

Podcast
episode

02

2026

**THE HEALTH AND
WELLBEING OF
MĀORI WHO LEAVE PRISON**

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

TIAKI

**AND WHAT
GOVERNMENT DATA
TELLS US**

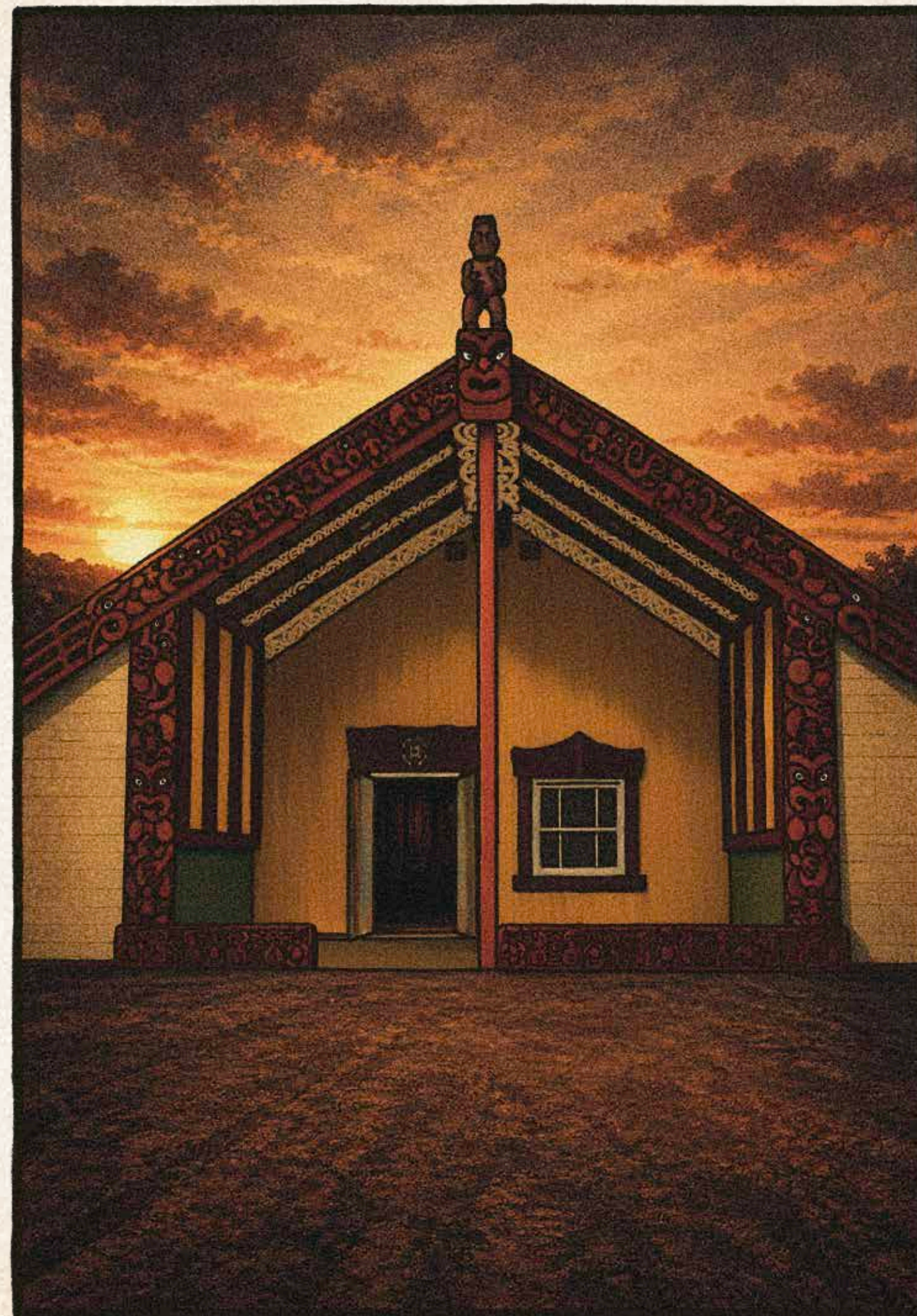
TIAKI

TIAKI (meaning ‘to care’) is a Kaupapa Māori research project that focuses on the lived experiences of Māori adults who have been imprisoned (in prisons either in New Zealand or overseas) and their whānau.



