



# A Wellbeing Report

Voices from Pacific Women and  
Girls in Aotearoa, New Zealand



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	2
<b>Foreword</b> .....	3
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	4
Learnings from the past .....	4
Key findings - learning from today .....	5
Where to from here? .....	6
<b>Introduction and background</b> .....	7
<b>Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand</b> .....	10
Table 1. Specific data - 2018 New Zealand Census .....	12
<b>Key findings: Data on Pacific Women</b> .....	14
<b>Online Survey</b> .....	15
Table 2. Demographic characteristics of those who took part in the survey .....	17
<b>Survey Findings</b> .....	19
Understand the challenges faced by Pacific women as told by PACIFICA members .....	19
What Pacific women perceive to be their strengths .....	25
Figure 1. What motivates Pacific women to face/ mitigate their challenges (%) .....	25
Figure 2. How important is your Pacific language, culture and identity in your life and to your sense of belonging? .....	26
What Pacific women aspire for in the future .....	32
<b>A call for action</b> .....	38
<b>References</b> .....	40

# Acknowledgements

Fakafetai lahi lelei, meitaki ma'ata, fakaauue lahi, fa'afetai tele lava, mālō 'aupito, fakafetai lasi, vinaka vakalevu, fāiākse'ea and kam rabwa to the Pacific women throughout Aotearoa New Zealand who generously supported this project, dedicating their time and insights to this report.

Special acknowledgement and thanks to the PACIFICA UN ECOSOC Working Group (project team) members for their commitment and dedication to this project:

Fuatino Ma'anaima Soa-Lafoa'i  
Natalia Fareti  
Tuiloma Lina Samu  
Leitū Tufuga  
Natia Tucker

We also thank the PACIFICA UN ECOSOC Governance Group sub-committee for their expert advice and guidance:

Reverend Alofa Lale  
Prof Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop  
Tofilau Bernadette Pereira  
Dr Jean Mitaera  
Dr Diane Mara

We extend our appreciation to past and present National Executive members, who have been actively part of this journey and Dr Seini Taufa for her focus on the write-up of the final report.

We acknowledge the Ministry of Social Development (Pasefika Proud) and the Ministry for Women for contributing funds to enable the completion of this project.



# Foreword

It is a privilege to be the National President of Pacific Allied (Women's) Council Inspires Faith Ideals Concerning All Incorporated (PACIFICA Inc) during the final publication of this report.

What comes to mind is the Samoan proverb

## “E au le ina'ilau o Tamaita'i”

which illuminates the essence and fundamental nature of our Pacific women and what we can achieve and do as women and leaders within our community.

Since 1977, irrespective of one's background, faith, or ethnicity, PACIFICA has created spaces where Pacific women could come together, drawing on their personal, cultural and traditional tūranga<sup>1</sup> to benefit the collective.

With a united voice, we continue to advocate for issues relevant to Pacific communities, uplifting and developing Pacific women to be confident in their skills and knowledge, and to feel strong and steady in whatever situation they find themselves in.

I am proud to advise that this report is the first of its kind, elevating the voices of Pacific women in Aotearoa New Zealand – our experiences, both good and bad, and our aspirations for the future. This report speaks to our resilience as Pacific women and how far we have come. We celebrate our progress, reflect on our past, and acknowledge the path ahead.

la manuia

**Repeka Lelaulu**  
National President  
PACIFICA Inc.



---

<sup>1</sup> Tūranga (the acknowledgement by self and others of one's position/standing and potential within the collective).

# Mai na matua, mo ki tatou, ki na fanau

## Learning from yesterday, living today, and hope for the future<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This alagākupu Tokelau (proverb) encourages us to learn from past experiences and through living today to ensure hope for our families and the future.

### Learning from the past

Pacific Allied (Women's) Council Inspires Faith Ideals Concerning All Incorporated (PACIFICA) was established in 1976 by Pacific women living in Aotearoa New Zealand during the tail end of the Dawn Raids, so that they could speak with one voice and be recognised as a force working for a more positive involvement of Pacific peoples in New Zealand society.

This report sought to understand factors contributing to Pacific women's wellbeing through a mixed methods approach. This report drew on past literature to gauge how Pacific peoples are portrayed in data and research, specifically Pacific women.

Historically, data collected about Pacific peoples often focused on the inequities and disparities they face. Statistics suggest that Pacific peoples are more likely to experience poverty than other New Zealanders, as reflected in employment, income, wealth and housing statistics. Although we were 'counted', our Pacific context/voices were void.

The catalyst for an online survey was PACIFICA's desire to present its record of Pacific women and girls' voices in 2023, understanding the challenges they face and factors supporting them in Aotearoa New Zealand. One hundred and seventy-three Pacific women across the country participated, providing unique responses relevant to their experiences.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2022) Pacific Wellbeing Strategy, cited from Ministry for Pacific Peoples — All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy (mpp.govt.nz)

<sup>3</sup> Literal translation means: Mai na mātua = from the elders/ ancestors; mō ki tātou = for us today, ki na fānau = for the future generations/ descendants

## Key findings - learning from today

---

### Challenges

The challenges faced by Pacific women, as told by PACIFICA members, were broken down into three categories:

1. **Clash of cultures:** Pacific women often struggle with navigating between the Western environment they find themselves in and their cultural values and obligations. This was more common among those who identified as multi-ethnic and who were New Zealand-born.
2. **Intersectionality:** biases they face being Pacific (brown) and female. Pacific women drew on examples like the wage gap and felt like they had to work twice as hard because of the current societal biases.
3. **Socioeconomic hardship:** Pacific women are aware of the socioeconomic inequities concerning ethnicity and these challenges for Pacific communities.

These three overarching themes above have a negative impact on the perceived wellbeing of the Pacific women in the survey.

---

### Strengths

Through this report, Pacific women also drew on their strengths, which keep them resilient despite these inequities. They included:

1. **The importance of cultural identity:** The connection to language, culture and identity is featured in this report. Women confident in their personal, cultural and professional tūrangā felt better equipped to navigate different spaces and were aware of how they could use their skills and knowledge to benefit the collective.
  2. **Pacific representation and role models:** Seeing Pacific women succeeding across different disciplines made the aspirations of others seem attainable. The Pacific women who participated in the survey acknowledged the glass ceilings shattered by the previous generations and the importance of being vocal to ensure a seat at the decision-making table.
  3. **Developing Pacific leadership:** Organisations like PACIFICA allow for fostering and developing leadership that enables Pacific women to participate nationally, Pacific-wide and globally. We see Pacific women leaders across sectors, and their leadership is premised on knowledge and skills.
- 

### Hopes for the future

Pacific women's aspirations for the future include:

1. **Having safe spaces/platforms to share and learn:** Providing safe spaces and platforms for Pacific women and girls to share their experiences and speak out about the biases they experience will help raise awareness of what they experience, and how they come up with solutions, to contribute to overall wellbeing.
2. **An allocated seat at the decision-making table:** Pacific women are aware that to create real, meaningful change and they need a seat at the decision-making table, whether this means having a quota system or purposely recruiting Pacific peoples where Pacific communities are involved. This would ensure true advocacy of issues relevant to our Pacific communities.
3. **Strength in the collective:** PACIFICA provides opportunities for Pacific women to unite, learn and develop leadership skills across various disciplines. Aspirations for the future include the continuation of coming together as a collective to empower one another.
4. **Greater access to mentoring, resources and funding:** Drawing on the skillsets of those within the collective to provide mentoring, and to apply for funding that will allow for the resourcing of initiatives that are important for Pacific women. This will help appeal to a greater number of Pacific women with various needs.

# Where to from here?

From the findings above, PACIFICA used the information to enter into conversations about how we continue to strengthen our women and organisation. Some feedback received and thoughts on what can be achieved to support Pacific women and families in Aotearoa New Zealand and our current PACIFICA members, are as set out below:

- 1. Development of resources that will help mitigate the challenges impacting wellbeing:** For example, having a Pacific women leaders series (podcasts featuring leaders from each region or training on social theories such as racism, biases, intersectionality), language, culture and cultural competency. This will allow for a greater likelihood of navigating two worlds confidently.
- 2. Pacific data:** For Pacific, By Pacific – while this report is a beginning, there needs to be more opportunities to document Pacific experiences that add context to Pacific data currently collected in Aotearoa New Zealand. Only then will decision-makers be able to make informed decisions relevant to the wellbeing of Pacific peoples.
- 3. Equity:** This report calls for PACIFICA to continue to advocate for issues such as pay equity and to be a voice for Pacific communities, encouraging Pacific women and girls to continue to speak up and tell their own stories.
- 4. Strengthening the collective:** The report emphasises PACIFICA's current role in bringing together Pacific women from across Aotearoa New Zealand and creating a platform for mentoring and leadership development, both now and in the future. However, it acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure that the voices of our most vulnerable communities are echoed.



# Introduction and background

The World Health Organization defines 'wellbeing' as a positive state experienced by individuals and societies (World Health Organization, 2021). Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Wellbeing encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose. A society's wellbeing can be determined by the extent to which it is resilient, builds capacity for action, and is prepared to transcend challenges (World Health Organization, 2021).

