

Tackling inequity through transformational change

E fofo e le alamea le alamea - the solutions lie within our communities

For half a decade we have known of the health inequalities that exist for certain populations groups here in Aotearoa. Yet despite successive governments promising to address these disparities, particularly for Māori and Pasifika, we have made very little progress. This is reflected in, and not limited to, the disturbing disproportional rates of suicidal behaviour and mental health and addictions issues experienced by Māori and Pasifika living in Aotearoa.

A large contributor to these inequities has been the inability or unwillingness of those in decision making positions to remove the barriers which can hinder indigenous peoples from creating innovative solutions to the challenges they face. The recent Covid pandemic provided key lessons on how successful outcomes are achieved through Māori and Pasifika community and culturally-led responses.

The revitalising of indigenous models of wellbeing and practice are contributing globally to tackling inequities. This talanoa (conversation) will provide examples of how Pasifika-led approaches are creating transformational change through a holistic socio-ecological approach. We will highlight our strengths-based approach that utilises Pasifika values and combines traditional cultural knowledge with new and innovative approaches that resonate with our communities through the execution of traditional values delivered in a contemporary way.

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Denise is a New Zealand born Tongan and hails from the village of Kolofo'ou.

She is a registered clinical psychologist and is honoured to lead Le Va, a national Pasifika NGO as the Chief Executive.

Denise graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology from Massey University (Palmerston North) and is privileged to have served the community in her extensive career as a clinical psychologist and in service roles within the health sector. She has worked in New Zealand prisons, mental health services (Adult, Child and Family) and Māori mental health both in New Zealand and in Australia. She is also the chair of Pasifikology, which is a national network of Pasifika psychologists in Aotearoa New Zealand and a member on the Suicide Mortality Review Committee.