For more
information on
TIAKI, check
out our podcast

Published by the TIAKI Rōpū Rangahau
2026, Te Whanganui-a-Tara



Māori are imprisoned in Aotearoa New Zealand on a mass scale. And even though the government has obligations to make sure it is serving all of its citizens well, including those in prisons, it does not count the population accurately so its monitoring is... variable.

And then once Māori leave prison, and go back to the community, the government also has obligations to make sure the health and social systems are working equitably for them. But again, the lack of data means the government does not know much at all about how its actions (or inactions) are serving Māori individuals and whānau after imprisonment.

TIAKI is focused on better outcomes for Māori and whānau after imprisonment. Together, the TIAKI Rōpū Rangahau – which includes academics at Otago University, the team at Tū Kotahi, Te Rākau

o Te Wāo Tapu Nui and kairangahau with lived experience of prisons, looked at this issue in a couple of different ways – and one of those was by looking at the data.

This graphic novella (which is a term we may have sort of made up), pairs some of the findings that we previously published in academic articles with the glorious illustrations of Jordan Tane. The illustrations help to bring life to our findings and emphasise our hope for a future without prisons on Māori whenua.

To go with this graphic novella, we have a podcast episode focused on the quantitative findings. You can scan the QR code on the previous page to find out more!

Ngā mihi

Paula and Gabrielle

TIAKI

The health and wellbeing of
Māori who leave prison and what
Government Data tells us

Māori are imprisoned on a mass scale in New Zealand.

In March 2026, the Department of Corrections reported that...

11,255 people were imprisoned:

4,537 people remanded awaiting trial or sentencing;

6,606 who had received a prison sentence;

112 in mental health facilities and in police custody.

The numbers are the highest they have been

for the last several years, and they keep on rising.

As part of the TIAKI project, we wanted to understand more about the health and wellbeing of Māori who leave prisons.

And one way we wanted to do this was through looking at the data government agencies collect.

Associate Professor
Paula Toko King
Te Rōpū Rangahau
Hauora a Eru Pōmare,
University of Otago



The first thing we do as good data researchers,
is to ask about the quality of Corrections
data for Māori,

because we already know that Māori
are being undercounted in Health data.

