

Purpose

This A3 summarises findings from the evaluation of Mana in Mahi – Strength in Work from its launch in August 2018 to October 2023.

It also outlines how the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) is responding and making improvements to the programme.

Background

Mana in Mahi is an employment programme that aims to support people at risk of long-term benefit receipt into permanent sustainable work while gaining an apprenticeship or formal industry qualification.

Mana in Mahi includes a wage subsidy, payment of course fees, educational support and pastoral care for employees and employers. It also offers a training pathway that includes industry training qualifications such as apprenticeships. The employee can receive phased incentive payments if they remain in employment and continue their training.

Mana in Mahi has had several delivery phases as it developed from initial pilot to established product. Differences in phases reflect changes to settings, such as eligibility, duration of programme, level of financial subsidy and number of places.

The majority of participants are youth. In the first phases of the programme (August 2018 to July 2020) 80% of participants were under 25. This proportion dropped to 61% in August 2020 – October 2023, following removal of the youth target.

Key evaluation findings



Mana in Mahi creates employment for people employers would otherwise not hire.



Mana in Mahi participants had increased time in employment, education or training, income from all sources, and time off benefit compared to a comparison group.



Positive impacts were strongest under earlier settings which targeted people on a main benefit.



Employees needed substantial pastoral support to retain their employment and participation in Mana in Mahi, especially in the first six months.



Low awareness and use of contracted pastoral support services meant that employee needs were either not met or required considerable effort from employers.



When used, pastoral support was valuable and, in some cases, instrumental in preventing withdrawals.



The phased financial incentive payments of Mana in Mahi were key to retaining participants in work and training.



Optimal programme duration for Mana in Mahi could not be determined because of impacts of other changes in programme phases.



While not specifically designed for Māori, many of the generic features of Mana in Mahi benefited Māori.

Evaluation has prompted changes to improve Mana in Mahi

The evaluation has allowed MSD to identify and make several key changes to improve delivery of Mana in Mahi including:

- > Updated and regularly reviewed resources to improve participant and staff awareness of all aspects of Mana in Mahi.
- > New processes to reduce administration and waiting times, improve referrals to pastoral care services, and improve data sharing with employers and training providers.
- > A monthly outreach campaign to ensure all new participants are fully informed about available pastoral support services.
- > Investment shifts for 2024/2025 will mean 50% to 55% of those supported by Mana in Mahi being people on Jobseeker Support.

How did we evaluate Mana in Mahi?

We explored a range of topics covering programme implementation, employee and employer participation and retention, employee outcomes, and programme impact. The evaluation included:

- > A mixed methods evaluation using surveys, interviews and focus groups to understand the experience of those involved in Mana in Mahi (MSD staff, pastoral care providers, employees, and employers)
- > A Kaupapa Māori evaluation, focusing specifically on the experience of Māori participants in three regions
- > An impact evaluation using data from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI).

Mana in Mahi is an effective programme

Mana in Mahi participants had increased time in employment, education or training, income from all sources, and time off benefit compared to a comparison group.

- › This impact is greater for participants coming from Jobseeker Work-Ready than those not on a main benefit before starting and increases with the duration of benefit receipt.
- › Most employees considered that Mana in Mahi had set them up to achieve sustainable employment, alongside greater experience and confidence. Māori employees also described positive impacts on their tamariki and wider whānau.

Positive impacts were strongest under earlier settings which targeted people on a main benefit.

The Expansion of Mana in Mahi in 2020 was part of the government's response to the COVID-19 economic environment. It broadened eligibility criteria to support people who were not yet receiving a main benefit, but who were at risk of long-term benefit receipt.

As expected, Mana in Mahi was less effective when it included more participants who were closer to the labour market but remained an effective programme overall.

Pastoral support provision was key to meet needs

Employees needed substantial pastoral support to retain their employment and participation in Mana in Mahi, especially in the first six months.

- › Support needs were highest for young participants, those new to work, those who had not been in work for a long time, and Māori.
- › The most common challenges to work attendance and success were around childcare, whānau, transport, and health needs.
- › Many (especially young) participants found the initial transition from benefit to work challenging, reporting difficulties navigating workplace relations and expectations.
- › Many found balancing work and study challenging. Some employers provided study time during the work week for full-time employees. The ability to work part-time supported some employees to successfully participate in training.

Low awareness and use of contracted pastoral support services meant that employee needs were either not met or required considerable effort from employers.

- › Few employees or employers knew much, before enrolment, about key features designed to encourage uptake and retention in the programme, including pastoral supports and training pathways.
- › Low awareness meant limited uptake of virtual pastoral support and negative experiences (e.g. unanticipated challenges balancing work and study, or delays in finding suitable training pathways).
- › It also placed a significant burden on employers. Small employers found providing pastoral support more challenging than larger businesses.

When used, pastoral support was valuable and, in some cases, instrumental in preventing withdrawals.

- › Pastoral support prevented some exits.
- › Participants who left Mana in Mahi unable to resolve issues affecting attendance or workplace success felt pastoral support may have enabled them to retain their employment.
- › The most used pastoral support service was MSD's In-Work Support.
- › In some regions, face-to-face intensive pastoral supports were provided in addition to the virtual services available through Mana in Mahi. These were key to retaining Māori participants, especially youth (rangatahi), women and those new to work.

Design features and processes supported participation and retention in the programme

Mana in Mahi creates employment for people employers would otherwise not hire.

- › Employers were primarily motivated to join Mana in Mahi by the wage subsidy which allowed them the financial security to employ people they otherwise would not hire.
- › Employers also wanted to build industry capability and career pathways. Māori employers wanted to support Māori into employment, acknowledging positive effects for community and whānau.

The phased financial incentive payments of Mana in Mahi were key to retaining participants in work and training.

- › Participants were primarily motivated to join Mana in Mahi by the wish to build a career and sustainable employment.
- › However, the phased payments encouraged employees to stay in the programme, and most spent the payments on work-related costs.
- › The education support payments for equipment to study were particularly important for Māori, Pasifika and older participants.

The optimal programme duration for Mana in Mahi to achieve greatest impact could not be determined due to changes in the participant profile following the Expansion.

- › A longer duration of Mana in Mahi may better support those for whom the transition to work and study was more challenging, and who showed the most need for support.
- › All surveyed employers and employees valued the second year given the time needed to adjust to the work environment and progress training, and employers felt it reduced the risk of early exits.

While not specifically designed for Māori, many of the generic features of Mana in Mahi benefited Māori.

- › Māori employers actively sought out Māori employees, and Māori participants appreciated a Māori workplace.
- › There were strong indicators that Māori clients who complete the programme are on track to increase their financial stability, stay engaged in employment and not return to the benefit. Those interviewed were optimistic about their future. Māori who had been on the benefit for more than two years reported positive experiences.