'Pacific peoples' is a collective term used in Aotearoa New Zealand, to describe a diverse ethnic and cultural group with heritage links to Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia. Most of the data about Pacific peoples has been collected and interpreted through a non-Pacific lens, with a paucity of literature on the experiences of Pacific women in general.

Current data is largely deficit-framed, focused on areas of deprivation. Although they highlight important issues, for example, that pay inequities based on gender and ethnicity exist in Aotearoa New Zealand, the reality is, Pacific voices and context are often missing. This report is the first one that looks at the experiences of Pacific women through the voices of Pacific women. The challenges Pacific women's resilience, strength and mana to continue to thrive.

The catalyst for this report is PACIFICA's desire to present its record of Pacific women and girls' voices in 2023.

---

## The rise of PACIFICA

Pacific Allied (Women's) Council Inspires Faith Ideals Concerning All Incorporated (PACIFICA Inc.) was established in 1976 by Pacific women living in Aotearoa New Zealand during the tail end of the Dawn Raids<sup>4</sup> and when the mobilisation of Pacific women outside of their immediate family was challenging.

With the support and encouragement of the Māori Women's Welfare League (MWWL) Te Rōpū Wāhine Māori Toko I te Ora, which had been established in 1951, Eleitino Paddy Walker, along with a small but strong group of Pacific women, formed the organisation "so that they could speak with one voice and be recognised as a force working for a more positive involvement of Pacific peoples in New Zealand society."<sup>5</sup>

By 1980, PACIFICA had branches across Aotearoa New Zealand, empowering PACIFICA women of all ages. Even then, members participated in government committees and local government, school boards and university women's seminars, festival programmes and community arts councils. PACIFICA held workshops and seminars on education, health, social services, justice, business management, the arts, recreation, and employment issues in line with its focus on empowering women. These forums helped increase the awareness and participation of Pacific women within their own communities and the wider community. It also allowed Pacific women to advocate for issues related to Pacific communities and women's rights.

To date, 21 branches across Aotearoa New Zealand continue to provide platforms for Pacific women to be mentored and to grow. PACIFICA also promotes the development of young Pacific women. To ensure Pacific youth voices are heard, young Pacific women are encouraged to join, and having a youth representative on the National Executive ensures their voices are echoed at governance level.

---

<sup>4</sup> Anae, M. (1997). Towards a NZ-born Samoan Identity: Some reflections on 'labels'.

<sup>5</sup> PACIFICA | NZ History, New Zealand history online

PACIFICA has representation from across the sector, with Members of Parliament, including the former Deputy Prime Minister, Carmel Sepuloni, being part of PACIFICA. The collective continues to provide a space for PACIFICA to live out the seven objectives aimed at providing, giving, creating, inspiring, initiating and promoting things important for the advancement of Pacific women and communities. These include:

1. To **provide** opportunities for Pacific women to contribute effectively to the cultural, social, economic and political development of Aotearoa New Zealand and its people.
2. To **give** Pacific women opportunities to plan and work together for the stability and development of themselves, their families, and their communities, and therefore contribute to the development of the country.
3. To **create** ways and means for Pacific women to overcome barriers that may hinder their ability to reach their full potential.
4. To **inspire** unity among women of Pacific descent in the furtherance of these aims so that all can speak with one voice in true fellowship.
5. To **initiate** and promote policies and programmes that support Pacific women to take active decision-making roles in their lives.
6. To **initiate** and support programmes promoting the education, welfare, health and social development of Pacific families and Pacific family life.
7. To **promote** understanding between women of all races.

---

#### Local and global relationships

PACIFICA maintains relationships with other like-minded Pacific organisations at a national, local and global level. Representatives of the organisation meet regularly with the government sector, such as the Ministry for Women (MfW) and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP). A close relationship is maintained with the MWWL and other women's organisations, such as the National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Women (NACEW) and the National Council of Women in New Zealand (NCWNZ), to ensure that the voices of Pacific women are heard and included.

Regionally and internationally, PACIFICA was a founding member of the International Women's Caucus (IWC) convened by MfW. In 2007, the National President of PACIFICA at that time, Diane Mara, was part of the government delegation attending the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) and the presentation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report by the New Zealand Government. This included the national women's organisations' presentations of their Shadow Reports (NCWNZ and MWWL) on the progress of the elimination of discrimination against women. They advocate for both gender and ethnic equity and equality.

**Ties to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC)**

In October 2021, PACIFICA was granted a special consultative status by the UN ECOSOC, one of six principal organisations within the United Nations. <sup>6</sup>It is the highest status granted by the United Nations to non-governmental organisations. The accreditation enables PACIFICA to participate in the work of the UN ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, the Human Rights Council, and events of the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies.

---

**The need for this report**

The catalyst for this report is PACIFICA's desire to present its record of Pacific women and girls' voices in 2023. This report aims to understand better the challenges faced by Pacific women and the strengths that make them resilient and empowered, and will provide the following:

1. An overview of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, to provide a snapshot of Pacific women and girls in Aotearoa, as shown in data. This includes income, education qualifications, employment, health and housing data.
2. Understand the challenges Pacific women face as told by our Pacific women in an online survey.
3. Document how Pacific women and girls, despite the statistics, still show resilience, strength and 'mana'.

This report achieves these objectives by delving into existing data and through an online survey designed by PACIFICA to draw out the voices of Pacific women and girls in Aotearoa New Zealand.

---

<sup>6</sup> UN ECOSOC is responsible for the direction and coordination of the UN's economic, social, humanitarian and cultural activities. It is the UN's largest and most complex subsidiary body.

# Pacific peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Pacific peoples have lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for over two centuries. Pacific migrants often referred to New Zealand as 'the land of plenty', attracted by employment, health care and educational opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

In 1945, after World War II, an estimated 2,200 people in Aotearoa New Zealand were identified as being of Pacific origin, making up 0.1 percent of the total population. By 2018, it increased to 381,642, contributing 8.1 percent of New Zealand's population, highlighting the rapid growth of this population. <sup>8</sup>To date, there are 20-plus ethnic communities under the umbrella term 'Pacific', the third largest minority ethnic group in Aotearoa New Zealand, after 'Māori' and 'Asian'.



## History of migration and early experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand

The history of migration into Aotearoa New Zealand varies amongst the Pacific nations. Since the beginning of the 20th century, New Zealand has administered the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, which all retain citizenship within this country. Those from the other Pacific nations usually migrated through temporary permits, quota schemes and family reunification provisions.<sup>9</sup>

The seven largest Pacific ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand are Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan. The growth of these communities in Aotearoa New Zealand has been so rapid that for some (Cook Island, Niuean and Tokelauans), their communities in Aotearoa New Zealand exceed the size of the populations in their home island nations, influencing their geographic perspective.<sup>10</sup>

A pull factor in Aotearoa New Zealand was the opportunity for Pacific peoples to provide for their families back in their home island nations and to pave a path of greater opportunities for children born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Between 1973 and 1974, a global oil crisis changed the nature of the global economy. Jobs, once plentiful, became scarce. One of the responses to this economic downturn, loss of employment and competition for scarce resources was to 'racialise' workers from the Pacific through the media.<sup>11</sup>

The New Zealand Government embarked on an 'overstayers campaign' from 1974 to 1976, in which Pacific peoples were targeted as illegal immigrants in Aotearoa New Zealand and were seen to threaten the rights of 'New Zealanders' to jobs.<sup>12</sup> This led to the infamous Dawn Raids, which targeted Samoans, Tongans and Fijians in particular, but also involved the police stopping and arresting individuals from New Zealand's realm countries and Māori who did not look like 'New Zealanders'.

Within a decade, the unemployment rate of Pacific peoples rose from 5.6 percent to 29 percent.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1980s, Pacific peoples were more likely to participate in the labour market than the rest of the population. By the mid-1990s, their participation was well below the average and has remained so ever since.<sup>14</sup> The above-mentioned chain of events shows how Pacific peoples became economically, culturally, socially and symbolically positioned in New Zealand society. It was amid the Dawn Raids era that Pacific women mobilised themselves with the establishment of PACIFICA, timely considering all that was happening during that period.

---

<sup>7</sup> Taufa, S. (2015). A mother's hope: Pacific teenage pregnancy in New Zealand. Doctoral dissertation, ResearchSpace@ Auckland.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (2018). Pacific Peoples ethnic group. [www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples](http://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples)

<sup>9</sup> Bedford, R. & Hugo, G. (2012). Population movement in the Pacific: A perspective on future prospects. Labour and Immigration Research Centre.

<sup>10</sup> Hau'ofa, E. (1993). A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands. School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific in association with Beake House.

<sup>11</sup> Ongley, P. (1996). 'Immigration, Employment and Ethnic Relations', in Nga Patai: Racism and ethnic relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, edited by Cluny Macpherson, David Pearson and Paul Spoonley, 17-36. Dunmore Press.

<sup>12</sup> Spoonley, P. & Bedford, R. (2012). Welcome to our world? Immigration and the reshaping of New Zealand. Dunmore Press.