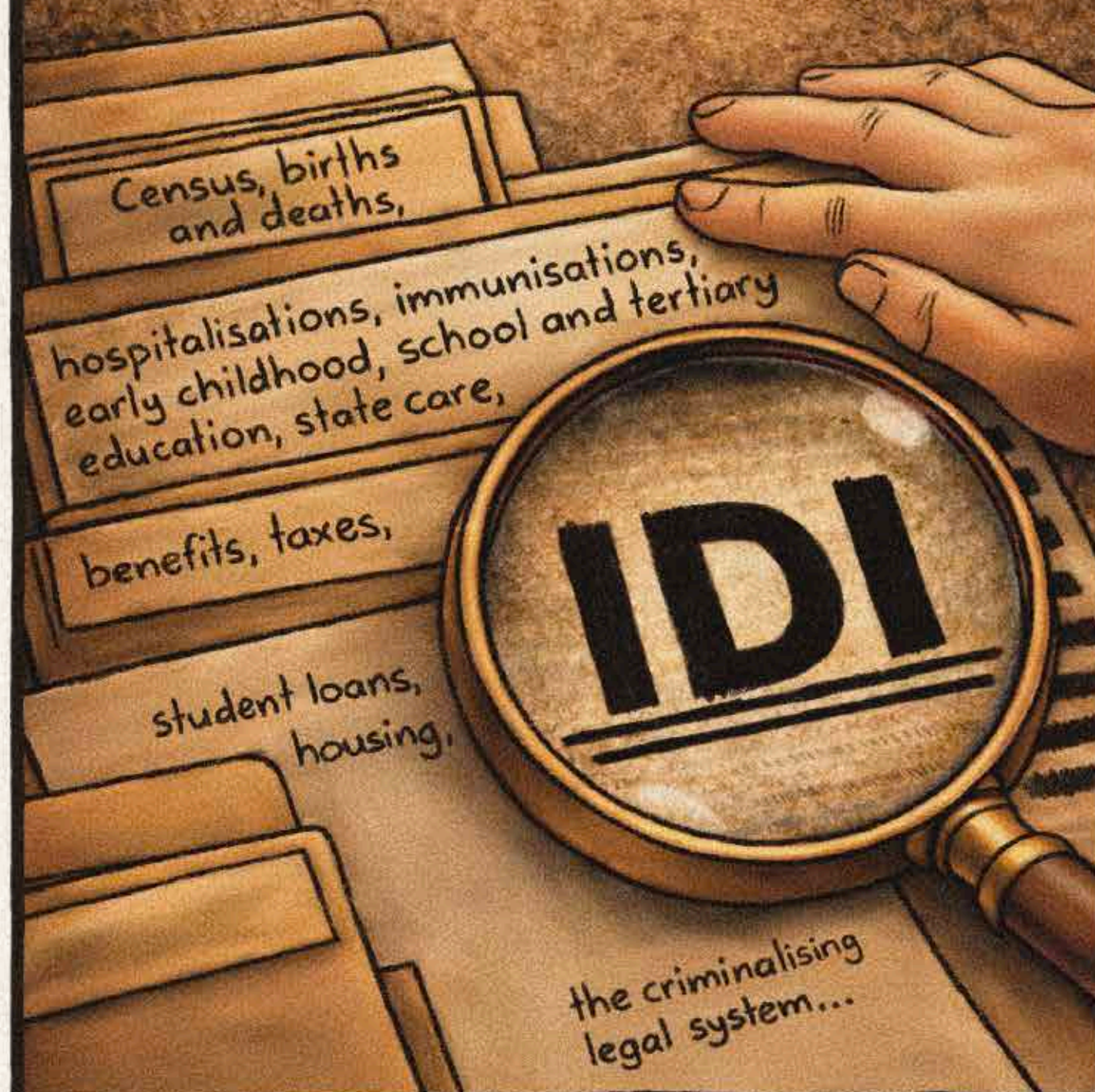


Associate Professor
Ruth Cunningham
University of Otago

We used data from the Stats NZ
Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI).

The IDI is a large database that includes
de-identified data (no names or full dates of birth)
from government, non-government organisations
and government surveys.

A few examples of the types of de-identified data
the IDI holds include...



It is important to think about how data
should be used ethically, and follow principles
of Māori Data Sovereignty.

So, together with kairangahau (researchers) on the broader team who have lived experience of prisons,

we developed a
'Tikanga and Māori Data
Sovereignty Framework'

to help guide us on how data in our **TIAKI** project
should be analysed, framed, and presented.

We compared data held by Corrections with data
held in the IDI and found it undercounted Māori.

ARA POUTAMA
AOTEAROA
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



The Department of
Corrections data
says that over half
of those imprisoned
are Māori

52%

But when we looked at the IDI...

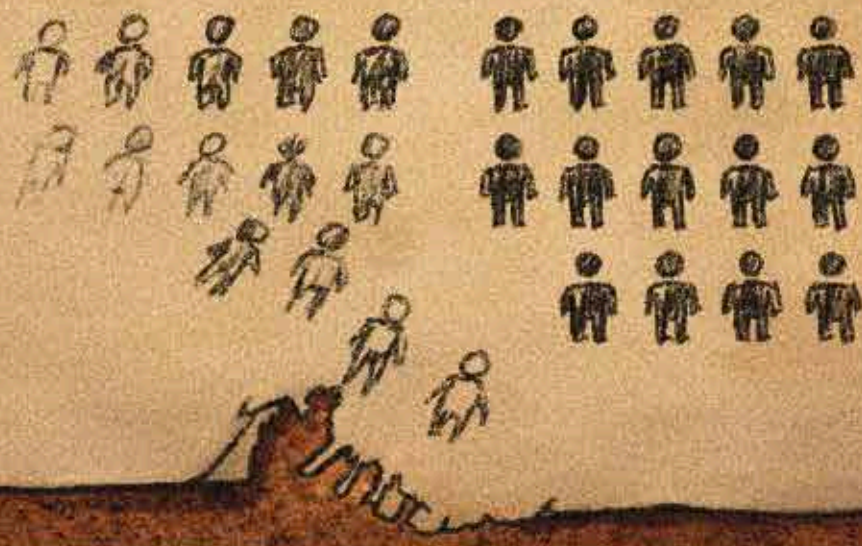
we found there were
more people who
self-identified as Māori
than what Corrections
was reporting.

We could quantify this as Corrections undercounting the number of Māori in prisons

by around...

6%

The **6%** undercount of Māori equates to at least an extra **405** Māori in prisons than what is being reported by Corrections.



Once we understood the quality issues with the data we wanted to understand what the government's

data told us about health and wellbeing of Māori when they

... leave prison.

Māori coming out of prison are young...

84% were under **45** years of age.
And they are mostly tāne Māori **88%**

REMAND

REMAND

And most released
from remand

64%

rather than
sentenced
imprisonment.

