

Health inequities between Māori and non-Māori adults cost \$863 million a year study finds

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A new study has found that health inequities between Māori and non-Māori adults cost more than \$860 million a year.

The study, which was hosted by the University of Auckland, found the cost was disproportionately borne by indigenous people and society.

The study used data taken from government agencies for people aged over 15 between 2003 and 2014 including hospitalisations, outpatient and primary care consultations, accident claims and laboratory and pharmaceutical usage.

It found that at a conservative estimate, health inequities between Māori and non-Māori adults cost \$863.3m per year.

The **cost was mainly borne by Indigenous communities and society** and concealed large savings to the government from the **underutilisation of healthcare**, the study said.

One of the study's authors, Professor Rhema Vaithianathan from the Auckland University of Technology, told the Science Media Centre that its most concerning finding was that the **primary health care system actually saved money by under-serving Māori**.

"This saving is equal to \$49m per year. Not surprisingly, the **under-serving in primary care has a flow on effect in the hospital sector where Māori have excessive rates of avoidable admissions**," Vaithianathan said.

Porirua GP - and College of GPs medical director - Bryan Betty said in many cases inequity was caused by **not enough funding going into high needs areas**.

"So there has been a traditional issue in New Zealand where there's parts of New Zealand that are highly deprived and the funding to provide service into those areas is less than needs to be there."

Dr Betty said the government needed to look at how it could make funding more equitable.

University of Auckland's Associate Professor Rhys Jones told the Science Media Centre that the study demonstrated that **health inequities constituted a burden on society resulting in a loss of human potential**.

The study showed that the costs of **health inequities were disproportionately borne by Māori**, Jones said.

"In fact, in certain settings the net impact for the public health system is a financial saving. For example, in primary care millions of dollars are saved every year by underservicing Māori, with the costs effectively passed on to Māori whānau and communities.

"This represents an unconscionable breach of human rights and a dereliction of duty by the New Zealand health system," Jones said.

Reference:

RNZ. (2022). *Health inequities between Māori and non-Māori adults cost \$863 million a year study finds*. [online] Available at: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/477167/health-inequities-between-maori-and-non-maori-adults-cost-863-million-a-year-study-finds>.