

Whānau and Māori Community Assisted Dying Kōrero Guide

This guide supports whānau, hapū, hapori, and iwi to have open, respectful discussions about assisted dying. It centres Māori values and recognises that perspectives will differ. The kaupapa is to support increasing understanding, aroha and manaakitanga for whānau and communities seeking to understand assisted dying. We wrote this guide based on wānanga with 15 Māori research participants and what they told us in the [Exploring Early Experiences of the Assisted Dying Service study](#). It has also been shaped by the findings from the [Waerea Māori assisted dying study](#) and what whānau involved with assisted dying shared with us.

Assisted dying can be a deeply personal and emotional kaupapa. You may wish to pause and step away from the kōrero. Before beginning, it might help to identify who can provide cultural, spiritual, or emotional support if it is needed. We've put links to support and information about assisted dying including contact details at the end of this guide. Please contact the Assisted Dying Service if you have any questions.

He tīmatanga - To begin a kōrero about assisted dying

Consider the tikanga you wish to follow:

- Who should be involved in this kōrero?
- What does a good death (mate rangatira[1]) mean in our whānau or community?
- What values guide us when someone is nearing the end of life?
- How do tikanga and kawa shape our thinking about dying?
- When is the right time to begin these conversations?
- What happens if whānau are not ready to have this discussion?

During the kōrero:

- Listen deeply to each other to understand what assisted dying is rather than trying to persuade others to accept or reject it.
- Allow silence.
- Accept that people may change their thinking.
- Speak from personal experience.
- Respect different beliefs and expressions of grief and mamae.

During your hui (meeting) there may be different views about assisted dying and some people may hold on to their views very strongly. It can be helpful to:

- Focus on shared values (aroha, manaakitanga, respect)
- Separate the person from the position or whakaaro (ideas) they hold
- Allow space for uncertainty and thinking that grows over time with more information and experience
- Return to your established tikanga to guide your kōreroprocess and to care for everyone.

[1] A death that honours the person's mana, wairua, whakapapa, and whānau relationships.



A Traditional Death and Transformation Pūrākau

After welcoming your whānau or community to a hui to kōrero about assisted dying, you may wish to share the familiar pūrākau of Hinetītama's transformation into Hine-nui-te-pō. This pūrākau invites reflection on death, wairua, relationships, and the exercise of mana motuhake in circumstances shaped by profound suffering. It does not provide a direct example of assisted dying; rather, it offers a culturally grounded starting point that whānau can use to explore different understandings of dying and the journey between te ao kikokiko (the physical realm) and te ao wairua (the spiritual realm). End-of-life choices are often made under difficult circumstances however, they can be made in a way that upholds self-determination within whakapapa, relationships and collective responsibility.

You might like to check out this [Graphic novel](#) about a whānau navigating assisted dying and the article '[Pūrākau, Death, and Assisted Dying: A Māori Framework for Understanding End-of-Life](#)' before your hui.

1. Wairua - Spiritual wellbeing and the journey beyond

For some people, assisted dying may be seen as interfering with natural death or disrupting our tikanga and spiritual processes. For others, assisted dying may be seen as a continuation of good care at the end of life because it prevents further pain and suffering; it may be understood as supporting spiritual peace. Space is needed for both perspectives.

- How do we understand wairua at the end of life?
- What supports the wairua to transition well?

- How might assisted dying affect the wairua of the māuiui (ill) person? How might assisted dying affect the wairua of the whānau? Do we have any concerns about the disruption of our spiritual processes when someone has an assisted death, or is there a way to uphold our tikanga?
- What role do tohunga, kaumātua, or spiritual advisors play in an assisted death?

2. Whakapapa - Connections across generations

Whakapapa reminds us that every person is connected to their tūpuna, whānau, hapū, iwi, and future generations. Decisions made at the end of life are rarely experienced by one person alone; they may have lasting effects on relationships, memories, and the stories that are passed on. Whakapapa invites us to consider how we honour these connections while respecting the wishes of the person who is dying.

- How does whakapapa shape the way we think about death and dying?
- How are our tūpuna's teachings and experiences reflected in our thinking?
- What responsibilities do we have to one another because of our whakapapa?
- How might this decision affect future generations and the stories our mokopuna inherit?
- How do we balance the wishes of the individual with our responsibilities to whānau, hapū, and iwi?
- What role do whānau, hapū, and iwi have in supporting someone nearing the end of life who may choose assisted dying?
- How can whakapapa strengthen understanding and compassion when whānau hold different views?
- What obligations arise because we are connected through whakapapa, even when we disagree?

3. Mana - Dignity, respect and relational integrity

Decisions about dying affect not just the individual but the wider whānau collective. The process must avoid whakamā (shame or embarrassment), isolation, or harm to relationships.

- What does it mean to uphold the mana of someone who is dying? Does it mean honouring their wish to have an assisted death even if it is not something some whānau may not agree with it?
- How is mana expressed through the care, presence, and decision-making that whānau are involved with?
- Can assisted dying support or challenge a person's dignity and in what ways?
- How do we ensure the mana of our whānau (and community) is upheld?
- How do we manage disagreement while protecting our special relationships?

4. Mana Motuhake - Autonomy, authority and collective responsibility

Te Ao Māori perspectives may support collective decision-making, where decisions are shaped by whānau. The assisted dying process involves whānau however, the consent of the dying person is legally required for them to have an assisted death.

