



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

# Heartland Services & Information and Advisory Services

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The current state

July 2020

## Contents

About this report.....	3
Background .....	3
Rural Aotearoa .....	4
Benefits and challenges of living in rural Aotearoa .....	4
The services.....	5
The people .....	7
Key issues and challenges for services.....	8
Moving to the future state.....	12
Appendices .....	13
References .....	15

## About this report

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This report provides an overview of the current state of Heartland Services (Heartlands) and Information and Advisory Services (Information and Advice). Heartlands and Information and Advice are community-based, community-led services that provide information, advice, referral and advocacy services to rural, provincial and urban regions across Aotearoa.

In 2019, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) reviewed Heartlands and Information and Advice (the review) to:

- clarify the need and use of the current services, and whether they are delivering services that align with the intended purpose
- develop a services strategy; identifying what is currently being delivered, the gaps in service provision, and recommendations for future services.

The review involved face-to-face meetings with a sample of 20 Heartlands and Information and Advice providers across the country from Whangarei to Invercargill; and telephone-based interviews and online surveys with providers that could not be visited. It also included consultation with Partnering for Outcomes contract managers and a survey of Heartlands users. The Heartlands website was also reviewed to identify the value and use of the site.

For the review, Heartlands and Information and Advice were separated into rural and urban/non-rural areas to enable focus on the unique complexities faced by people in these communities and the differences in how services operate based on their locations. This report focuses on the first point above by summarising the current state of rural and urban/non-rural Heartlands and Information and Advice services, including service provision, service users, and the issues and challenges providers face in delivering the services.

## Background

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MSD funded \$1.065m (\$0.670m contracted) for Heartlands and \$0.573m (\$0.483m contracted) for Information and Advice annually. The location of Heartlands and Information and Advice services across Aotearoa is shown in **Appendix One and Appendix Two**.

Heartlands was established in 2001 to improve access to government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) service support for people in rural areas. There are 28 Heartland Services: four of these services are delivered by MSD staff out of Work and Income sites, one from a District Court Hearing Centre and the rest are delivered through contracts with NGOs. Of the 28 Heartland Services, five are considered to be in urban/non-rural regions and the remaining are in rural areas.

Information and Advice was transferred to MSD in 2005 from Child, Youth and Family, for the provision of family support-related information and advisory services. There are 32 Information and Advice contracted services, 12 of which are in rural regions. Information and Advice providers deliver a wide range of services, including social and community support, facilitating access to other social services, and running helplines.

## Rural Aotearoa

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Around 14% of New Zealanders live in rural areas<sup>1</sup> and these regions 'represent the bulk of the land mass' of this country<sup>2</sup>. European New Zealanders make up a large majority of the ethnic profile of rural Aotearoa. Around 16-20% of all Māori live in non-urban settings<sup>3</sup> and changing migration patterns has also diversified ethnic demographics in rural areas over the past few decades.

Though the definition of 'rural' varies considerably, Statistics New Zealand has suggested that the best option for defining distinct rural communities is by using the place of work in comparison with usual residential address as a proxy for the distance from, and the need to travel to, an urban area for employment<sup>4</sup>.

The Urban Rural Indicator classifies urban areas by the size of their estimated resident population:

- major urban area – 100,000 or more residents
- large urban area – 30,000 – 99,999 residents
- medium urban area – 10,000 – 29,999 residents
- small urban area – 1,000 - 9,999 residents
- rural area – less than 1,000 residents<sup>5</sup>.

For this report, 'rural' areas or regions are determined using the above suggested definition from Statistics New Zealand, with the inclusion of the 'small urban area' population group from the Urban Rural Indicator.

## Benefits and challenges of living in rural Aotearoa

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People provide a range of reasons for residing in isolated locations, such as the communities being tight-knit and friendly, as well as enabling connections with rural environments, such as the rivers, mountains and associated outdoor activities. Social resilience, whānau and whakapapa; physical resources such as marae, and culture and tūrangawaewae (places to stand) have also been cited as features that draw people, families and communities to rural Aotearoa<sup>2, 6</sup>.

