevention. Future iterations of the networks may consider additional support for organisations to build their readiness for such collaboration. As networks become more established, the structures, relationships, and practices they have begun to build could enable a coordinated, locally informed approach to AOP prevention that leverages both government and community resources effectively.

## **Government agencies and community organisations having a better understanding of AOP and how it impacts diverse communities**

The pilot of the Regional Elder Abuse Networks has supported a deeper understanding of AOP prevention for both government agencies and community organisations. Through direct engagement with the contracted organisations, the Office for Seniors has gained valuable insights into AOP prevention, recognising both the complexities of the issue and the particular needs of different communities. This work has highlighted the need for a strengths-based approach that draws on the cultural knowledge and experiences of older people, particularly in Māori communities, where factors such as legal and housing access gaps add to older people's vulnerabilities.

For organisations with experience in AOP prevention, some networks have broadened their awareness of culturally diverse needs, particularly around the importance of culturally aligned support methods. These organisations have recognised the need to move beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, noting the importance of offering older people options for accessing support that fit their specific backgrounds and comfort levels. An inclusive approach that integrates cultural values like whakawhanaungatanga (relationship-building) and manaakitanga can enhance the reach and relevance of AOP services, complementing more clinical approaches and ensuring that all older people can safely access prevention resources.

For those organisations new to AOP prevention, the pilot has been an opportunity to learn and adapt their practices to meet the needs of older adults in their specific communities. These organisations have not undertaken significant professional development to be in a position to respond to AOP, but they have a deeper awareness of the issue and have formed networks to support them to begin talking about this within their specific communities. The network structure has encouraged cross-organisational learning and highlighted the importance of diversifying the range of providers within communities to ensure that all older people have choices for where and how they access support. Diversifying the organisations who integrate prevention methods into their business as usual will also increase the reach of awareness raising activities.

This pilot has brought attention to the need for more formal knowledge-sharing mechanisms within and across the networks. Some networks have identified that they can integrate AOP awareness material into regular forums and training modules to better share information and knowledge. One of the networks has considered structured, regional needs assessment reports as a future tool to communicate their findings to government and influence policy.

## **Protective factors having been strengthened and/or risk factors being reduced for older people involved in the co-design process**

While it is early in the establishment of most regional networks, there are emerging signs that protective factors have begun to strengthen in some communities, particularly through targeted events and resource-sharing efforts. In the two networks that organised expos or conferences, there was a focus on raising awareness about the abuse of older people and providing access to resources that can help prevent it. These events have introduced older people to practical steps they can take to protect themselves, such as setting up Enduring Power of Attorney (EPOA) documents, drafting wills, and connecting with healthcare and wellness services.

Through these events, some older people and their families have started to put this knowledge into action, initiating conversations with legal advisors and healthcare providers about their end-of-life plans and support needs. These initial steps toward future planning may help reduce risk factors for abuse by ensuring that older people have clearly defined legal protections in place and an established network of support services.

Protective factors were further enhanced for kaumātua (older people) when they were enabled and encouraged to lead and drive the establishment of the networks. Through participatory and partnership co-design processes kaumātua gained a sense of belonging, feeling less lonely and more connected to others and the community. In some instances, kaumātua have become more involved in their community and do not feel like a burden to whānau or as reliant on them. In some cases, new relationships have developed or strengthened and kaumātua continue to meet and support one another. Importantly, throughout the process kaumātua feel heard, valued, and relevant.

While the impact on protective and risk factors remains limited due to the early stage of implementation, the networks have laid a foundation for ongoing education and community engagement.

## General Learning: What has been learnt about the prevention of AOP through these pilots?

The regional network pilots have highlighted the importance of tailoring network structures to meet the unique needs of diverse communities, highlighting both the value of regional flexibility and the challenges of creating cohesive, sustainable networks. Effective AOP prevention requires time for relationship-building, culturally responsive approaches, and clear expectations around network roles and collaboration. Building sustainability into network design from the outset—through ongoing resources and a commitment to long-term engagement—could further strengthen regional responses in future.

### What has been learned about the prevention of AOP generally?

Providers themselves reported learning more about the prevention of AOP, which has been evidenced throughout this report. This section speaks to some of the broader insights into AOP that were gained through this process and shared during the evaluation. These new insights were all related to Māori and Pacific communities.

**Pacific communities grappling with different types of AOP:** In Pacific communities, older people are traditionally held in high regard, with family structures prioritising care and protection within the family. Neglect is rare, but financial abuse is a concern reported by interviewees, as older family members are sometimes seen as a source of financial support.

**It may be useful to unpack beliefs about residential living to support older Māori out of abusive situations:** The pilot has also provided insight into the perspectives of some Māori communities around residential or assisted living arrangements, where stigma and a strong preference for remaining within the whānau can influence decisions. For many Māori, placing an elder in a retirement home or residential facility is viewed as a last resort, sometimes due to the older persons' fears of losing family connections, particularly with mokopuna

(grandchildren). One network's work with Māori families revealed that, for some older people struggling to meet their basic needs, education on the benefits of these facilities – including accessibility for family visits – can open up alternative solutions that improve their quality of life while maintaining family ties.

