

FAQ about the apology for racism in psychology harming Māori

This FAQ is for members with questions, concerns, or disagreements about the apology. It's written for people genuinely working through this, not to shut discussion down.

When and where is the apology being delivered, and when will I see the full text?

At an event at Pipitea Marae, Wellington, on Friday 2 October. The full statement will be released publicly on the day. Ahead of that, NZCCP and NZPsS are sharing background in stages, including separate pieces on what the apology means for Pākehā/tauiwi psychologists, for Māori psychologists, and for the future of the profession.

What exactly does 'systemic racism' mean here? I don't think of myself or my colleagues as racist.

The term doesn't describe individual intent. Systemic racism refers to societal structures, laws, and institutional practices that favour one racial group while disadvantaging others, without requiring any individual within that system to hold racist beliefs. It's baked into how things normally operate, not a claim about any one person's character. That's the sense in which the apology says psychology in Aotearoa has been shaped by systemic racism: through training history, workforce composition, and whose knowledge counts as legitimate, not through an accusation against individual clinicians.

I've never personally mistreated a Māori client or colleague. Why does this apology speak for me?

It doesn't claim you individually caused harm. It states that psychology in Aotearoa was built on, and continues to operate within, a systemically racist structure, through training grounded in settler-colonial worldviews, monocultural practice norms, and the exclusion of mātauranga Māori from clinical theory and training. As clinicians, we were trained inside that structure, largely without choosing it. The apology asks us to recognise that and act differently going forward, not to personally own historical wrongdoing you didn't commit.

This apology says we've "benefited from white privilege and advantage" from a racist structure. That feels like an accusation.

It's a structural claim, not a personal one; the same way acknowledging any systemic inequity doesn't require every beneficiary to have acted in bad faith. The apology's own appendix to tauwi/Pākehā members names this directly: it expects some readers will feel resistance or discomfort and asks that this be recognised as a natural response worth sitting with, rather than a sign that the claim is wrong or unfair.

Isn't this just symbolic? Will anything actually change in how psychologists are trained or credentialed?

The apology comes with named commitments, including mandatory cultural safety training and Te Tiriti o Waitangi education for everyone entering the profession, and a proposed independent, funded accountability body to monitor and publicly report on progress. If you think a specific commitment lacks teeth, that's useful feedback: raise it with us.

Why is the NZ Psychologists Board not signing this?

NZPB was part of the working group from the outset and supports the process, but as a statutory Crown body it can't formally be part of the apology itself. The Ministry of Health advised in December 2024 that any apology would need to come from the Crown, not the Board, and NZPB formally withdrew from the working group in 2025 as a result. This is a legal and procedural position, not a disagreement with the apology's content. The Board will remain involved in supporting the profession through actions after the apology is delivered.

The Waitangi Tribunal claim itself says cultural competency training and adding Māori content on top of Western psychology won't fix this, so why do our commitments lean heavily on training?

Fair challenge, and worth being precise about. The 2024 amended claim (Wai 2725, 1.1.1a) specifically argues that the fundamental problem won't be solved by cultural competency training, increasing Māori numbers within psychology as currently structured, or adding Māori content as an add-on to a still-dominant Western framework alone. It calls for something more fundamental: a transformative kaupapa Māori psychology with real influence over power and decision making, not just content. Mandatory training is a floor, not the destination; it's paired with commitments to fund and protect kaupapa Māori research and practice in their own right, and a proposed independent body to hold the profession accountable for going further than training.

What about mātauranga Māori being described as equal to clinical/scientific knowledge: do I have to personally accept that as a clinician?

The apology doesn't ask you to resolve that epistemological question personally. It commits the profession to no longer excluding or delegitimising mātauranga Māori and kaupapa Māori approaches by default in training, research funding, and practice, so that Māori clients and clinicians have genuine access to frameworks reflecting their own knowledge systems, alongside Western clinical approaches.

Is this actually backed by evidence, or is it a reaction to current politics?

There's a documented paper trail going back over 40 years: the 1987 Whiter Shade of Pale study found training programmes made little effort to include a Māori dimension; a 2002 Board-commissioned report (Levy) identified specific, actionable barriers to Māori participation; a 2016 national workforce survey found the profession still didn't reflect the population it serves; a 2023 replication of the 1987 study found the same barriers persisting nearly four decades on; and a 2024 survey of psychologists, academic staff, and trainees found Māori respondents more likely to rate their training as poorly preparing them culturally, more likely to witness racism, and more likely to be the sole advocate for Māori issues in their workplace. This apology follows that evidence, not a news cycle.

Why now, after so long? And was this actually put to members, or just decided for us?

Both NZCCP and NZPsS have consulted members throughout, not just at the end. The apology has been discussed in open plenary sessions at both organisations' conferences in 2023 and 2024, with dedicated workshops at each in 2025, and updates have gone to both Executives, and have been included in annual reports and AGMs every year since the working group formed in May 2022. We won't pretend this has been unanimous; some members have told us they don't support the apology, but member feedback overall has supported this work. The apology working group also drew on advice from the National Standing Committee on Te Tiriti Issues (NSCTTI), He Paiaka Totara, and independent legal advice. If it feels sudden to you, that's a sign you're hearing about it for the first time now.

I disagree with specific wording. What do I do?

Raise it within the College and Society's internal channels (such as your branch/institute or with your Executive or staff) rather than responding publicly or with clients. The text has already been through extensive consultation and won't be reopened for redrafting, but concerns about how the commitments are implemented in clinical training, supervision, or practice are valuable discussions and will shape what happens next.

What if I'm struggling with this personally, or it's bringing something up in my own clinical work?

That's important to take seriously rather than pushing through alone. The apology names the risk of retraumatising those the profession has harmed as something the Apology Group weighed carefully throughout; the same care is worth extending to yourself as you sit with what this asks of you.

I agree with this Apology – what can I do to support its kaupapa?

Some steps you could take include to:

- Familiarise yourself with the content of the key documents listed in the [References and resources list](#).
- Take the opportunity to participate in a Te Tiriti-Informed Psychology workshop.
- Discuss any limitations you feel you have in your practice with your supervisor.
- Seek cultural supervision as appropriate.
- Learn more about systemic racism and its effects, and how this underpins the origins and field of psychology
- Value the input and experience of Māori colleagues on these issues.
- Acknowledge the extra role many Māori colleagues play in cultural roles.
- Support initiatives aimed at changing this situation, such as removing barriers to Māori to training as psychologists and supporting inclusion of mātauranga Māori as a legitimate worldview and basis for practice.