Despite the multitude of benefits, rural communities face several challenges, including:

- Low population densities and greater travel distances<sup>7</sup>
- Limited telecommunications and transport infrastructure
- Isolation, exacerbated by fewer permanent residents, an ageing population, and young people leaving, which contributes to the possibility of depopulation as well as impacting the economic development of the areas<sup>8</sup>
- Climate change and more extreme weather events<sup>9</sup>
- Inadequate housing and a lack of employment opportunities, as well as a shortage of teachers, doctors and police
- Intergenerational and interconnected social issues such as family violence, mental health concerns, gambling, crime, suicide, gang culture, drug use, poverty and homelessness<sup>6</sup>
- Lack of availability of healthy foods and high volume of alcohol outlets
- Scarcity of sporting and youth facilities<sup>6, 10</sup>

- Access to services and support for people with disabilities, older people, migrant communities and gender equity<sup>11</sup>.

Rural communities require information, advocacy and advice, particularly in relation to key government and NGO services. The method of access to information is key in rural or isolated regions as people prefer kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) support, especially when dealing with complex issues. This is compounded with reduced internet connectivity, impacting access to information. Trust and relationship building are also essential in these regions due to close community networks as ‘newcomers to rural New Zealand often have to mark time before being accepted and gaining the confidence of a community. Even those known to the community must reintegrate and demonstrate their skills in order to build relationships’<sup>12</sup>.

## The services

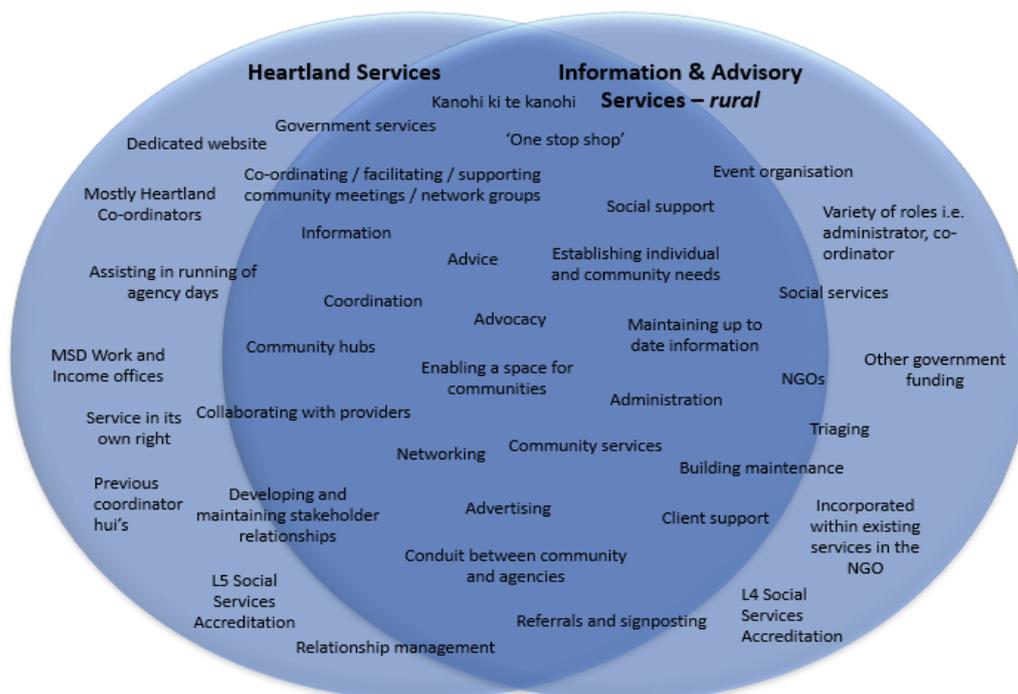
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### *Rural Heartlands and Information and Advice*

Funding for Heartlands and Information and Advice is used to co-ordinate various activities delivered from the service sites. Some providers use administrators or equivalent roles to deliver the Heartlands service. However, most providers use their funding for a Heartlands co-ordinator position as a dedicated resource for the centre. In some Information and Advice services there are co-ordinators and administrators who deliver a similar role to that of Heartlands co-ordinators, although these roles are often embedded within the overall service delivered by providers.