REMAND

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
X	X	X	X	X	X
JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

With the majority imprisoned for
less than **6 months**
(72%) before released.

Half were reimprisoned
within a year.

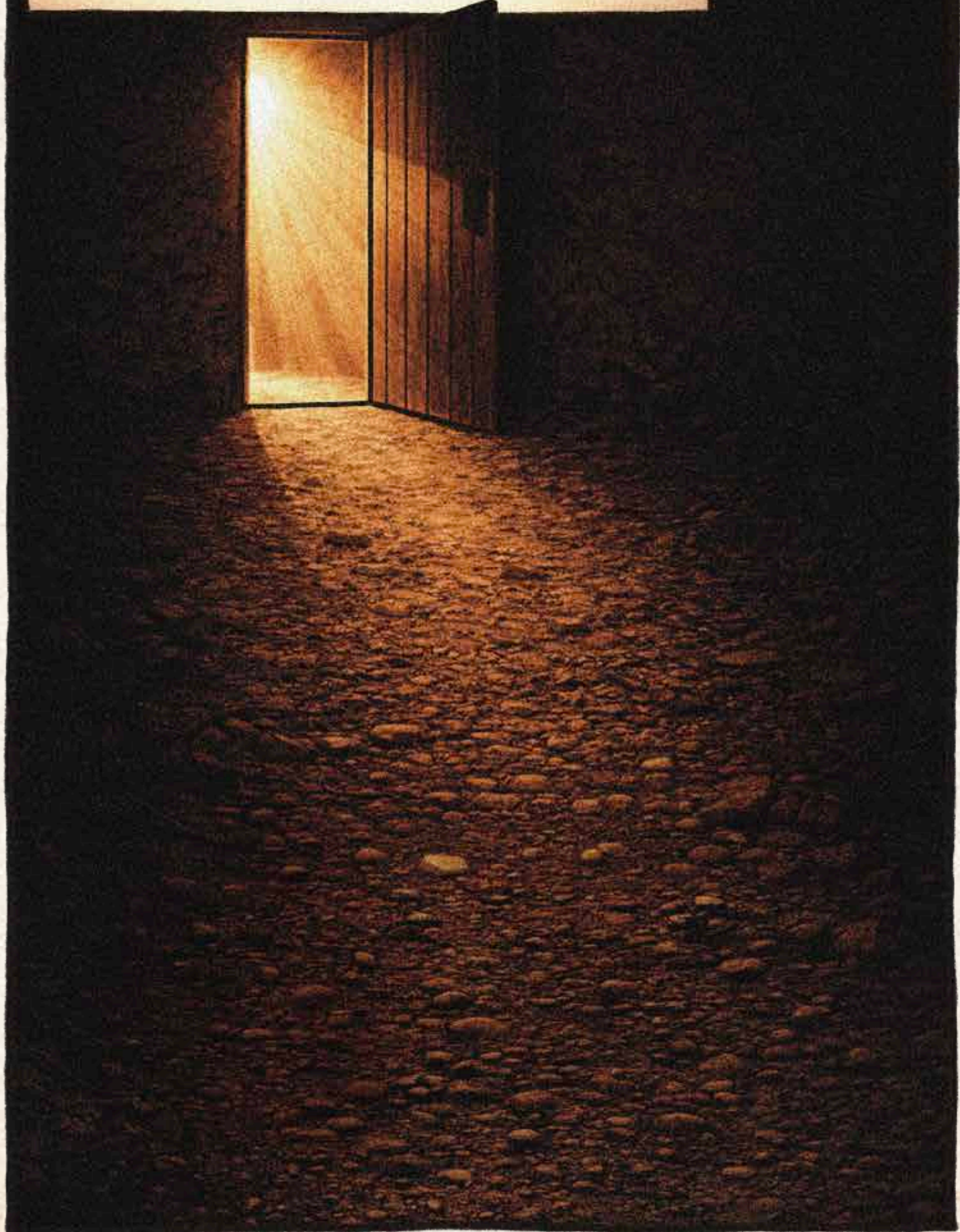
We also found that people released from prisons have more than **3x** the death rate of people in the New Zealand population



The most common causes of death occur from cardiovascular disease, cancer and suicide.

The risk of death is highest in the first month after release from prisons...

Suicide rates are highest among those released from being on remand.



In the wider community primary health care is the main point for New Zealanders accessing health care.



Most people access primary health care through enrolment in a Primary Health Organisation through a general practice.