<sup>13</sup> Ongley, P. (1996). 'Immigration, Employment and Ethnic Relations', in Nga Patai: Racism and ethnic relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, edited by Cluny Macpherson, David Pearson and Paul Spoonley,

<sup>14</sup> de Raad, J. & Walton, M. (2007). Pacific People in the New Zealand economy: Understanding trends and linkages. Paper presented at Thought Leaders Dialogue, Auckland, 30-31 August 2007.

## A current snapshot of Pacific peoples in New Zealand

This report acknowledges that the data collected about Pacific peoples often only highlights the inequities and disparities they face in Aotearoa New Zealand. While this section will outline what we are told in the literature and statistics, it will also draw on the limited data available that focuses on areas where Pacific peoples excel.

Currently, Pacific populations are diverse, young, growing primarily in urban cities, and increasingly born in Aotearoa New Zealand. The median age of the total New Zealand population was 38 years, whereas for all Pacific peoples other than Fijian, the median age was around 20 years. It is estimated that by 2026 Pacific peoples will make up a significant part of the New Zealand labour force and potentially 30 percent of the Auckland working population, contributing to the fabric of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Statistics suggest that Pacific peoples are more likely to experience poverty than other New Zealanders, as reflected by employment, income, wealth and housing statistics.<sup>15</sup> Further disparities are seen when broken down by Pacific-specific ethnicity (Table 1).<sup>16</sup>

Table 1. Specific data – 2018 New Zealand Census

	Samoan	Tongan	Cook Island	Niue	Pacific	NZ General
Population	182,721	82,389	80,532	30,867	381,642	4,699,755
Median Age	22.8 years	20.5 years	21 years	21.6 years	23.4 years	37.4 years
Median Income	\$25,400	\$21,000	\$22,500	\$23,800	\$24,300	\$31,800
Religious Affiliation	80.4%	84.9%	62.3%	63.6%	77.1%	51.8%
Unemployed	6.8%	7.1%	8.9%	7.7%	7.1%	4.0%
No qualification (education)	22.8%	25.6%	28.7%	27.4%	24.5%	18.2%
One Ethnic Group	58.2%	63.9%	42.7%	29.4%	59.4%	-
NZ Born	66.7%	64.4%	83.1%	83.0%	66.4%	72.6%
Home Ownership*	19.2%	15.3%	17.6%	18.1%	18.5%	50.2%
	Fiji	Tokelau	Tuvalu	Kiribati	Pacific	NZ General
Population	19,722	8,676	4,653	3,225	381,642	4,699,755
Median Age	27.6 years	21.4 years	18.3 years	20.4 years	23.4 years	37.4 years
Median Income	\$24,100	\$21,700	\$18,700	\$22,700	\$24,300	\$31,800
Religious Affiliation	82.5%	81.1%	92.0%	91.5%	77.1%	51.8%
Unemployed	5.4%	8.6%	9.1%	5.3%	7.1%	4.0%
No qualification (education)	11.2%	24.5%	28.6%	19.9%	24.5%	18.2%
One Ethnic Group	55.1%	34.9%	72.0%	74.8%	59.4%	-
NZ Born	41.2%	78.5%	54.0%	41.3%	66.4%	72.6%
Home Ownership*	22.9%	16.9%	9.7%	11.0%	18.5%	50.2%

\*taken from the 2013 Census

<sup>15</sup> Hawke, G., Bedford, R., Kukutai, T., McKinnon, M., Olssen, E., & Spoonley, P. (2014). Our futures. Te Pae Tawhiti. The 2013 census and New Zealand's changing population. The Royal Society of New Zealand.

<sup>16</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (2019). Pacific Peoples ethnic group. Cited from <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples>

Nonetheless, in the face of ongoing structural disadvantage, Pacific peoples have maintained stronger community connectedness, bonds of trust and religious (predominantly Christian) identity than the general population, while holding on to enduring cultural values, highlighting Pacific communities' important strengths and resiliencies.

Compared to the general population, Pacific peoples are more likely to speak more than one language and be affiliated with a religion.<sup>17</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were more likely to be socially connected, with higher perceived wellbeing during times of lockdown, highlighting the strengths of living in multi-generational households with multiple family members.<sup>18</sup>

Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand contribute significantly to the economy despite the many challenges and inequities they experience in areas such as health, education, housing and employment. In 2018, Treasury<sup>19</sup> estimated that Pacific individuals and businesses working in various industries contributed \$8 billion to New Zealand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Pacific peoples also undertake more unpaid work than the general population. Research from MPP showed Pacific peoples spent over 66,000 hours per week on unpaid work and volunteering. In its online survey of 2,000 people, the research team found participants dedicated more than \$2.4 million of their own money over four months to help others. On average, that equates to \$161 per person every week. This highlights the unaccounted service Pacific peoples contribute to New Zealand society, with Pacific women being the most likely to take part in unpaid activities.

New Zealand is also unique in that we are the only country in the world with a Ministry dedicated to Pacific peoples and a Ministry for Women. This highlights a point of difference between Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand and the rest of the Pacific diaspora.

---

<sup>17</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (2018). Pacific Peoples ethnic group. [www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples](http://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples)

<sup>18</sup> Meissel, K., Bergquist, M., & Kumarich, J., et al. (2021). The Growing Up in New Zealand COVID-19 Wellbeing Survey: Part 2: Education. Auckland.

<sup>19</sup> Treasury. (2018). The New Zealand Pacific economy. <https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/commissioned-report/new-zealand-pacific-economy>

# Key findings: Data on Pacific women



---

## Pacific women contribute to the workforce

Available data often lumps Pacific men and Pacific women together. However, literature related to Pacific women in the workforce shows that they contribute to industries that nurture and care for the wider society. Pacific women are more likely to work in the health care, social assistance, education and training industries, with 16 percent of all Pacific women employed in each. This is followed by manufacturing, which employs 10 percent of Pacific women.

At the 2018 census, most (76.2 percent) employed Pacific women were in skilled jobs such as professional, community and personal services, clerical and administrative roles, sales workers and managers. However, they were less likely to be in manager roles (8.3 percent).

Only about a quarter (23.8 percent) of all employed Pacific women are in manual jobs, such as labourers, machinery operators, drivers, technicians and trades. The second most common area was Pacific women working in the community and personal service roles. In the 2013 Census, community and personal service jobs were the third biggest occupation for Pacific women. This shows Pacific women's contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand in these supportive roles. During the COVID-19 lockdowns these roles were pivotal.

---

## Wage gap

Despite Pacific women's contribution to the workforce and building the economy, Pacific men and women continue to be at the bottom of the pay ladder. In a report launched by the Human Rights Commission, the Pacific Pay Gap Inquiry notes that Pacific women earned, on average, 25 percent less than a Pākehā (European) male.

Figures show that Pacific women earn, on average, \$24,671 less than Pākehā men – roughly \$474 a week. On average, for every \$1 a Pākehā man makes, a Pacific man makes 76 cents, while a Pacific woman makes 73 cents. For a quarter of the year, Pacific women effectively work for free. The inquiry found that most of the gap could not be explained, with 61 percent of the pay gap for Pacific women unexplained.

The research also shows the Pacific pay gap is experienced differently depending on where you're employed and what you do. For some of us, it's about tens of thousands of dollars; for others, it's about an hourly wage. For example, in health, where more than one-in-five Pacific women work, the average hourly wage of a Pacific worker is \$25.22 compared to \$32.29 for non-Pacific workers in the sector. The overall pay disparity between Pacific and Pākehā workers in the health sector is 22 percent.

Bridging the wage gap is an issue PACIFICA continues to advocate for.

---

<sup>20</sup> Pākehā – a Māori language term for New Zealanders mainly of European descent.

<sup>21</sup> Cochrane, B & Pacheco, G. (2022) Empirical analysis of Pacific, Māori and ethnic pay gaps in New Zealand. NZ Work Research Institute, Auckland, NZ.



# Online survey

Historically, insights gathered about Pacific women have been based on percentages and rates, written by non-Pacific people through a non-Pacific lens, with a lack of context about the experiences of Pacific women. The catalyst for this online survey was PACIFICA's desire to present its record of Pacific women and girls' voices in 2023, understanding the challenges they face and factors supporting them in Aotearoa New Zealand.

---

## Methods

A Working Group (also known as the PACIFICA UN ECOSOC project team) was established with PACIFICA members who had experience working in the public service sector, from policy development and implementation to research and evaluation. Their collective skills, wisdom and volunteer hours enabled the development and design of a survey which would inform a report.

A key influence on the Working Group was Teremoana Maua-Hodges' Tivaivai framework.<sup>22</sup> The framework sets out the process of making a tivaivai by a group of people, usually women, led by a ta'unga tivaivai – an expert in quilt making. They work collaboratively together to produce a quilt that will become the property of the group of sewers. The Working Group, like a group of sewers, were allocated parts of the data to summarise and analyse.

A talanoa session was held in Auckland in July 2022, where the working group facilitated a question-and-answer workshop with attendees. This was repeated in Wellington, where Pacific women and girls were asked to complete a pilot survey and to send a completed questionnaire back to a Working Group member. PACIFICA collected 16 completed surveys in the first approach. A shared value across the Pacific Nations is reciprocity, and as a sign of reciprocity, each participant was gifted a \$50 supermarket voucher to thank them for responding to the written survey.