There are clear overlaps between Heartlands and Information and Advice services in many rural areas, and some differences (see **Figure 1**). Both services operate in a similar manner through kanohi ki te kanohi support and a community hub / ‘one-stop shop’ service model, due to the scarcity of other organisations to co-ordinate or deliver services. Many co-ordinators describe their roles as ‘reducing isolation’ through the ‘one-stop shop’ service model, where people can access a range of support from a single site. Support can include facilitating access to government and NGO services, budgeting, advocacy with other organisations, providing internet access, classes or courses, and information on community events.

As ‘brokers’ between the community and support agencies, Heartlands and Information and Advice providers also spend time networking with a variety of external organisations. Where possible, providers attend network and development meetings where they collectively identify key issues in their areas and share resources to manage these concerns.



**Figure 1. Overlaps in service provision**

Some of the differences between Heartlands and Information and Advice are in the placement of the services, the relationships with government agencies, such as Work and Income, and the level of accreditation<sup>1</sup>.

There are also differences in scope and range of services delivered. The purpose of Heartlands is to co-ordinate access to support by being a focal point for government and NGO agency information, advice and support services. The purpose of Information and Advice is to provide family support related-information and advisory services, which is much broader, therefore a wide range of services are delivered under this banner. Family support can take a multitude of forms, all which aim to help families that are struggling. The broad scope of Information and Advice allows providers to use funding to address different social issues, usually related to the provider's main service specialisation or primary focus of their organisation. For example, some providers offer information specific to a subject area, such as parenting or pregnancy, and some focus on the delivery of broader community or social work.

Within the Heartlands model there are some differences between the four Heartland services that operate from Work and Income sites and the NGO-based Heartlands and Information and Advice services. While NGO-based providers can apply for a range of funding and may deliver other community or social services, Work and Income sites have restrictions on obtaining funding to deliver services beyond the remit of Heartlands service co-ordination.

### ***Urban/non-rural Information and Advice***

Urban/non-rural Information and Advice services are far more varied than Heartlands or Information and Advice in rural regions. The current service type allows flexibility in service delivery, where providers are able to focus funding on a range of subject matters, based on the needs of their local communities, whilst taking into account the services that are currently available in the area. Services

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the review, Heartlands required Level Five Social Services Accreditation (SSA) and Information and Advice required Level Four. The Heartland Services Centre Service Guidelines was updated in July 2020 to reflect the requirement of Level Four SSA for Heartlands providers.

include: provision of general information and advice, training and workshops, support for individuals and families in hardship, drop-in centres, counselling and social work support, client advocacy, and helplines.

A few providers use the Information and Advice funding for receptionist and administrative roles, who perform functions such as greeting service users, signing people in and out, and maintaining the organisational database. Other functions this funding supports include event organisation, responding to queries, ensuring forms are available for service users and sending reminders about appointments.

Many of the urban/non-rurally located Information and Advice providers hold contracts from other agencies and/or with MSD to deliver a range of services, including low to medium intensity family support, youth support, financial mentoring and family violence services.

## The people

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### *Rural Heartlands and Information and Advice is open to the community*

The nature of Heartlands and many rurally-located Information and Advice services means the target population is anyone that requires support in the community in which a provider delivers services. The services are used by diverse groups of people, including by families, single people, tourist and visitors, older people and youth.

