MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Evaluation of the impact of Budget 2019 funding on peer support for male survivors of sexual abuse service (2024)

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Background

Budget 2019 (Budget-19) announced $90.3 million of funding over four years for the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to invest in sexual violence services. A range of sexual violence services and initiatives received funding from Budget-19, including $11.5 million of new funding for the delivery of peer support for male survivors of sexual abuse services (MSSA Service). MSD funds 11 agencies to provide peer support services for male survivors of sexual abuse across Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as a national body (Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa) that these agencies belong to as member organisations.

All agencies provide peer support for male survivors of sexual abuse in the form of one-to-one peer support work, with some also facilitating peer support groups. In addition to core MSSA peer support services, many agencies also offer additional supports such as whānau services, social work sessions, counselling sessions, and general assistance such as food or petrol vouchers.

The overarching aim of the evaluation was to explore how frontline MSSA peer support staff (including managers) and service users are experiencing the impacts of the Budget-19 funding and the impact on sector integration. It was commissioned by MSD in February 2023 as part of a broader work programme evaluation the impact of Budget-19 funding on four specialist sexual violence services. The wider evaluation programme focused on how the funding has been used by recipients to build capacity and capability, and to improve inter-agency collaboration and referral pathways. It also focused on the associated impacts for people affected by sexual violence.

This document provides a summary of the findings. The full MSSA Service evaluation report can be found on the MSD website.

Methodology

The evaluation used a qualitative approach that was supplemented in a couple of areas with insights drawn from quantitative administrative reporting to explore the experiences of the Budget-19 funding for both service users and frontline staff. Fieldwork was conducted at five MSSA provider sites. These sites were selected in collaboration with Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa and MSD to provide a mix of: newer and more mature agencies; agencies that have implemented innovative bi-cultural frameworks; agencies with higher proportions of Māori and Pasifika service users; and geographic diversity, including urban-rural split. The evaluation received ethics approval from the University of Canterbury Human Research Ethics Committee.

The methods used included:

- Evaluation co-design hui with representatives from Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa, member MSSA organisations, and MSD
- A document review.
- Individual or groups interviews with 22 provider staff, including management and peer support staff.
- Individual or group interviews with 65 service users and two family or whānau members of service users.
- Interviews with six local partner agencies.
- Interviews with three national stakeholders, including Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa and MSD National Office.
- Sense-making hui with representatives from Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa, member MSSA organisations, and MSD.

The semi-structured individual or group interviews were conducted in person or online. The qualitative data was thematically analysed and the key evaluation questions were used to guide the identification of key themes. A limited number of quantitative insights sourced from a review of administrative reporting data and funding applications provided by Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa was also used.

Limitations

The key limitations for this evaluation included:

- The approach used makes it difficult to determine whether the impacts and outcomes reported by participants are a direct result of the MSD Budget-19 funding.
- Resources only allowed for data to be collected from five of the 11 MSSA providers across Aotearoa New Zealand. It is unclear the extent to which findings from these agencies can be applied across the entire MSSA sector.
- Due to the necessity of collaborating with MSSA providers to recruit service users and their whānau, the evaluation likely did not fully capture the perspectives of those whose experiences with the service were less positive or did not meet their needs.

The full report provides suggestions for future evaluations, including the incorporation of quantitative methods to measure the precise impact of the funding.

Key Findings

Budget-19 funding has supported significant expansion of MSSA services, yet gaps remain.

The funding has facilitated the establishment of new MSSA providers across multiple regions and the expansion of existing service sites, notably improving access to peer support services for male survivors across Aotearoa New Zealand. However, gaps remain in service access, particularly in rural areas and even for some entire regions, including the Manawatū and Southland.

Transport remains a large barrier to many male survivors accessing MSSA services, as they may need to travel long distances to attend groups or other services.

Peer support services are improving the wellbeing and resilience of male survivors, although there is room to improve cultural responsivity of services.

Service users primarily seek peer support to share experiences with people who will understand what they are going through, emphasising the importance of male-centred services to facilitate safe disclosures.