These practices can be ...

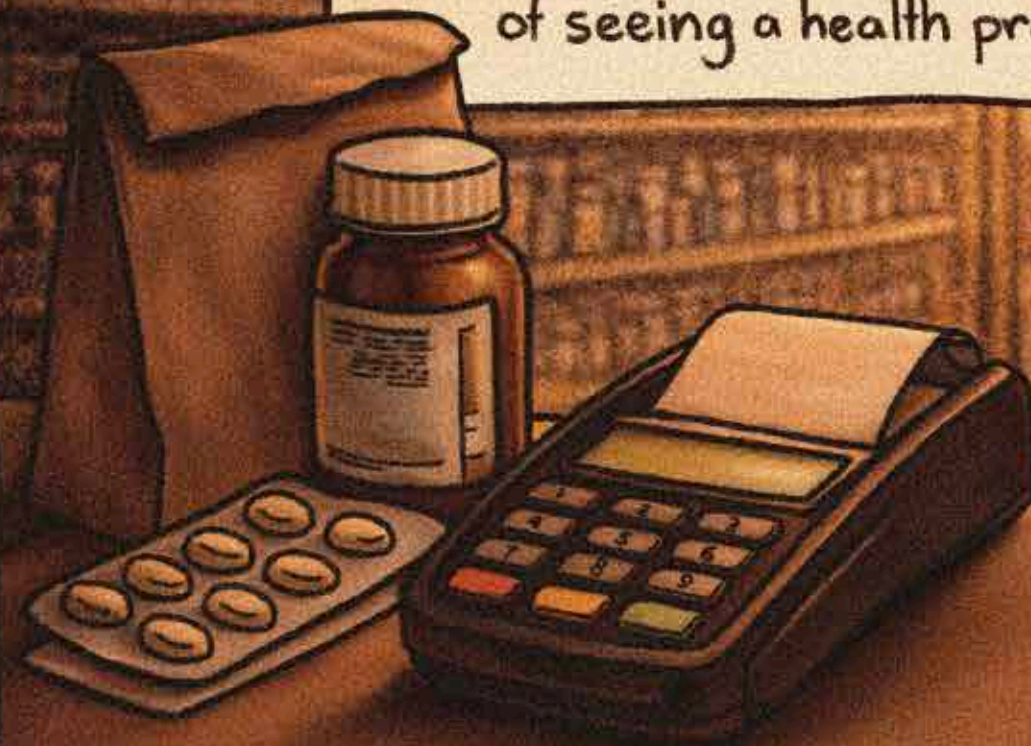
- ☐ Mainstream and operate for profit
- ☐ or be not for profit providers
- ☐ Māori health providers
- ☐ or Pacific health providers.



While lots of primary health care is funded by the government,



a person usually pays some of the cost of seeing a health practitioner



and picking up prescribed medicines from a pharmacy.

People in prison do not have access
to these community-based services.

However, these healthcare services
Stop when a person is released
from prison.

Instead, the Department of Corrections must provide
healthcare 'reasonably equivalent to the standard
available to the public' under the Corrections Act
2004.

We already know from overseas data that people leaving prison and re-entering the community



have major barriers to accessing a range of health and social services, and essentials...



like affordable housing.

To our knowledge this is the first study to have examined at a national level

Search Research Results

0 Results

the primary health care experiences of Indigenous Peoples following release from prison.

Guided by our 'Tikanga and Māori Data Sovereignty Framework', we used the IDI again.

blood pressure

We found that just over 3 quarters of Māori (or 76%) were enrolled with a general practice for some or all of the year following their release from prison.

And almost all were enrolled with VLCA practices.

VLCA stands for very low cost access practices that offer very low- or no-cost primary healthcare