The ageing population is a key user demographic of Heartlands and Information and Advice services in rural regions. Seniors and older members of the community access the services for a range of reasons, including to connect with relevant organisations, attend events or senior social groups, for access to forms and applications, and for transport to the closest major town for shopping and banking. 'Transient people' are also key service users for issues such as immigration and travel advice. These are people living in communities for short to medium periods of time, attracted to the area for work or travel.

Most sites are located in regions with higher European New Zealand populations, leading to greater use of services by this group. However, several sites have significant Maori populations (e.g. Kawerau and Ruatoria). Although the location of sites is not related to the socio-economic status of communities, providers told us people from lower income backgrounds regularly use their support services.

### *Urban/non-rural Information and Advice service users vary by provider specialism*

Service users of urban/non-rural Information and Advice vary according to the specialism of providers. Examples of groups of people using Information and Advice include:

- People in need of housing support or emergency accommodation
- Women requiring general or family support
- Fathers that have separated from their children
- Pacific communities

- People that are new to Aotearoa, including seasonal workers, people on working visas and those with immigration issues
- Pregnant women and young families
- People of all ages at risk of suicide
- People who require advocacy with government agencies
- Refugee communities
- People experiencing financial difficulties
- Parents in need of support and advice.

## Key issues and challenges for services

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Rural areas have issues unique to their locations, which can be grouped into themes. However, key concerns in urban/non-rural areas relate to separate issues experienced by the individual providers. This is due to the differences in service models and the type of support provided. Despite this, there are various similar issues experienced across all Heartlands and Information and Advice services, in both rural and urban regions, such as with funding and reporting.

### ***Insufficient funding is a burden to providers and limits service availability***

The average funding for Heartlands is \$29,000 per provider and \$15,000 per provider for Information and Advice. Aside from a 3.75% funding increase through Budget 2019, over the duration of the services there have been minimal increases in funding. Some Heartlands service leases are funded through MSD; however, the majority do not receive this support.

Funding is contributory and does not cover full service provision and, in many regions, components of service are unfunded. For example, service provision in rural areas involves higher than average costs associated with travel and transport for service users, and for providers to attend training and co-ordination meetings. Heartlands providers are expected to offer access to printers and computers. However, these costs are not built into current funding. Providers often use funding from other contracts to help cover costs.

Feedback from stakeholders (service users and other local providers) is that the co-ordinators and administrators are central to the delivery of services in communities. The review highlighted that some co-ordinators and administrators put their own resources into delivering service, such as paying for travel, events and general office supplies out of their own pockets.

Without adequate funding for full service provision, most providers have one part-time position, usually delivering the service for between 20 and 27 hours a week. Often with Heartlands, there is only one person per site to deliver the service. This is challenging when annual or sick leave is taken, as it means the role is left unstaffed, unless another member of the host organisation can provide cover.

Providers state that service users regularly ask for the service to be available full-time as the limited hours restrict service availability. Service users repeated this request in the client survey. Limited opening hours also means that local demand can remain unmet, so co-ordinators regularly volunteer their time to continue to respond to the needs of the community outside of opening hours.

### **The level of funding for Information and Advice is not enough for a stand-alone service**

The current funding for Information and Advice is unsustainable for many providers, particularly for those receiving less than \$20,000 (23 out of the 32 providers). Information and Advice funding is contributory and is insufficient to deliver a stand-alone service. This has meant that funding is often used by providers to 'top up' funding for other services they deliver or to support their operational costs. Some providers do not have other government contracts and rely on local grants or fundraising and philanthropic donations to support service delivery. Applying for additional funding is a time-consuming process and providers often have limited capacity.

The use of Information and Advice funding as a 'top up' fund has contributed to the loss of the strategic function of this service. During the review, many providers had trouble describing how they specifically used Information and Advice funding or how it is different from their other contracted services due to it being embedded within the overall funding the service receives.