Service users were overwhelmingly positive about the MSSA service's impact on their wellbeing and family or whānau relationships. They said it provides benefits that they are not able to get anywhere else, including through counselling or therapy. Peer support helps service users to rebuild social connections, and offers support and advocacy for day-to-day issues and stressors.

The funding has fostered increased cultural responsiveness of MSSA service providers, including the establishment of kaupapa Māori MSSA services and provider sites. That said, most MSSA providers acknowledged they are still on a journey towards cultural responsivity, including continuing to diversify the workforce.

> "I haven't had hope ever since I experienced [abuse]. No hope. I had no hope of being understood. I had no hope of being respected, cared for. But after [peer support] that changed".
>
> **Service user**

> **[Interviewer: Do you feel your son got what he needed from coming to peer support?]**
>
> "Yeah, absolutely. I'm so proud of him. I think he's become an exceptional man. And yeah, I do think that [peer support] intervention early on was a part of that as well".
>
> **Family/whānau member**

Budget-19 funding has allowed for a diversification of service offerings, although inconsistences persist across regions due to resourcing constraints.

Overall, the funding has enhanced the consistency of services offered to male survivors nationwide, with improved access to peer support and a broader range of services. It has enabled an expansion of support offerings, providing greater flexibility in timing and types of support, including offering more day-to-day support such as food and petrol vouchers.

Many regions offer drop-in centres, one-to-one and group peer support for male survivors, along with groups for family and whānau members. However several MSSA providers said that they did not have enough staff or resources to offer all of these supports, especially if they were more recently established.

> "[Peer support group] kept me alive. I was in a very dark place. I was in prisons, in darkness for a long time. I struggled to find the light until I came here. And just learning, you know, venting and coping skills which have helped me carry on. It's great. We have a laugh here too, not a lot of places you can laugh, you know".
>
> **Service user**

Budget-19 funding has filled a crucial gap in existing services, but rapid growth has introduced staffing and sustainability issues for providers.

The funding has enabled a significant expansion of MSSA services to provide holistic support for male survivors of sexual abuse, filling a critical gap in support services.

However, the rapid increase in service user numbers, from 710 active clients in 2018 to over 2,000 active clients by September 2023, has also led to unsustainable and unsafe caseloads for peer support workers. This has stretched peer support worker capacity, leading to recruitment of sometimes inexperienced staff.

Limited time and resources have also prevented focussed succession planning for MSSA providers.

> "A lot of the comments we get from guys is, *"Oh s**t, there's been nothing for us. Are you kidding me – so you want to help us?"*. So guys have wanted to [get help], but they haven't known how to or where to go. Now that knowledge is out there. But we're closing doors a little bit because we can't keep up with it".
>
> **Service provider**

MSSA provider staff find meaning in their work and are well supported, however increased service demand is placing a heavy strain on the workforce.

The significant increase in MSSA service user numbers has placed considerable strain on staff, resulting in high workloads and potential burnout, despite their deep passion for the kaupapa. Low staffing levels in certain areas has exacerbated feelings of isolation among staff and prevented opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