A Governance Group made up of PACIFICA National Executive members and former PACIFICA National Presidents was also established as a <sup>23</sup>sub-committee to the National Executive, to oversee the project. This group was called the PACIFICA UN ECOSOC sub-committee. The role of the sub-committee was to provide feedback to project status reports produced by the project team and to provide advice and recommendations to the National Executive on the final versions of the report.

---

## Data collections

In August 2022, the Working Group advised using an online survey to capture Pacific women and girls' voices. The online survey was launched by PACIFICA on 21 October 2022 and closed on 21 November 2022. The aim of the online survey was to:

1. Understand the challenges Pacific women face as told by our Pacific women in an online survey.
2. Document how Pacific women and girls, despite the statistics, still show resilience, strength and 'mana'.

---

<sup>22</sup> Teremoana Maua Hodges. (2018). 'Aere 'Aere Opara Ki Mua, Pursue Pursue and Push on: Teaching Cook Islands Māori to adults in New Zealand. A critical review of literature. Wellington.

<sup>23</sup> The PACIFICA UN ECOSOC sub-committee reports to the PACIFICA National Executive

**Analysis** The raw data was coded and themed. Open-ended narratives were entered into <sup>24</sup>nVivo and analysed. A Pacific researcher also went through both the closed and open-ended questions to code and analyse manually, ensuring quality assurance. In cases where quotes were provided, names and certain demographic characteristics (i.e., income and educational attainment) were not provided to protect participants' identity. Where demographic information such as ethnicity, location and age are not provided, quotes are labelled 'unidentified'.

---

**Demographics** A total of 173 people took part in the online survey, made up of women who live in Aotearoa New Zealand but identify as being of Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, Tokelau, New Zealand Māori, Pākehā and Other ethnicities.

---

**Age group** Ages ranged from 13 years old to 78 years old, with 18 percent being under 26 years, 48 percent between 26 and 47 years, and the remaining over 48 years (Table 2).

---

**Location** Respondents of the survey were found from across Aotearoa New Zealand. In the 2018 Census, only 8.3 percent of the population lived in the South Island. However, PACIFICA was able to over sample in the South Island (15 percent), a strength considering the increased migration of Pacific families there.

In total, the two most common locations were 1) Te Upoko o te Ika – Greater Wellington (43 percent) and Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland region (31 percent), which made up 71 percent of the respondents. This is similar to the Census data which sees 76 percent of Pacific peoples living in one of these two regions.

---

**Income per year** In the online survey, people were asked to indicate their income using an income total per scale. Approximately 82 people (47 percent) responded that their income was between \$70,000 and \$180,000 per year. The six people (3 percent) who responded under \$14,000 per year were either unemployed, part-time or a full-time student (Table 2). While 18 percent of survey respondents did not share their annual income, 69 percent of those who participated earned more than the median Pacific income in New Zealand.

---

**Highest qualification** Eight percent of survey respondents noted that they did not have any education qualifications, followed by 10 percent who did not disclose their highest form of education qualification. Sixty-eight percent of the women who participated in the survey had some form of tertiary qualification ranging from diploma level to post-doctorate. This may relate to the above-average income (Table 2).

---

**Employment status and field** Sixty-six percent of women were either in full-time employment or self-employed, followed by a further 8 percent who were part-time employed and 11 percent who were studying. Of those who were employed, the most common fields were Public Service (28 percent), Health and Social Services (25 percent) and Education and Training (20 percent) – making up 73 percent of the total.

The demographic of the women highlights that they were more likely to be aged over 25 years, spread across Aotearoa New Zealand, with a higher-than-average median income. This could be directly related to the average highest qualification, employment status and employment field.

---

<sup>24</sup> A qualitative data analysis tool that provides easy access to data, and also enables clerical tasks to be extensively automated.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of those who took part in the survey.

Age group			Location		
	n	%		n	%
15-19 years	18	10	Tai Tokerau – Northland and Whangarei	9	5
20-25 years	13	8	Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland region	53	31
26-36 years	34	20	Waikato/Tainui – Hamilton, Rotorua, Taupo, Tokoroa	3	2
37-47 years	41	24	Te Matau-a-Maui, Hawke's Bay - Napier	3	2
48-58 years	48	28	Te Tairāwhiti Coast, Gisborne	1	1
60+ years	18	10	Manawatu-Whanganui	5	3
Total	173	100	Te Upoko o te Ika – Greater Wellington	75	43
			Waitaha, Canterbury – Christchurch	8	5
			Ōtākou, Otago	8	5
			Murihiku, Southland – Oāmaru, Invercargill	8	5
			Total	173	100
Income per year			Highest qualification		
	n	%		n	%
Under \$14,000	6	3	No qualification	14	8
\$14,000 to \$48,000	18	10	NCEA	25	14
\$48,000 to \$70,000	31	18	Diploma	24	14
\$70,000 to \$180,000	82	47	Bachelors degree	56	32
\$180,000 to \$220,000	3	2	Masters degree	30	17
Over \$220,000	2	1	Doctorate degree	5	3
Did not say	31	18	Post-doctorate	2	1
Total	173	100	Did not say	17	10
			Total	173	100
Employment status			Employment field		
	n	%		n	%
Full-time employed	114	61	Public Service	48	28
Part-time employed	15	8	Health and Social Services	44	25
Self-employed	10	5	Education and Training	34	20
Unemployed	10	5	Did not answer	11	6
Full-time students	15	8	Administration	10	6
Part-time students	5	3	Corporate	7	4
Casual employment	5	3	Information, Media and Telecommunications	7	4
I also have a side hustle	12	6	Retail	6	3
Total	186	100	Arts and Recreation	3	2
			Cleaning	2	1
			Manufacturing	1	1
			Total	173	100



# Survey findings

The survey findings are divided into three main sections focused on the challenges Pacific women face, their strengths, and aspirations for the future. Through the quotes provided in this section, the report aims to allow the narratives to speak for themselves.

## Understand the challenges faced by Pacific women as told by PACIFICA members

Pacific women shared areas in their lives that they found challenging. This was often broken down into three categories related to 1) identity and having to navigate between the Western environment that they find themselves in and their cultural values and obligations, 2) an awareness of intersectionality – biases that they face being Pacific (brown) and female, and 3) the socioeconomic hardship that follows.

---

### Navigating between two worlds

Participants acknowledged the challenge of navigating between two worlds (through Western society) while upholding and fulfilling their ethnic and cultural roles and obligations. This often leads to a loss of sense of belonging that emerges from conflicting priorities. They share:

**It isn't easy, especially when you walk the middle ground of Pacific and Pākehā. Feeling like you don't belong in either can be hard.**

(Cook Islander/Tongan/Pākehā, 25-year-old living in Wellington)

**It's hard because our parents still live the old way and continue to drum it into us, even living here in New Zealand. It was hard for me, and it still is today.**

(Samoan, 48-year-old living in Lower Hutt)

**It is difficult to navigate spaces with competing priorities that don't necessarily fit the status quo. Often Pacific women are expected to care for but not lead.**

(Tokelau/Tuvalu, 31-year-old living in Auckland)

---

### Struggling with identity

For a subset of the women who took part in the survey, being torn between two cultures often led to a struggle with identity. Western values, or ways of being dominant, led to a loss of sense of identity. For some participants, the expectation to adapt to 'palangi<sup>25</sup> society' or the lack of cultural knowledge passed on to them creates an internal disconnect.

**It's not easy. We adapt to palangi society to be given chances that we lose parts of ourselves to fit in.**

(Samoan, 37-year-old living in Te Tai Tokerau)

---

<sup>25</sup> Palangi – synonymous with Pākehā; a Tongan term for European.

Many of us don't know our past, where we come from, or our extended whanau. And therefore, we are judged by our skin colour but disconnected from our culture.

(Cook Islander/Māori/Pākehā, 43-year-old living in Hawke's Bay)

At this stage in my life, it's not so important that others understand what it's like for me living in Aotearoa New Zealand today, but more important for me to know and understand myself and to live by those values and beliefs, using my heart and intuition as my guide.

(Pacific other, 60-year-old living in Christchurch)

---

The struggle with identity is often intensified when Pacific women have to navigate environments where they are the only Pacific person in the midst of others – more common within workplaces. One participant shares:

It can be one of the loneliest and frightening places when you are in a space where you are the only one (Pacific woman/girl). We deserve the chance to experience so many diverse opportunities which come so easily to others (in mainstream).

(Unidentified)

---

**Intersectionality – being brown and female**

Those who took part in the survey were also able to draw on the social concept of intersectionality, defined as an acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression that should consider everything that can marginalise people. In the examples provided below, participants noted the discrimination they felt being brown (Pacific) and female (gender bias).

---

**Discrimination based on ethnicity (racism)**

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific women acknowledged the racism and discrimination experienced by Pacific peoples living in New Zealand. This often leads to feelings of hopelessness and the idea of tokenism – where Pacific peoples are invited to participate as a tick box exercise. They note:

There is a lot of racism in New Zealand; we are not equal in other's eyes. It's hard to break that feeling of hopelessness.

(Samoan/Māori, 47-year-old living in Lower Hutt)

We try to break the bias daily, whether young or old; the struggle is certainly real, but we do not give in.