### ***Contracting and reporting mechanisms are inconsistent and unhelpful***

Heartlands is contracted as 'a service' whilst information and Advice providers are contracted for client volumes. The volumes measure for Information and Advice is considered arbitrary by providers as it does not reflect how the service is delivered. Funding for target volumes, particularly in rural areas, can set providers up to fail, as their services are based on meeting overall community need rather than the number of people visiting or calling each day. There are also varying rates and volumes across each Information and Advice service, leading to inequitable funding across providers. Most Heartlands and Information and Advice providers are also on one-year contracts that are renewed annually, which causes insecurity and limits innovation and service improvement in the regions.

In addition, providers consider current reporting and client feedback methods to be unhelpful and are frustrated by a lack of a feedback loop from government. It is difficult to extract meaningful data as providers have different ways of counting contacts with service users and reporting practices vary across the country. Both Heartlands and Information and Advice providers report annually, and Heartlands providers also produce monthly reports on client numbers for MSD National Office. The current monthly reports do not reflect the increasing need for social and community support in the regions, and providers describe them as onerous and 'government heavy'.

### **Misalignment of Information and Advice contracts with service delivery**

There are legacy issues with the alignment of Information and Advice services. Several contracts do not align with the most appropriate government funding agency or reflect the services some providers deliver. For instance, the varied service provision of Information and Advice has led to an assortment of providers with a mix of priorities. Some services were suitably assigned to the most appropriate agency in the separation of MSD and Oranga Tamariki as a government agency, however; others suggested that they were not. As a result, some Information and Advice providers indicated that they would prefer their contracts to be aligned with services they deliver and with government agencies whose priorities match their own.

### ***Decreased agency presence***

Despite rurally-located people experiencing the same issues faced by people in larger urban areas, (which are often compounded by the isolation and rurality), there is a lack of available community,

social and government services in rural areas. For Heartlands and Information and Advice to enable access to government, NGO and community support, such services need to be present and engaged in the community.

However, increased centralisation and digitisation of government services has meant that agencies have relinquished their commitments to being present in the regions. As a result, almost all Heartlands providers report a marked reduction of government agencies visiting their sites to deliver services. There is a similar pattern with NGOs, where organisations are invited to deliver services but due to the distance and travel, as well as their volumes-based government social services contracts, it can be difficult for them to attend. This is an issue for both Heartlands and rurally-located Information and Advice services.

With a trial of video conferencing between 2013 and 2014 in the Twizel and Waimate Heartlands centres, Work and Income and community law services were made available. This was to use technology to increase access to government and NGO services. The evaluation suggested that service users had found the system easy to use and it saved them trips to Timaru to access support. At the time, the technology was considered to be sub-standard and recommendations from the evaluation were to gather more efficient and supportive technology for the concept. This was not progressed and agency presence and access to services via the use of technology was not realised.

### ***Inconsistent practice and lack of professional support***

Up until three years ago, there were regular hui for Heartlands co-ordinators to come together and discuss their roles, strategise service delivery and share practice. This helped to alleviate professional isolation and build social cohesion among co-ordinators. Now there are limited opportunities to achieve consistent practice across providers and for co-ordinators to network and support each other.

Some providers continue to meet on their own accord, but having hui reinstated and as a designated part of Heartlands or similar service would help to standardise service delivery and improve practice. Information and Advice providers suggest that networking opportunities would also be useful for them to share practice, learn about other regions and feel connected.

### ***Location of sites can limit accessibility***

Location is crucial for Heartlands and Information and Advice to reduce geographic and social isolation/deprivation. This also affects the usability and trust in the provider, depending on who in the community is delivering the service.

The urban/rural divide is pertinent as a few of the Heartlands sites are in, or close to, urban regions; where social isolation is a concern and co-ordination of support is necessary. However, they are not geographically isolated from services with a lack of access to government and NGO services in the same way as rurally isolated communities. Over a third of all Information and Advice funding is in rural areas and their method of operation differs to the Information and Advice services delivered in urban areas. Providers receiving this funding in urban/non-rural areas deliver more subject specific services such as housing and pregnancy support. This has been attributed to urban/non-rural areas not suffering from the same level of scarcity of service provision as rural regions.

