



Karere Pāpāho/Media Release
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Ngāpuhi researcher challenges public health advice on Obesity

Medical practitioners and policy makers internationally are taking note of research completed by Ngāpuhi education scholarship recipient Dr Ricky Bell given its findings go against the long-standing public health approach for obesity mitigation.

Dr Bell (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Hau, Te Rarawa, Te Aupōuri) spent a year facilitating his own community-based research in Te Tai Tokerau before completing the four-year PhD research program at Otago University. He received a Ngāpuhi education scholarship of \$4,000 in 2015 and was very proud to have his PhD conferred at a graduation ceremony in Dunedin last month.

“If it wasn’t for a scholarship from Te Rūnanga-A-Iwi O Ngāpuhi the completion of my studies would still be a long way off”.

Dr Bell’s paper¹ “Understanding Obesity in the context of an Indigenous population” became one of the most shared papers for 2017 in one of the biggest medical journals in the Asia-Pacific region after it was published in Obesity Research & Clinical Practice.

His thesis topic² – “Huarahi Hauora: Identifying a pathway forward to wellness with Tangata Whenua” was determined by one of his thesis examiners Professor Meihana Durie to be a “blueprint for other iwi-centred hauora researchers” in its approach to conducting research with Indigenous populations, along with potential benefits with other Indigenous communities.

“What’s different about our research” he says “is that we are using Indigenous knowledge gathering processes within a targeted community to see if we can identify a way to increase the likelihood that people will be more successful in sustaining a healthy lifestyle.”

¹[https://www.obesityresearchclinicalpractice.com/article/S1871-403X\(17\)30028-5/fulltext](https://www.obesityresearchclinicalpractice.com/article/S1871-403X(17)30028-5/fulltext)

²<http://hdl.handle.net/10523/8146>

“Our research has provided a platform whereby Māori have added their own voice to the obesity narrative,” he said.

“Whānau and hapū certainly have the capacity to effect the changes that we need. It will take some time but I strongly believe that we can get there. We simply have to - or our whānau will continue to remain on the wrong side of all the health statistics”.

Ngāpuhi Rūnanga CEO Lorraine Toki says “Dr Bell’s achievement and completion of his PhD reminds us of the importance and value of supporting Ngāpuhi through tertiary study and we hope to learn more about his research and innovative approaches, to help our own people overcome the challenges of obesity to lead happier and healthier lives”.

Dr Bell lives in Kaitaia and currently has clinical roles at the Mamaru GP clinic in Coopers Beach and Broadway Health Ltd at Kaitaia hospital.

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