**The Māori Land Court can be an important connection in AOP prevention:** An unexpected yet valuable outcome of the regional elder abuse prevention networks has been the inclusion of the Māori Land Court as a support resource. Land succession is an impactful issue for many Māori whānau, often creating complex family dynamics that can contribute to financial and emotional pressures on older people. By bringing representatives from the Māori Land Court into community events, one network helped Māori families access guidance on land-related legal matters that can otherwise remain unresolved or unaddressed.

### **What has been the value of taking a regional approach to AOP networks?**

Taking a regional approach to AOP prevention networks has proven valuable for tailoring solutions to meet the specific needs of local communities. By operating at a regional level, networks have been able to identify unique gaps in services and start to develop targeted strategies that support AOP prevention efforts in ways that are relevant to each community. This approach has also expanded the range of organisations involved in AOP prevention, including some that may not have previously engaged in this work, thereby laying the groundwork for more AOP expertise and service delivery capacity to be invested-in in future.

One key advantage of the regional approach is that it has enabled organisations with diverse backgrounds and expertise to begin working in the AOP prevention space. Through participation in the networks, a variety of providers are now able to access professional development, build their knowledge, and start working in this area in a more structured way. This increased range of providers has the potential to offer older people greater choice in accessing support in future and allows services to reach different demographic groups within communities, ultimately creating a more inclusive and wider-reaching prevention network.

*“It has allowed us to pull together a diverse set of voices to feed into policy etc. We've been able to pull together a group of those providers to actually participate in those processes, and I don't know that we ...always would have been able to do that, [previously] it would have been that select group and now it's much more diverse, which is great.” – The Office for Seniors*

Additionally, the regional structure has supported the development of local relationships, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing between organisations that operate within the same community. This localised focus has allowed networks to communicate community-specific insights directly to the Office for Seniors, which may not have been as feasible under a national model. This has been particularly relevant for organisations who work closely with people who speak English as a second language or do not speak English at all, ensuring that these insights and needs are captured, shared and acted on. By keeping the approach regionally focused, the networks can channel both local needs and effective solutions into national-level discussions, helping to ensure that AOP prevention strategies are both community-grounded and responsive to broader policy goals.

## Were there challenges in the design and implementation of networks? How could challenges be addressed in future to support improved outcomes?

While the regional AOP networks have shown promise, there were some challenges in the design and implementation of some networks that impacted their development. To address these challenges effectively, future initiatives should integrate flexibility, clear expectations, and sustainability planning into the initial design of regional networks. By supporting relationship-building and fostering cohesive regional structures, future AOP networks can create a more aligned and resilient approach to elder abuse prevention. Investing in these elements from the start will help ensure that networks are well-positioned to deliver meaningful, lasting outcomes for older people and their communities.

**Building new relationships in communities takes time and resource:** One primary challenge was the time-intensive process of relationship-building within communities, which, in some cases, was constrained by the limited contracting period. For some networks, starting from scratch to build trust and connections within their regions required more time than initially allocated. The flexibility provided by the Office for Seniors in extending timelines was appreciated by those networks. Future implementations could benefit from built-in flexibility to account for the time needed to establish meaningful local partnerships.

**Co-designing networks with kaumātua also takes time and resource:** Some networks found that a thorough co-design process with kaumātua was vital in ensuring that services and responses meet their needs and consider their own lived experiences. Working in this way requires going at the pace of the kaumātua, ensuring that their voices are prioritised when developing strategies and solutions. One network shared that rushing the engagement process or focusing on quantity rather than quality engagements could lead to a network that feels like an institutional space for organisations rather than a genuine community initiative. This time is necessary, but again, is not always factored into contracting and initial design, and future initiatives should consider this in commissioning similar work.

**Some regions formed multiple subnetworks, rather than one network for the region:** In regions where multiple organisations were contracted to form a network, these organisations formed smaller, separate sub-networks rather than a cohesive regional network. While sub-networks allowed organisations to focus on specific local needs, they sometimes led to fragmentation rather than the unified network approach that was originally intended. Clearer communication with contracted organisations regarding expectations, alongside careful selection or self-selection of network participants, could help address this challenge. Additionally, dividing larger regions into smaller, manageable areas might enable more focused and effective collaboration among local providers.

**Some networks did not adopt a traditional networking model with regular meetings and structured knowledge-sharing sessions:** The flexible approach of the regional network pilot allowed for regional adaptation but sometimes lacked the alignment seen in more conventional networks. Setting clearer expectations at the outset around regular meetings and knowledge exchange could strengthen network cohesion in future iterations. Establishing a consistent thread for all networks could help build alignment and support the sharing of best practices across regions. For example, a regular National forum hosted by the Office for Seniors (OFS)



could bring together representatives from all regional networks to share insights and discuss AOP prevention strategies at a national level. This regular interaction could create a sense of unity and help each network align with a more traditional networking approach, providing a national perspective that enhances regional work.