In addition, feedback from providers and service users suggests the Heartlands service operates best when delivered by NGOs at an independent location. There are some concerns that delivering

Heartlands from a Work and Income site limits interactions with service users. For example, the relationship between Work and Income and the community, previous experience of the service user, and presence of security guards (also indicated as an issue with Heartlands delivered out of the District Court Hearing Centre) can all be considered barriers to accessing support through Heartlands. However, access to the client information system and connection with for Work and Income can be considered advantageous for Heartlands based in Work and Income sites.

### ***Access to services is further restricted by issues with travel and transport***

Transport is a major issue in many rural regions<sup>10</sup>. Service users are travelling from up to/and over two hours away to access the range of services available at the rural Heartlands and Information and Advice sites. Providers have suggested that up to an hour and a half may be an acceptable travel duration. People with limited financial resources also must consider fuel costs and increased wear and tear on their vehicles when travelling long distances to access services. A lack of public transport is also a significant problem as there is a high reliance on others in the community for travel if a person is unable to drive themselves. This disproportionately affects seniors in the regions, due to factors such as health issues, not having a valid driver's licence, or less confidence in their driving. In very isolated areas, providers co-ordinate their own minivan or shuttle services for the community as a response to the lack of public transport available, but again, this is unfunded.

Travel issues are exacerbated in winter in areas prone to dangerous conditions, which leads to further isolation and reduced access to vital services. Particularly in these conditions, Heartlands and rurally-located Information and Advice services act as conduits or proxies for government agencies, and community and social support services.

### ***Technology and branding updates are needed***

Around 37% of service users say they use Heartlands services to access computers, printers and telephones, so it is important to have up-to-date technology and systems for people to use. However, many providers operate with a basic level of technology and have limited funding for ongoing maintenance or technology upgrades. The review also identified that the Heartlands website continues to receive online traffic. However, some of the information is outdated and the overall website requires updating. Administration of the Heartlands website was previously carried out by Operational Policy within MSD, but due to changes in roles and teams, the website is currently unsupervised.

The 'Heartland' brand in general is not considered beneficial. Heartlands is a service associated with specific branding and signage – providers have plaques and signs to advertise the service as separate but part of their organisation. However, communities mostly associate the service with the NGO brand of the provider. In some areas it is confused with other unrelated services, such as banks and hotels. Some providers note that the imagery is outdated and unwelcoming. Providers also express a preference to advertise Heartlands as part of their suite of services and some suggest that promoting the 'Heartland' brand is an additional responsibility, which often makes little difference to service use or service users. In contrast, Heartlands in Work and Income sites are promoted separate to Work and Income services and co-ordinators expressed strong associations with the brand.