Children aged 0-13 years: free

Children aged 14-17 years: up to \$13

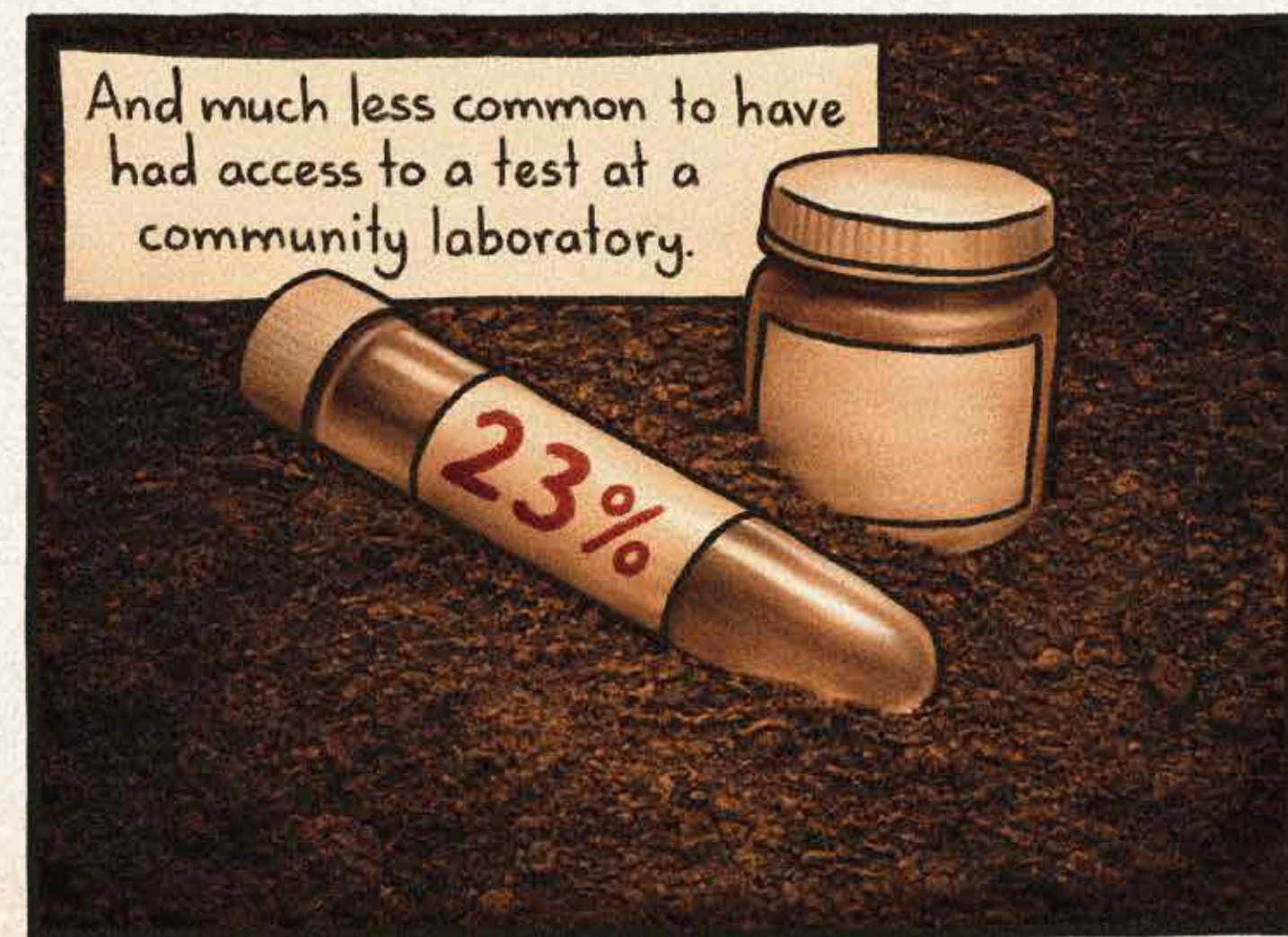
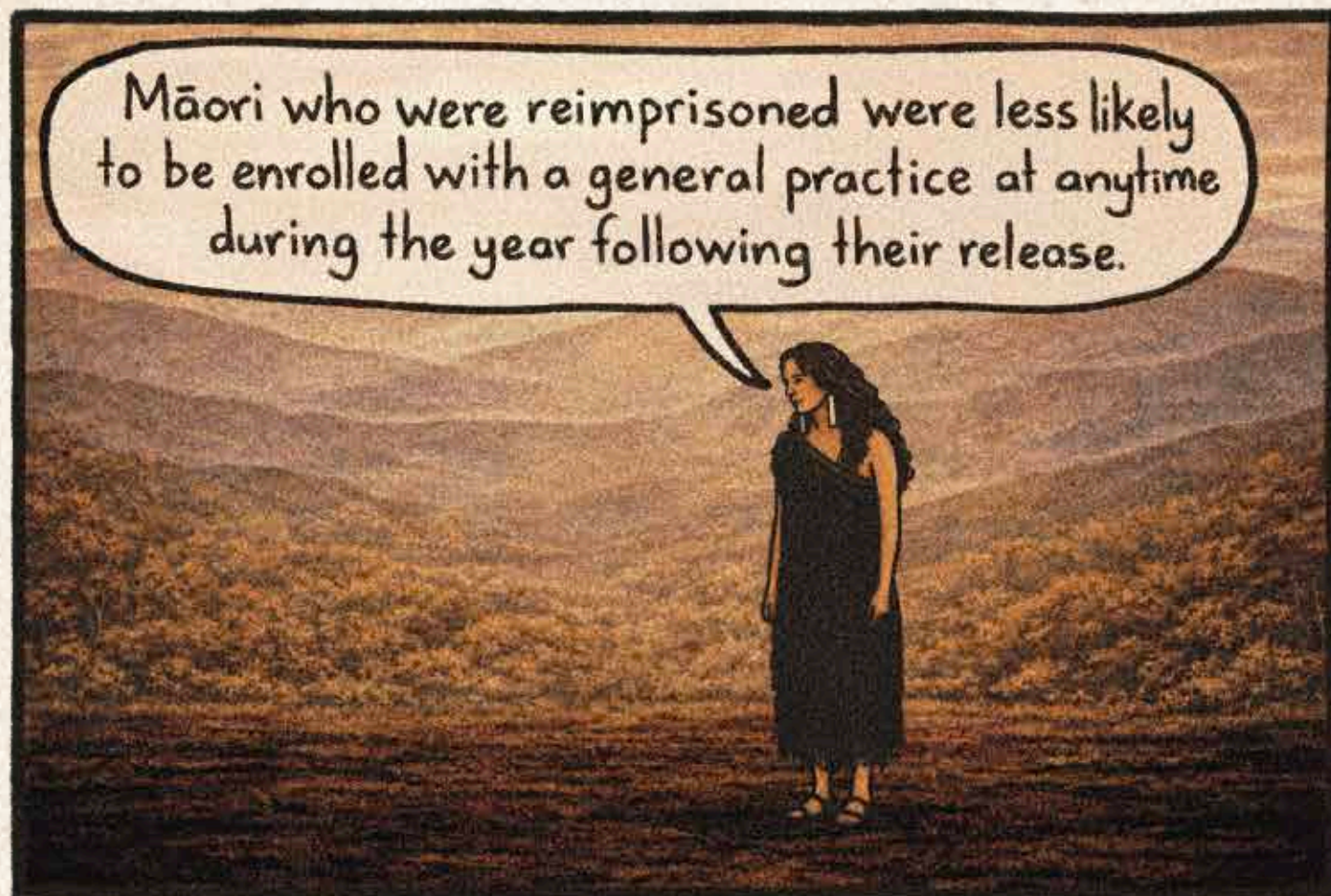
Adults 18 years and over: up to \$19.50