**Not all networks were built with sustainability in mind:** While some networks expressed intentions to continue meeting and collaborating beyond the pilot, and are considering hosting similar events in the future, others approached the pilot with a specific endpoint in mind, viewing it more as an end-to-end project than a foundation for a lasting network. This approach is understandable given the limited funding period, but embedding sustainability into network planning from the outset could improve long-term outcomes. Future iterations could benefit from strategies to support sustainability, such as providing ongoing resourcing for minor yet essential expenses like travel and catering and selecting providers who demonstrate a commitment to building long-term connections.

## Recommendations for future regional networks

To support the development of future regional elder abuse prevention networks, a set of recommendations are outlined below to strengthen design, implementation, and sustainability.

### 1. Select and prepare organisations purposefully

When initiating a network in a new region, funders should be intentional in selecting organisations that are well-positioned to collaborate effectively. Consider how each organisation's expertise, reach, and approach will contribute to the network's goals and complement others in the region. Communicate clear expectations from the outset regarding collaboration, shared responsibilities, and the intended outcomes of the network. Setting these expectations early can foster stronger, more cohesive partnerships and ensure that each organisation understands its role in building a unified, effective regional network.

### 2. Prioritise culturally responsive, community-led co-design

To build AOP prevention networks that resonate with local communities, ensure co-design processes incorporate culturally relevant methods and are paced to respect community needs. Engaging existing community groups, such as kaumātua collectives or local networks, can strengthen co-design efforts and create efficiencies. Starting with broad conversations about safety before discussing abuse may help older people feel more comfortable participating, allowing their insights to shape the network's design. Setting clear expectations at the outset will ensure that regional networks have a shared understanding of what is meant by co-design.

### 3. Support flexible relationship-building timelines

Developing meaningful, lasting connections in communities is essential but time-intensive. Allow for flexible contracting periods to give organisations the time needed to establish relationships and build trust, especially when entering new regions or working with groups new to AOP prevention. This flexibility supports long-term network cohesion and prepares organisations for sustained collaboration.

### 4. Build sustainability into network design

Planning for sustainability from the outset will help networks continue operating beyond the initial funding period. Consider strategies such as providing ongoing resources for small expenses and selecting providers committed to a long-term vision. Supporting networks in securing resources for ongoing activities or future events can also contribute to the enduring impact of AOP prevention efforts.

### 5. Formalise knowledge sharing locally and nationally

Building in regular, structured opportunities for knowledge exchange among network members can strengthen cohesion. Setting expectations for regular meetings and encouraging shared learning through resources or formal training sessions can ensure a more traditional network approach, where insights are continually shared, and skills are developed across regions. Establishing a regular national forum where regional networks can convene may help align local initiatives with broader policy goals and ensure best practices are shared. Such a forum could provide a regular touchpoint for collaboration, support a unified national perspective, and foster a sense of commitment across regional networks.

## Conclusion

The Regional Elder Abuse Network pilot has illustrated the impact that community-led, regionally tailored approaches can have on AOP prevention. By empowering local organisations to design networks that respond to their specific community needs and cultural contexts, the pilot has contributed valuable insights into what works in AOP prevention and revealed areas for growth. Each network's unique structure has highlighted the diversity of approaches required to address AOP effectively across New Zealand, with co-design, relationship-building, and community engagement emerging as key components for success.

While the pilot networks made meaningful strides in raising awareness and building connections, challenges such as fragmented collaborations and sustainability considerations were observed across some of the regional networks. These challenges provide an opportunity to refine future efforts by incorporating more flexible timelines, setting clearer expectations for collaboration, and embedding sustainability measures from the outset. Integrating culturally responsive practices and building on existing community relationships can further strengthen the networks' foundations, ensuring that elder abuse prevention efforts resonate deeply within each region.

Looking forward, a national network that supports local knowledge-sharing while aligning with broader policy goals could enhance cohesion and consistency across regions. Establishing a national forum for regular exchange among regional networks could provide a valuable touchpoint for collaboration and learning in future, helping to build a unified, responsive AOP prevention network across the country that benefits from the targeted, community-specific insights gained and implemented from the regional networks.

The pilot has laid essential groundwork for a collaborative, community-based approach to AOP prevention networking, highlighting the potential for regional networks to begin addressing gaps and challenges that can result in safer environments for older people. With targeted refinements and continued support, these networks can evolve into lasting, impactful initiatives that empower communities and reinforce New Zealand's commitment to protecting its older population.

## Appendix 1: Theory of Change

### Theory of Change

Regional Elder Abuse Networks: focus on activities and short-term outcomes