## Moving to the future state

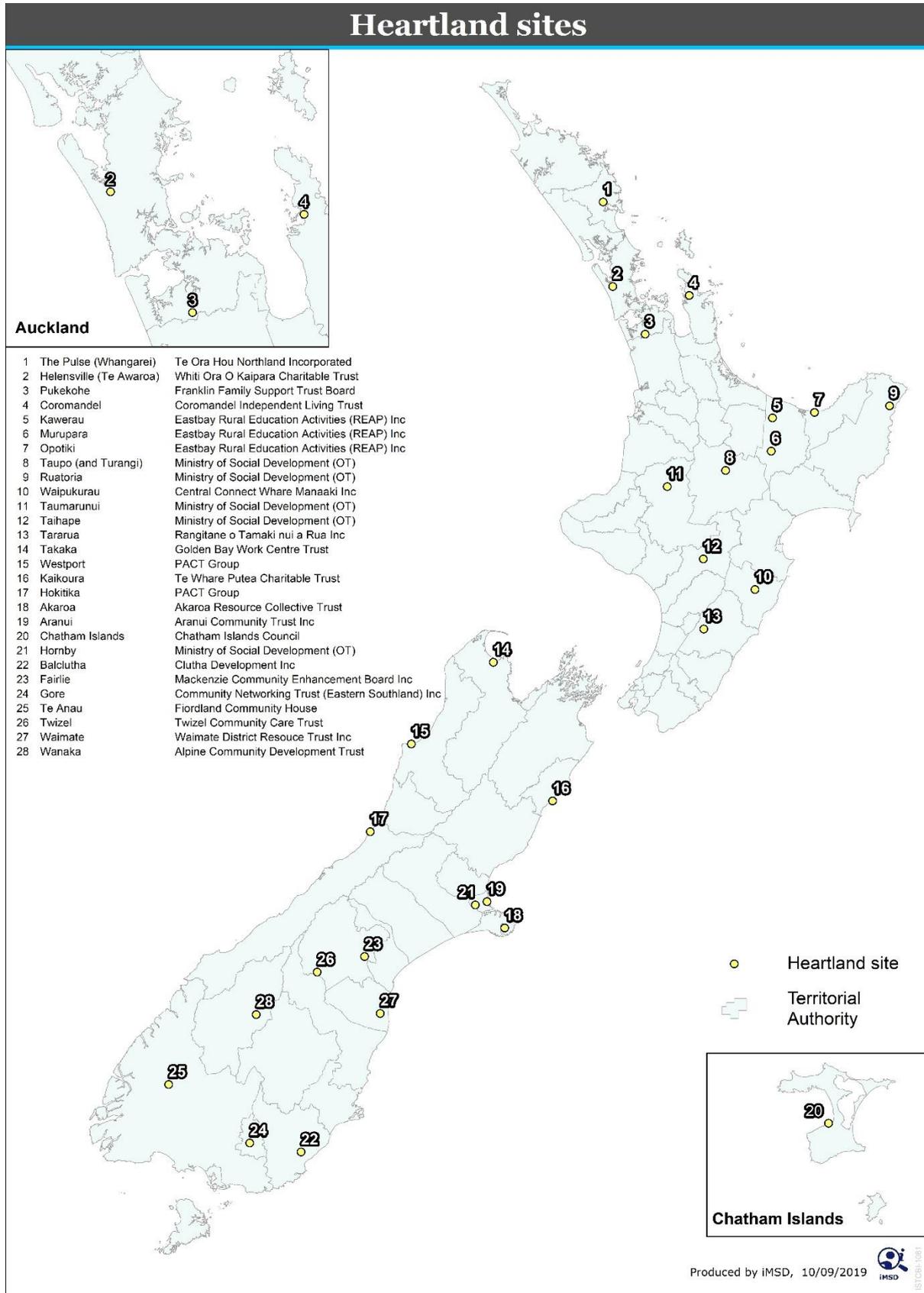
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Heartlands and Information and Advice services are conduits or brokers for other services. Rurally-located Heartlands and Information and Advice services aim to reduce isolation and increase community cohesion; connecting people with other services through a 'one-stop shop' model. Most Information and Advice providers in urban/non-rural regions address specific areas of concern that relate to their core business or use funding to support their operational costs. Over time providers have been responding to changes in demographics and the needs of their communities, with little change to their funding and contracts for almost 20 years.