(Samoan, 55-year-old living in Auckland)

## Struggling through systemic racism and tokenism.

(Samoan/Tongan/Māori, 53-year-old living in Porirua)

## Intersectionality of being Pacific, young and a woman feels like a triple disadvantage.

(Samoan, 28-year-old living in Auckland)

---

Those from the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand where only 8.3 percent of the Pacific population live, shared having to work twice as hard, noting the ignorance of people (particularly in leadership roles) regarding views about Pacific peoples.

## I'm sick of deficit racist thinking. I'm losing patience with those who claim ignorance of things Pacific, particularly those in leadership roles. It's bloody hard being brown in the South of Aotearoa.

(Samoan/Tongan, 50-year-old living in Otago)

## We don't have 'white privilege'. We have to work twice as hard towards our achievements. Understand us, know our culture, and respect the <sup>26</sup>Va.

(Samoan, 32-year-old living in Southland)

---

### Discrimination based on gender

As well as an awareness of the biases experienced by Pacific peoples, the women who took part in the survey also acknowledged biases based on their gender, where they are not compensated the same as their male colleagues or recognised for their qualities. This supports findings based on pay disparities previously mentioned in the literature. They state:

## There are subtle systemic Western cultural micro-aggressive behaviours that we experience on a daily [basis] within Aotearoa, much like Māori women.

(Fijian, 29-year-old living in Christchurch)

## We are constantly fighting for a better future for our tamariki (children). We are working towards being good ancestors. We may not be [as] fairly compensated as our male colleagues.

(Tongan, 27-year-old living in Auckland)

---

<sup>26</sup> The va/va'a/vaha is a pan-Pacific notion that describes the spatial and relational context within which secular and spiritual relationships unfold. Social, spiritual, and relational contexts allow for personal and collective well-being and growth through knowledge generation, social action, and cultural transformation.



**As Pacific women, I think we are undervalued most of the time. We take the lead, we are innovators, and problem solvers, we go over and beyond, and we work extremely hard in our jobs, and yet Pacific women are not being recognised as much for their qualities.**

(Samoaan/Tuvalu, 41-year-old living in Oamaru)

**We are sometimes discriminated against for being brown and Pacific and further polarised being a Pacific woman.**

(Tongan/Samoan, 56-year-old living in Auckland)

---

**Socioeconomic hardship**

The biases that Pacific women feel, based on ethnicity and gender, are seen to contribute to socioeconomic hardship. Pacific women reflect on the current inequities in relation to socioeconomic issues, such as employment and income. They note:

**There are still many barriers facing us, making it difficult to get ahead and to contribute to our own futures and that of our families. For example, lack of access to reliable public transport, kids leaving home to go to the cities to study but no affordable accommodation available.**

(Cook Islander, 50-year-old living in Northland)

**That we are still overlooked in all areas of employment, that our voices matter, and that they are able to look after themselves and provide if given the opportunity.**

(Cook Islander/Tahitian, 41-year-old living in Wellington)

**We do significant voluntary work for our communities and families, and we do not yet have pay parity – we are the lowest paid people in Aotearoa New Zealand.**

(Samoaan/Māori, 45-year-old living in Auckland)

**We carry the most but are paid the least.**

(Samoaan/Pākehā, 54-year-old living in Wellington)

**Women are moving towards more leadership roles, however Pacific women have the lowest-paid roles. Even in mainstream organisations they are undervalued, and it is shown in their remuneration.**

(Tokelau/Tuvalu, 31-year-old living in Auckland)



When asked “what would you tell the Prime Minister and Minister for Pacific Peoples are the three most important issues for Pacific women and girls and our families?”, 56 percent of comments in the survey mentioned pay equity and socioeconomic inequities as the major issues challenging Pacific women. Statements made in reference to the pay gap include:

**The Ethnic and Gender Pay Gap between Pākehā men and Pacific women is at 27 percent, which will take 120-150 years at the current rate of progress to get to pay equity.**

-

**Equity as women in Pacific society needs to be addressed. Pay equity MUST be addressed as we're at the bottom of the wages heap.**

-

**Pacific Pay Gap & Pay Transparency – close the pay gap & provide more opportunities.**

-

**We are grossly underpaid but are always working hard and going above and beyond, bringing our whole selves to work. This is also hard if we are the ones who also carry the bulk of our family commitments.**

---

The perceived pay gap had a flow-on effect on the socioeconomic burdens identified by the Pacific women in the survey. From across Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific women share:

1. Financial barriers to education and exposure to career exploration and opportunities.
2. Lack of access to meaningful, sustainable employment.
3. Housing issues.
4. Poverty, financial stress and disadvantage: more is needed to support Pacific families to improve their quality of life.
5. Poor accessibility to higher education and diverse experiences in education.
6. Poverty and the impact of this on the wellbeing of women who invariably carry responsibility for making ends meet.

This highlights an awareness of a range of inequities that act as challenges for Pacific women.

---

**The belief that life is getting harder**

Consequently, Pacific women in different parts of New Zealand feel that, given the time and context that we are in, life is getting harder and/or more challenging.



**I am very concerned that Pacific women are continuing to struggle to make advances and gains towards prosperity, sometimes even regressing more than our mothers' and grandmothers' generations did as new migrants to New Zealand.**

(Samoa, 53-year-old living in Auckland)

**It's difficult, and it's different. It's twice as hard today, especially against the other gender. Pacific women hold responsibilities at a very young age; we are the nurturers of the family, we have expectations that we feel we need to uphold and do to keep the peace and so much more.**

(Tongan, 26-year-old living in Auckland)

---

This is linked to the changing social norms and expectations over time for women to multi-task well. For example, having a career while maintaining their obligations at home and in their communities. They share:

**With changing times, come changing responsibilities for women. They are not just expected to care at home but also care in terms of work. So work and family balance is demanding. Do Pacific women ever get a break?**

(Samoa, 24-year-old living in Auckland)

**The expectation for us to care for ourselves, our families (those we have made and the one we come from), church, community, as well as thrive and do well in work and/or studies. We are always the first to volunteer to do things because we are great at what we do and are the last to be acknowledged.**

(Unidentified)

**Responsibilities of Pacific women at home**

(Unidentified)

**Pacific women carry whole families, church and communities on their shoulders, all day and all night**

(Unidentified)

These are the challenges voiced by Pacific women themselves.

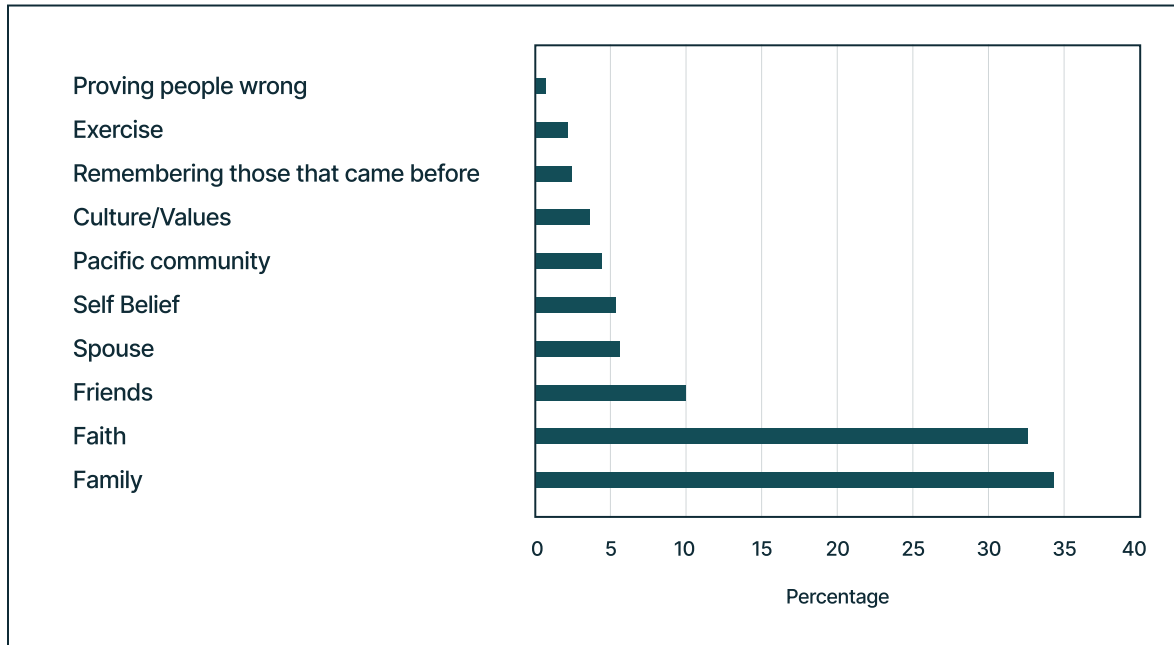
# What Pacific women perceive to be their strengths

Participants in the survey were asked the question – “What gives you strength when you face challenges?”

Two hundred and eighty examples were provided. The three most common responses (Figure 1) were related to being connected to – family (34 percent), faith (32 percent) and friends (10 percent). These were seen as motivating factors that led to mitigating risks or challenges.