prices from [healthnz.govt.nz](https://www.healthnz.govt.nz)

This means 1 quarter of Māori released from prison did not have access to low- or no-cost primary healthcare.

24%

This is a large proportion of the population and a serious concern given the critical importance of universal access to primary healthcare.



A third of Māori coming out of prison had some evidence of contact with mental health services in the year following their release.



This is really high when you know these services are only set up to deliver for...

3-4%
of the population.

Māori released from prison have high rates of emergency department presentations particularly in the first week after their release.

Rates were significantly higher for wāhine compared with tāne Māori.

Regional
HOSPITAL

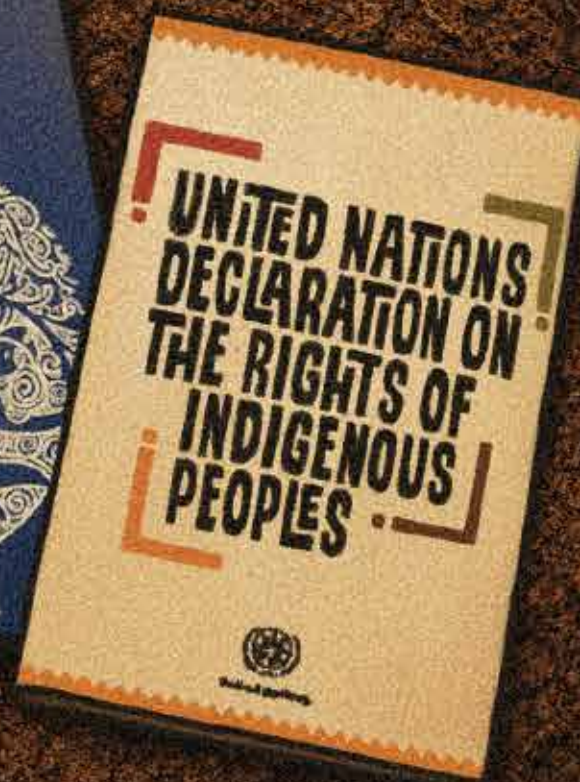
Emergency →

Delivery Suite →

← P Main Entrance

Where people stayed longer in the emergency department, it was mostly due to head injuries with the majority caused by assault.