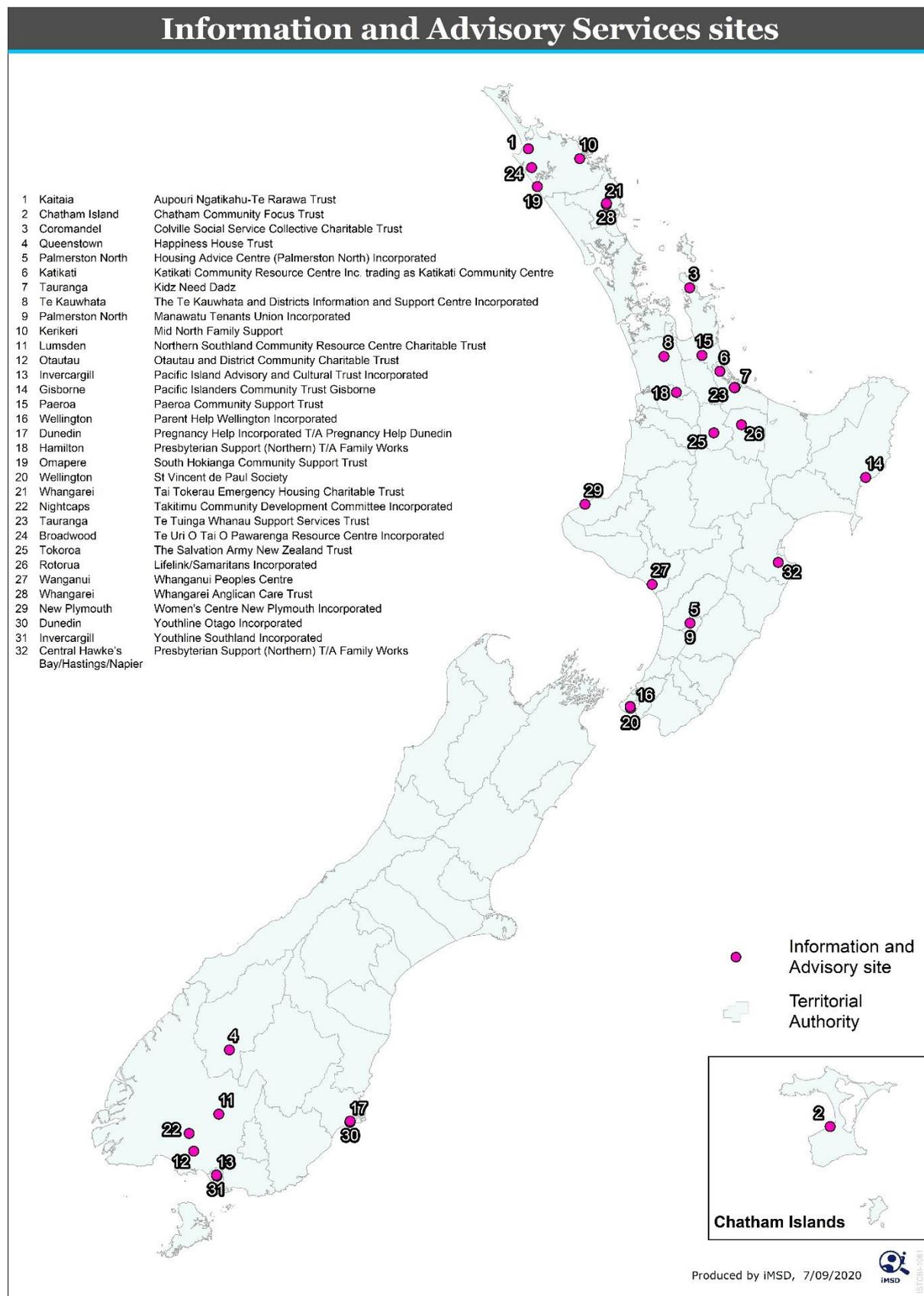
This report has identified a number of issues and challenges with the current state, including insufficient funding, inconsistent contracting and reporting, and particular issues in rural areas such as decreased agency presence, professional isolation and limited transport. This current state report is followed by a report on the future state of Heartlands and Information and Advice, with recommendations on how the issues of the current state can be addressed in a move towards a future model.

# Appendices

## Appendix One: Heartland Services locations



## Appendix Two: Information and Advice Services Locations



## References

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