Figure 1. What motivates Pacific women to face/mitigate their challenges (%)

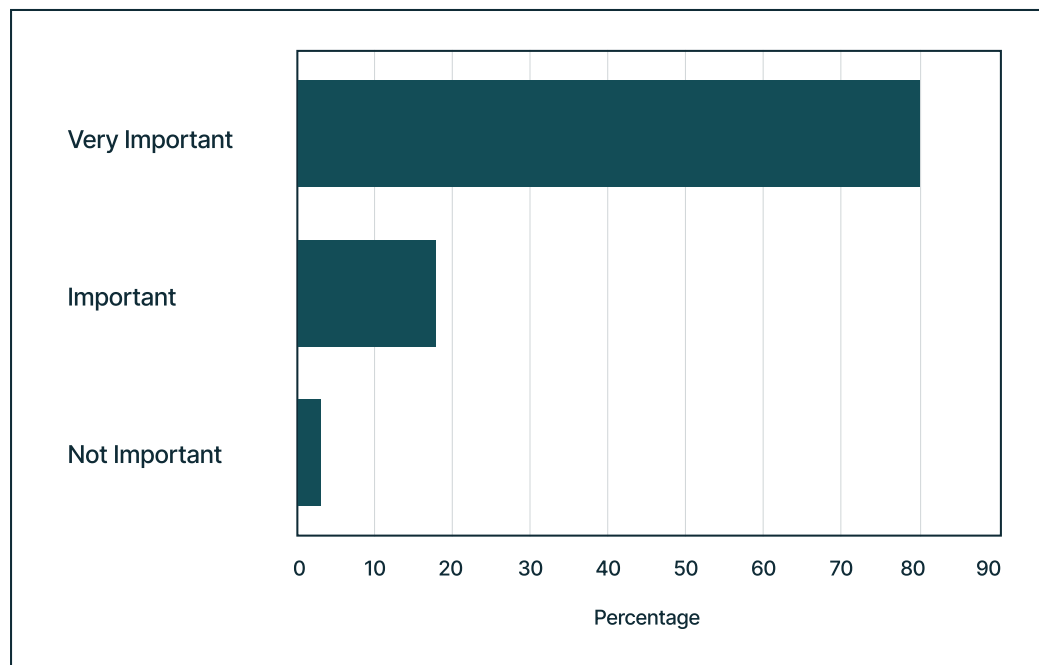


## The importance of identity

In the online survey, participants were also asked – “How important is your Pacific language, culture and identity in your life and to your sense of belonging?”

Overwhelmingly, 97 percent of Pacific women said, ‘important or very important’, acknowledging language, culture and identity’s significant role in their lives and wellbeing (Figure 2).

Figure 2. How important is your Pacific language, culture and identity in your life and to your sense of belonging?




The connection to language, culture and identity was tied to the three most common themes in Figure 1 – family, faith and friends. Through the online survey, Pacific women shared the importance of culture and language in moulding their sense of belonging and resiliency. They talked about shared values of service, fostering and maintaining relationships and being part of a collective contributed to the uniqueness of Pacific women. They note:

**Our cultural way of being and the practice of this is a skill set unique to us. Our Samoan ideology of tautua/service is unique. We participate and collaborate in a manner that uplifts everyone. The ideology of being raised by a village makes us naturally inclusive of others, always thinking of what benefits the wider group and not the individual.**

(Samoan/Cook Islander, 50-year-old living in Otago)

**Our voice! Our lived experiences! Our connection to God! Our community that we bring along. Our backing is different than any other.**

(Samoan 34-year-old living in Auckland)



**Pacific women are unique in that our values are the same across the Pacific. Respect for our elders, service for others, and reciprocity are just some of our unique ways of living.**

(Samoan, 61-year-old living in Dunedin)

**We have a strong sense of our cultural heritage by the way we speak our mother language or present ourselves that is uniquely Pacific and showcases our differences in the Pacific. We aren't all the same in the Pacific, there are some similarities, but we are culturally unique in our upbringing and exposure to our culture, language and identity.**

(Samoan, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**I consider our points of uniqueness are our family values, leadership, breaking barriers, supporters, our ability to work together and our capacity to laugh and love.**

(Niuean, 60-year-old living in Christchurch)

---

When asked, "What do you think would help Pacific peoples have a better connection to their Pacific language, culture and identity?", Pacific women also acknowledged the role of family/friends in promoting the use of language and the practice of culture within the home.

**Talanoa with elders of the land, their own parents or aunties, uncles etc, various workshops relatable to young people and the world we live in now.**

(Tongan, 26-year-old living in Auckland)

**Learning where they come from, linking back to their whakapapa.**

(Cook Islander/Māori, 43-year-old living in Hawke's Bay)

**Using it daily i.e., language – if parents don't speak to their children/family/church members in their Pacific language, then it is lost.**

(Tongan, 32-year-old living in Dunedin)

**Language class and parents speaking at home.**

(Cook Islander, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**Speaking your language, teaching your children, joining in cultural activities and many more to enjoy.**

(Samoan, 72-year-old living in Manawatu)

**It starts in childhood – being raised with a strong sense of cultural identity. As well as having opportunities to mix with your extended family and cultural communities/groups, church, customs etc.**

(Samoan/Pākehā, 56-year-old living in Wellington)



### Stronger family relationships.

(Tongan, 36-year-old living in Auckland)

Family upbringing, church connection, sense of belonging and pride with culture. Having culture be a part of everyday life whether it be through language, cooking, community etc.

(Samoan, 38-year-old living in Auckland)

This highlights the importance of strong positive relationships in passing on the language and cultural values.

---

### Confidently navigating between two worlds

Although navigating between two worlds was previously mentioned as a challenge, the importance of remembering where we come from as Pacific women was seen as a strength. Those with a strong sense of cultural identity, who were also comfortable in mainstream spaces, often used both to navigate forward confidently. They share:

We have a strength and knowledge in both the Western world and our traditional Pacific world (inherently and learned) that only we can juggle the things we do in the ways that we do. We are strong and bold but also gentle and loving.

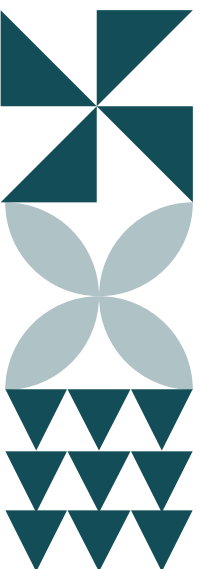
(Samoan, 31-year-old living in Wellington)

We are a strong unit and continue to go from strength to strength. I see us using skills from those that went before us and organising better as collectives. We have a mix and wealth of knowledge from all walks of life that is very unique.

(Samoan, 31-year-old living in Porirua)

We are starting to make our voices seen and heard!! More and more Pacific women are starting to see their value, and because of our unique ability to pull from our community and village of people around us, we are given a beautiful foundation of strength and experience from other likeminded Pacific women who are on their way up but who are also always willing to 'send the elevator back down' to those making their way to the top also.

(Tongan, 31-year-old living in Porirua)



## Master multi-taskers

Navigating between Western and Pacific worlds also provides a platform for Pacific women to effectively multi-task in different spaces, be it their work, home, or community environment. This also adds to the resilience of Pacific women. They note:

**We are multi-faceted, widely gifted women who get shit done to the highest standard and often without complaint! We are multi-culturally aware more than many others in a diverse range of spaces e.g., culturally, professionally, socially, linguistically, academically, for our kids/grandkids in school activities settings.**

(Samoan, 53-year-old living in Auckland)

**We are unique because we see the world from so many different lenses. For example, culturally with different languages, understanding others with different cultures to ours. We understand being daughters, granddaughters, mothers and grandmothers within a different environment to the Pacific environment where we grew up. We bring different perspectives to Aotearoa today.**

(Cook Islander, 62-year-old living in Palmerston North)

**We have an untapped power, resilience, the ability to wear so many hats both professionally and in family life.**

(Tahitian, 28-year-old living in Auckland)



## Being part of a collective

The narratives that came through the online survey highlight the importance of connections and being part of a collective for Pacific women. As noted in the earlier sections, PACIFICA plays a pivotal role in empowering Pacific women, with examples of service and leadership in its membership. The strength of being part of a collective contributes to wellbeing, provides a support system, and a more coordinated approach to mobilising communities. They share:

**I think Pacific women have a lot to offer Aotearoa. We are drawn to gathering together as a group and a community. I generally think Pacific women are also supportive of each other and the wider community. I also think Pacific women can be very efficient and co-ordinated when mobilised to do so.**

(Tongan, 44-year-old living in Wellington)

**We are involved in community events that are relevant to us and our family. We have small click groups that we go out with that help us with our wellbeing, and we enjoy connecting. We like to join and support local Pacific businesses because we know them well. We are using our skills to start our own businesses and we support each other.**

(Fijian, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**I would say we have strong family support. We have church support and the community, which is amazing. Whether we are celebrating an achievement or mourning a loss the love is there. Pacific women are making a difference in how some families see things not only in sports but also through as educators and using talents like sewing traditional wear or making traditional wear is making a mark in New Zealand and all over the world.**

(Cook Islander, 36-year-old living in Invercargill)

---

## Pacific women – representation and role models

Seeing Pacific women succeeding across different disciplines acts as motivation for the participants in the survey. Participants noted how this contributes to building resilience and the increased belief that, as Pacific women, seeing other Pacific women excelling gives them the belief that they, too can succeed. The narratives provided reflect the make-up of PACIFICA across the sector, including Parliament, with Pacific Members of Parliament also part of PACIFICA. Across Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific women note:

**Pacific women in Aotearoa have a much greater presence now that we see more of us in senior positions in the public service, on Boards, in Parliament, in ministerial positions, the judiciary. We are definitely breaking that glass ceiling. I hope that we no longer have to read stories that say ‘the first Pacific woman to hold ...’ Our point of uniqueness is that we bring with us a community rich in culture, history and tradition. We also have a legacy to protect and carry on in the place we now call home.**

(Samoan, 39-year-old living in Wellington)



I see Pacific women as strong advocates for our cultures and our people. We have Pacific female court judges; we have professional sportswomen, and we have a Pacific women representative in just about every field – media, TV, radio, education etc. We are unique in that wherever we go, we take our culture, our family, our villages with us.