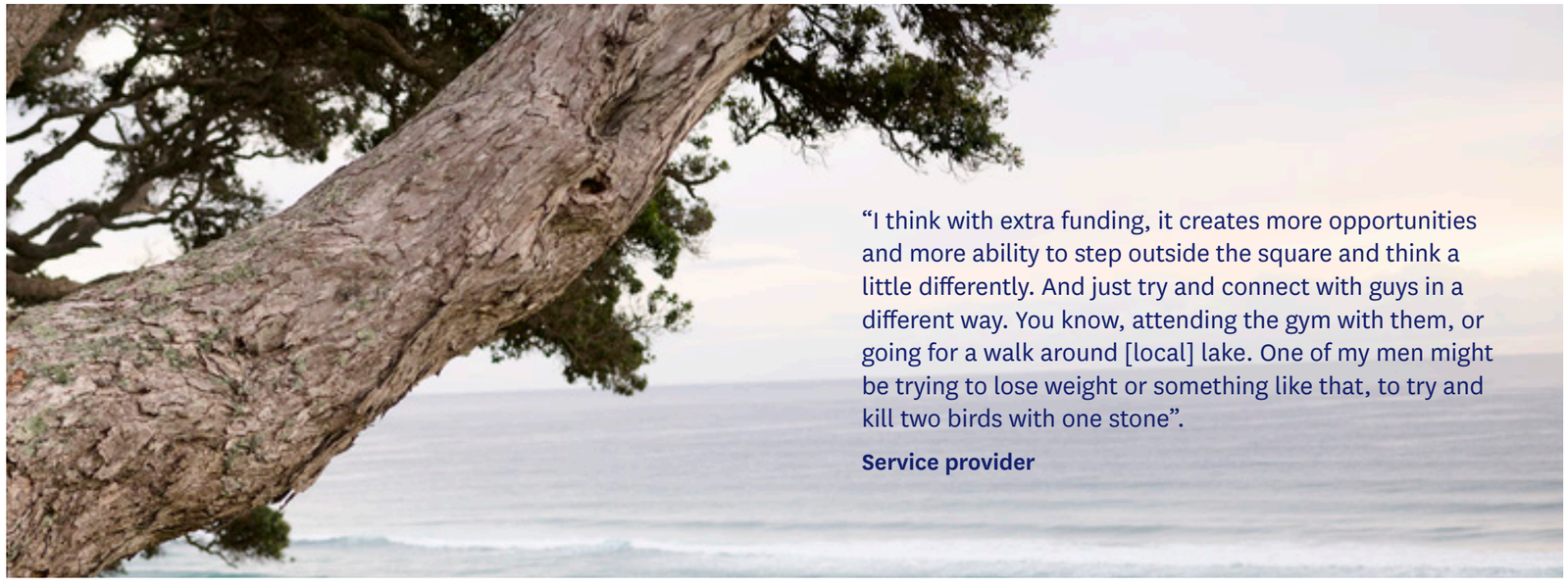
To partially address these issues, the Budget-19 funding has supported Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa to develop and deliver standardised peer support training across MSSA providers. This will help to support an enlarged, appropriately skilled workforce.

Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa's leadership in promoting best practice and providing key resources has enabled providers to effectively use the increased funding to improve the MSSA service, and address some of the inconsistencies across providers.

Many providers have good links with local communities, but increased staff capacity would allow greater opportunity for targeted relationship building.

Due to the Budget-19 funding, the MSSA provider network has expanded nationally, improving access to services, and sector integration. While existing providers and Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa have assisted with the establishment of new MSSA providers, heavy workloads and geographical distance make collaboration among providers more difficult.

Additional funding to ease workloads would enable MSSA staff to engage more actively in networking, promoting consistency and innovation across providers. Increased capacity is also needed for targeted relationship-building initiatives with local community partners, particularly with local Māori and Pacific organisations.



> "I think with extra funding, it creates more opportunities and more ability to step outside the square and think a little differently. And just try and connect with guys in a different way. You know, attending the gym with them, or going for a walk around [local] lake. One of my men might be trying to lose weight or something like that, to try and kill two birds with one stone".
>
> **Service provider**

Key Recommendations

Service development

- Increase resourcing for additional peer support and administrative staff across providers.
- Ensure that resourcing and funded staffing levels allow for the provision of both one-to-one and group peer support services across MSSA providers.
- Explore options and resourcing required to consistently provide support for whānau of male survivors across MSSA agencies.
- Consider establishing MSSA providers or services covering the Manawatū and Southland regions.
- Explore options and resourcing required to establish satellite or mobile services covering rural communities within existing MSSA provider regions.
- Continue to develop the cultural responsiveness of services, including for Māori, Pacific peoples and other culturally diverse populations.

Policies and procedures

- Facilitate succession planning and establishment of clear frameworks to support sustainable growth for existing MSSA providers.
- Review the funded salary rates for MSSA provider staff, including peer support workers to ensure that MSSA agencies are competitive in attracting and retaining suitably qualified and/or experienced peer support staff.
- Develop and implement strategies to increase connections with local community groups or organisations across MSSA providers.