- What does mana motuhake mean in the context of dying?
- What does it mean for the person who has a terminal illness who wants to have an assisted death?
- What does it mean for their whānau who love and care for them?
- How do we balance personal choice with our collective whānau values?
- Who should be involved in assisted dying decision-making?
- How can whānau support someone's wish to have an assisted death even if that differs from their own wishes?
- What would culturally safe decision-making look like for our whānau or community?

5. Whānau – Collective experience and ongoing impacts

Assisted dying is a new and different way of dying. Not many whānau have experienced this way of dying before. It is important for us to think about how to care for whānau pani (bereaved whānau):

- How might assisted dying affect whānau in the short and long term?
- What support might whānau need before, during, and after a person's assisted death?
- How do we care for differing views within the whānau?
- Who should be told about the person's decision, when should they be told, and who has authority to share that information?
- What are some of the ways we can support whānau before someone has an assisted death and afterwards?

6. Tikanga - Cultural practices and rituals

Tikanga help to guide and protect us. Thinking about what tikanga are helpful for whānau who are involved with assisted dying, or how tikanga can be adapted will help to prepare us can be very supportive.

- Are there tikanga considerations specific to the assisted dying context we can draw from to help guide and protect us on the assisted dying pathway?
- What are the tikanga of the marae for an assisted death? Will the death be treated as death from natural causes? Will the person's tūpāpaku be allowed to lie in the urupā after an assisted death?
- What adaptations to our tikanga, if any, feel appropriate or not appropriate?
- How can tikanga be maintained in end-of-life care, including assisted dying?
- How can we manage transitions between states of tapu and noa?
- What tikanga can we draw from to support us to re-balance if we lose our whānau harmony?
- Who will lead these discussions and decisions in our whānau?

Discussion Exercise

We offer the following fictional story as a starting point for discussion. After reading it together, you may wish to talk about how your whānau or community would respond in this situation.

Te Kohe Whānau

Whaea Bella Kohe's husband passed away at home six months ago after a long illness. Whaea Bella felt unwell while she was caring for her husband but she never told anyone. Recently she saw a doctor and was diagnosed with a terminal illness. The doctor told her she only had a few months to live. Whaea Bella was in a lot of pain and she had become incontinent. She was scared her illness would cause her a lot more pain before she died and that her mana would be trampled if she could not take care of herself properly in the way she liked. She was also scared she would "lose her marbles" and her mokopuna would see her like that.

At her next appointment, Whaea Bella told her doctor that she wanted to know whether assisted dying might be an option for her. Her doctor explained that assisted dying was legal and that Whaea Bella had the right to ask to be assessed. The doctor also explained that a formal assessment process would determine whether she met all the legal eligibility criteria. The doctor wrote a phone number on a piece of paper for Whaea Bella to contact the Assisted Dying Service. Whaea Bella picked up the paper with the phone number and said "I am going to kōrero to my whānau about this first."

- How would your whānau respond to Whaea Bella's wish to have an assisted death?
- What might Whaea Bella need from her whānau before making any further decisions?
- What might her whānau need from her?
- Whose voices might be missing from this kōrero?
- What information would the whānau need before responding?
- How could they express disagreement without diminishing Whaea Bella's mana?

He whakakapi - Closing the kōrero

- Invite reflections: What have we heard today? Has anything changed or shifted for us after our kōrero?
- Identify any next steps. You may want further hui, advice and information, or support.
- Close with karakia.

Assisted Dying Support and Information

Kaupapa Māori wellbeing services

- Information about free services for tāngata whaiora (a person seeking health) and whānau are delivered by Māori, for Māori, using Mātauranga Māori can be found on this [website](#).

Professional support

- Your GP Practice may be able to refer you to some funded or subsidised counselling sessions, depending on where you live.
- If your work provides Employee Assisted Programme (EAP), this can also be used.
- There are also specialised assisted dying counsellors you can find online.
- Call [1737](#) for a free, confidential and 24/7 mental health support
- [Tend](#) - Book a free 30-minute video call with a mental health clinician. No referral or enrolment needed. Open to all NZ residents 16+, 8am - 8pm weekdays.

Peer support

- [Lean On Me](#) – a NZ and Australian peer support network for people and their supporters going through and after assisted dying.

Written resources

- [Graphic novel](#) about a whānau navigating assisted dying
- [Thinking It Through](#) – a research-based guide for people applying for assisted dying.
- [Assisted dying grief resource](#) from this research
- [How to talk to tamariki/children and mātātahi/young people about assisted dying - A guide for Mātua/parents and caregivers](#) by Kenzies Gift.

Acknowledgement: We mihi to the participants who generously shared their perspectives with us. Their openness and insights have been invaluable to this research.

Ethics approval statement: The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Northern A Health and Disability Ethics Committee through the full review pathway [ref 2023 EXP 18493].

Funding statement: The research team received funds from the Health Research Council (22/710) to conduct this research. The funder only provided funding and did not participate in this research.

Contact

If you wish to contact the Assisted Dying Service team, you can phone [0800 223 852](tel:0800223852) or email AssistedDying@tewhatuora.govt.nz website [Assisted Dying Service – Health NZ Te Whatu Ora](#)

This research is based on: Karaka-Clarke TH, Robertshaw C, & Clarke A. Pūrākau, Death, and Assisted Dying: A Māori Framework for Understanding End-of-Life. *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 2025; 21: 1–18. [Free to read using this link](#).