(Tongan, 38-year-old living in Auckland)

Humble, respectful and educated. Growth for Pacific women in governmental sectors.

(Niuean/Samoan, 50-year-old living in Northland)

So many wonderful leaders, voices, creativity coming through. We have it all ... and if not yet, we have all the potential.

(Samoan/Niuean, 33-year-old living in Otago)

We are amazingly resilient, hugely significant, and strong advocates for each other, our families and our communities. Despite the odds stacked against us, we see many of our women succeed with so little resources. Many of us have an unwavering faith in God or a higher being. We are world-changers.

(Samoan, 61-year-old living in Auckland)

Leadership in Pacific women is developing in Aotearoa, and its definitely more encouraged now.

(Fijian, 51-year-old living in Oamaru)

Coming forward, taking leadership roles, more being bold, being the voice that was once shunned.

(Samoan, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

---

## Developing Pacific leadership

Leadership and service are synonymous for Pacific women in the survey. Leadership development through organisations like PACIFICA enables Pacific women to participate at national, regional (Pacific-wide) and global forums. For example, Pacific women hold leadership roles in MPP and other government agencies. We must be at a point where participation is premised on knowledge/skills and population.

They also state that leadership is tied to celebrating the success of others:

Leadership through service, we do not leave anyone behind, we pull people up not stand on their hands.

(Tokelau, 50-year-old living in Christchurch)

**We are often pillars of leadership within our own cultures, communities and families, and dedicated a lot of voluntary hours to different causes.**

(Samoan, 34-year-old living in Wellington)

**We are seeing more wāhine toa, trail-blazing the way in a country with very much a ‘tall poppy syndrome’. We are learning to celebrate our successes and through generational changes, we are seeing more Pacific women in leadership roles throughout New Zealand.**

(Samoan, 33-year-old living in Otago)

Participants also acknowledged that while we are increasing Pacific leadership in the workforce, Pacific women also have leadership roles in their homes, spaces that are equally important.

**I see an increase of Pasifika women leaders in organisations, business owners, etc. but I’m also aware of the high number of Pasifika women who are leaders of our homes and can also deserve more recognition and acknowledgement.**

(Tahitian, 31-year-old living in Wellington)

**Great at serving our families while also leading our own lives and forging our own paths. Showing people, the ‘typical leadership qualities’ are not the only, or the best way.**

(Cook Islander, 24-year-old living in Wellington)

---

## What Pacific women aspire for in the future

For the future, Pacific women aspire to have safe spaces or platforms to voice their views, free from bias. They hope for leadership opportunities for the future advancement of Pacific women in Aotearoa New Zealand, through an allocated seat at the decision-making table, and more resources, funding and mentoring.

Pacific women also acknowledge the importance of mobilising our Pacific communities and working alongside other ethnic and women’s groups to advocate for things that are important for the most vulnerable groups in society, in which Pacific peoples often feature. When asked about what is needed moving forward, they shared the need for the following:



Safe spaces/platforms to share.

As noted in the challenges section, experiences of racism and bias create feelings of discomfort and judgement. One participant shared:

**New Zealand society needs to change the way they see Pacific [peoples] in general. Currently there is a subtle racism, prejudice that exists in the workplace and when going to public spaces that makes us feel uncomfortable, not welcomed, judged, and looked down upon.**

(Samoan/Other, 34-year-old living in Auckland)

Providing safe spaces and platforms for Pacific women and girls to share their experiences and speak out about the biases they experience will help raise awareness of what Pacific women experience, provide opportunities to come up with solutions, and contribute to overall wellbeing.

**For Pacific women and girl's voices to be valued in every setting, the home, church, community, workplace. For their voices to be encouraged from a young age by parents and leaders and within schools, their community and churches.**

(Samoan, 38-year-old living in Auckland)

**Give Pacific women opportunities to voice out their opinions in different platforms.**

(Tuvalu, 60-year-old living in Auckland)

**Providing spaces that are hospitable for all women to talanoa and support each other.**

(Tongan, 26-year-old living in Auckland)

**Having talanoa in many platforms such as social media.**

(Samoan, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

---

A seat at the decision-making table

Pacific women are aware that to create real, meaningful change, they need a seat at the decision-making table. This would ensure true advocacy of issues that are relevant to our Pacific communities and Pacific context interpreted through Pacific lenses. This allows for the elevation of Pacific voices. They share:

**Being invited to share our experiences rather than just guessing. If we are not at the table, then we are on the menu – but we are not here just to be consumed.**

(Tongan, 31-year-old living in Wellington)

At the highest levels, representation and a voice at the key decision-making tables. A Pacific Prime Minister would be the ultimate. Continue increasing Pacific politicians, CEOs both in the NGO and business space, global influence, and on credible and influential social media platforms.

(Samoan, 51-year-old living in Otago)

Targets for more Pacific and Pacific women, on public and private and Not-for-profit boards, and shadow opportunities for younger Pacific girls (as age appropriate). Encourage more Pacific women and girls to enrol, vote, and run for candidacy in central and local government elections, including district boards, school boards – all sorts of governance roles. Present to the UN, PIFS, and other relevant international bodies. Annual or twice-a-year audience with the Prime Minister and invite them and senior members of their party to the annual PACIFICA conference.

(Samoan, 45-year-old living in Wellington)

---

Mobilise Pacific women – strength in numbers

The participants in the online survey acknowledge the strength of coming together as a collective. This helps build confidence and upskilling through learning from others.

Provision of more opportunities to come together and learn from each other, creating confidence and awareness amongst us of each other's skills, knowledge and wisdom.

(Niue/Samoan, 38-year-old living in Porirua)

I would encourage people to seek advice from those who have already done so, but we should be submitting as groups and collectives when bills are open for public submission, when councils have their long-term plans and also be encouraged to write letters to leadership when we feel there are injustices.

(Samoan, 31-year-old living in Porirua)

Ally with each other, people in power to make change or support change. Government agencies to support ideas, needs. Different Pacific networks for different types of groups that want to focus on certain things and for equal support for these groups.

(Tongan, 31-year-old living in Auckland)



 A close-up portrait of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white flower in her hair and a lei. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The Pacifica Inc. logo is in the top right corner.
 

**PACIFICA INC.**  
*Sei September*  
 Nation-wide initiatives from our PACIFICA Inc. branches to celebrate Pacific women and girls, focusing on bolstering the mental health and well-being of our families.



**Working alongside other communities (ethnic and gender)**

As well as creating spaces and opportunities for Pacific women to unite, participants note the importance of working alongside other minority groups. Several examples were provided of the importance of walking alongside Māori and other women's groups to continue to advocate for issues that are important to women and minority groups in general.

**I believe we need to ally more with our Māori relatives and with businesspeople/the corporate sector. In the public sector, we are always going to be viewed in the deficit – but in the private corporate sector, we can have our own sovereignty ownership uplifted.**

(Samoan, 53-year-old living in Auckland)

**We need to work with other women's groups, particularly those that are indigenous, e.g., MWWL, Ministry for Women. We need to be seen and to advocate for ourselves.**

(Cook Islander, 57-year-old living in Northland)

**Ally with Maoridom, Palagi women's networks and back to our Pasefika sisterhood organisations in the Pacific homelands because we already have these networks and can collaborate more effectively towards maintaining and sustaining our place as Pasefika women in Aotearoa.**

(Samoan, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**Māori are our greatest allies in making progress in Aotearoa. Any progress we make must work for Māori too.**

(Samoan/Pākehā, 24-year-old living in Wellington)

**More forums that involve women in addressing concerns. Involve women in decision making. More women leaders in government and head of departments.**

(Samoan, 62-year-old living in Palmerston North)

---

**Access to resources and funding**

PACIFICA was seen as a group that could act as an avenue for mentoring, training or pathways to future opportunities.

**Have groups like PACIFICA do more to provide educational pathways. Have tertiary scholarships that are of real benefit to a woman's future.**

(Samoan/Tongan, 50-year-old living in Otago)

**Scholarships, mentoring, sponsoring to demonstrate pathways into leadership with proper support and pay parity, as well as the chance to own our own homes.**

(Unidentified)

However, those who participated in the survey were aware that investment (funding) is needed to support PACIFICA in creating pathways and platforms that allow for the elevation of Pacific women's voices.

**Funding training and appointments to national boards and trusts targeting Pacific women. Call upon PACIFICA to put forward nominations from their members to various boards and trusts. Work collaboratively with other women's organisations to get support for and with Pacific women. Connect with Pacific community leaders and churches to put forward Pacific women leaders to get them represented across all sectors!**

(Fijian/Tongan, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**Through funding organisations WELL, such as PACIFICA etc, to specifically work on projects to tell COMPELLING stories; we need to be purposeful in collecting these stories, and not rushed for budget rounds etc, but properly funded to be able to get the story AND the insights, and the solutions (that already sit with our people/ communities).**

(Samoan, 40-year-old living in Auckland)

---

#### Access to mentoring

As highlighted throughout this report, access to mentoring is offered through PACIFICA. The voices of our women and girls highlight the need for continued investment and support in this area.

**More Pacific women mentors to help those who are learning and upcoming and especially the younger generations. To make connections to help others reach their maximum potential.**

(Samoan, 38-year-old living in Auckland)

**Through promoting Pacific women and girls into leadership roles with appropriate training and support so that they fly and lead by example to show the pathway forward for those following.**

(Samoan/Māori, 50-year-old living in Auckland)

**Allowing for empowering programs to be led BY Pasefika women/ girls FOR Pasefika women/girls.**

(Samoan, 44-year-old living in Wellington)

**Scholarships, mentoring, sponsoring to demonstrate pathways into leadership with proper support and pay parity, as well as the chance to own our own homes.**

(Samoan, 45-year-old living in Auckland)

Access to advocacy and empowering groups/forums (online/face to face) to build networks, observe and learn from others and safe spaces to test ideas.

(Cook Islander, 58-year-old living in Wellington)

The aspiration for the future provides insights into things that are currently being done, and that should continue to be done. New ideas are needed about how organisations like PACIFICA could better support Pacific women to build on their strengths and progress towards achieving their achievements for a better future.

---

## A call for action

The report emphasises PACIFICA's critical role in bringing together Pacific women from across Aotearoa New Zealand and creating a platform for mentoring and leadership development. This report acknowledges the uniqueness of Aotearoa New Zealand, in that it is the only Western country with a dedicated MPP and MfW, which also advocate for the voices of Pacific women.

A subset of Pacific women struggle with navigating between Western and cultural spaces. There is an awareness of the biases they have to live through being brown and female. Pacific women in Aotearoa New Zealand are aware of the socioeconomic hardships and the added pressure of changing norms (when it comes to women), where they are expected to wear multiple hats and wear them well.

This report calls for the following:

---

### Development of Pacific resources

Development of resources that will help mitigate the challenges acknowledged as detrimental to Pacific women's wellbeing. For example, for those who are not confident in advancing in their professional roles, having a Pacific women leaders series. This could be a series of podcasts featuring leaders from each region and done in partnership with MfW. For those who noted not being confident in their 'cultural/ethnic' skin, providing language and cultural identity training to empower Pacific women. This could be done in partnership with MPP or organisations like the Centre for Pacific Languages.

---

### Pacific Data: For Pacific, By Pacific

This report acknowledges the paucity of data and/or research on Pacific women. It also calls on the need for more comparative statistics that assist in bringing attention to Pacific women's rates of participation in the wider Aotearoa New Zealand society and the validity of ethnic-specific and Pacific voices. It acknowledges the importance of Pacific peoples leading and writing up findings that take into consideration Pacific worldviews and environmental contexts. Let Pacific peoples be the narrators of Pacific lived experiences.

---

### Equity

'Equity' is an issue that PACIFICA is challenged to be concerned with, both amongst and between Pacific peoples.

This report calls for PACIFICA to continue to advocate for pay equity, to be a voice for Pacific communities, and to empower Pacific women and girls to continue to speak up and tell their own stories.



Pacific women (through PACIFICA) acknowledge that despite the inequities, challenges can be mitigated, with family, friends and faith - often sources of strength and resilience.

Despite the statistics, Aotearoa New Zealand has Pacific women in leadership across sectors who come together to work in partnership.

Those who are confident in their identity, and who feel safe and secure in both Western and cultural settings, are more likely to feel resilient. Also for Pacific women and girls, seeing other Pacific women and girls in leadership roles and excelling in the sector makes a difference.

This report acknowledges the role of PACIFICA in creating spaces where people can see and interact with their role models, and also upskill through those interactions.

---

### Strengthening the collective

This report also acknowledges the importance of drawing on other like-minded groups with shared commonalities (gender, ethnicity etc), echoing the amplifying of voices if we stand as a collective. PACIFICA provides a united Pacific voice and is able to be ethnic-Pacific-specific when needed.

The strength of having a PACIFICA report on Pacific women's wellbeing is that the voices of Pacific women are not diluted. Pacific women are able to speak for themselves and tell us what they want, moving forward. The call for action includes:

1. PACIFICA to continue advocating for equity, including pay equity.
2. PACIFICA to advocate for more seats around decision-making tables and representation of Pacific women at all levels.
3. Continuing to grow PACIFICA and creating opportunities for Pacific women to come together, to learn, and to upskill as a collective.
4. Funding to develop resources and programmes relevant for the advancement of Pacific wellbeing.
5. Platforms for Pacific women to learn more about their cultures, languages and identities.

---

### Strengths and limitations of the survey

A strength of the online survey is that it provided Pacific women and girls throughout Aotearoa New Zealand with an opportunity to anonymously share their views on the strengths, challenges and aspirations for the future. The questions were developed, coded and analysed by Pacific women immersed in their Pacific communities - so interpretation was through a Pacific lens.

Limitations included the need to capture the views of Pacific women with lower income and educational attainment. Another limitation was the lack of questions in the online survey specifically asking women about their experiences or views of PACIFICA. This report acknowledges that this is a pilot, and future research similar to this would provide more insights on the views and experiences of Pacific women and areas for advocacy.



# References

1. Anae, M. (1997). Towards a NZ-born a Samoan identity: Some reflections on 'labels'.
2. Bedford, R. & Hugo, G. (2012). Population movement in the Pacific: A perspective on future prospects. Labour and Immigration Research Centre.
3. Cochrane, B & Pacheco, G. (2022) Empirical analysis of Pacific, Māori and ethnic pay gaps in New Zealand. NZ Work Research Institute, Auckland, NZ.
4. de Raad, J. & Walton, M. (2007). Pacific People in the New Zealand economy: Understanding trends and linkages. Paper presented at Thought Leaders Dialogue, Auckland, 30-31 August 2007.
5. Hau'ofa, E. (1993). A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands. School of Social and Economic Development, The University of the South Pacific in association with Beake House.
6. Hawke, G., Bedford, R., Kukutai, T., McKinnon, M., Olssen, E., & Spoonley, P. (2014). Our futures. Te Pae Tawhiti. The 2013 Census and New Zealand's changing population. The Royal Society of New Zealand.
7. Hodges, T. (2018). 'Aere' Aere Opara Ki Mua, Pursue Pursue and Push on: Teaching Cook Islands Māori to adults in New Zealand. A critical review of literature.
8. Meissel, K., Bergquist, M., & Kumarich, J., et al. (2021). The Growing Up in New Zealand COVID-19 Wellbeing Survey: Part 2: Education. Auckland.
9. Ministry for Pacific Peoples (2022) Pacific Wellbeing Strategy, cited from Ministry for Pacific Peoples — All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy ([mpp.govt.nz](http://mpp.govt.nz))
10. Ongley, P. (1996). 'Immigration, Employment and Ethnic Relations', in Nga Patai: Racism and ethnic relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand, edited by Cluny Macpherson, David Pearson and Paul Spoonley, 17-36. Dunmore Press.
11. Spoonley, P. & Bedford, R. (2012). Welcome to our world? Immigration and the reshaping of New Zealand. Dunmore Press.
12. Statistics New Zealand. (2018). Pacific Peoples ethnic group. Cited from [www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples](http://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples)
13. Statistics New Zealand. (2019). Pacific Peoples ethnic group. Cited from 2018 Census ethnic group summaries | Stats NZ
14. Taufa, S. (2015). A mother's hope: Pacific teenage pregnancy in New Zealand. Doctoral dissertation, ResearchSpace@ Auckland.
15. Treasury. (2018). The New Zealand Pacific economy. Cited from <https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/commissioned-report/new-zealand-pacific-economy>
16. World Health Organization. (2021). Health promotion glossary of terms. SBN 978-92-4-003834-9 (electronic version).



**Published November 2023**

**Web:** [www.pacifica.org.nz](http://www.pacifica.org.nz)

**Email:** [pacificanationalexec@gmail.com](mailto:pacificanationalexec@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/PACIFICA.INC](https://facebook.com/PACIFICA.INC)

**Instagram:** [instagram.com/pacifica.incorporated](https://instagram.com/pacifica.incorporated)



Pasefika  
**PROUD**

Our Families, Our People, Our Responsibility