Our findings show poorer access to and poorer quality of primary healthcare for Māori released from prisons and demonstrate a breach of government obligations to Māori under...

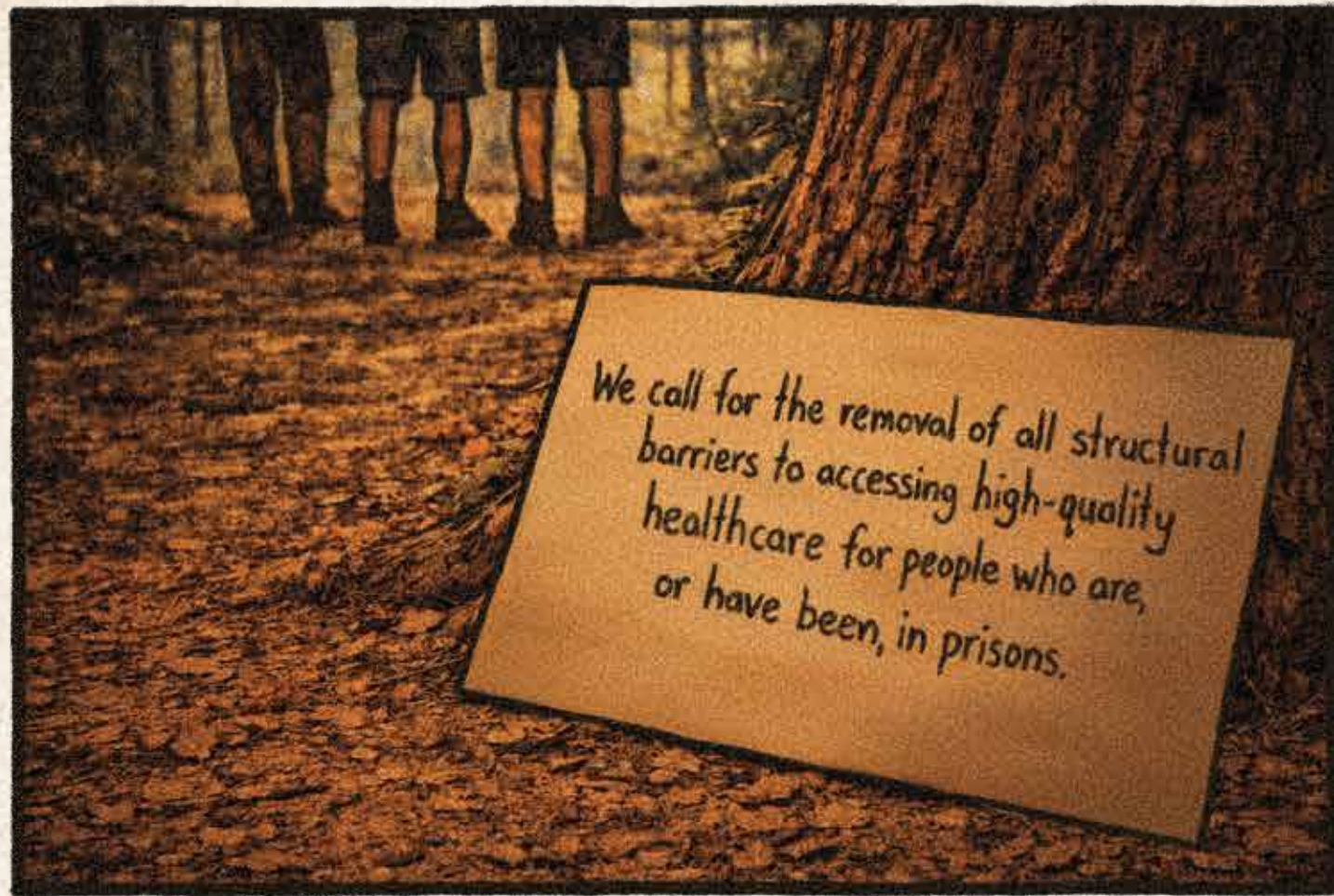


Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We do not accept the inevitability of prisons.



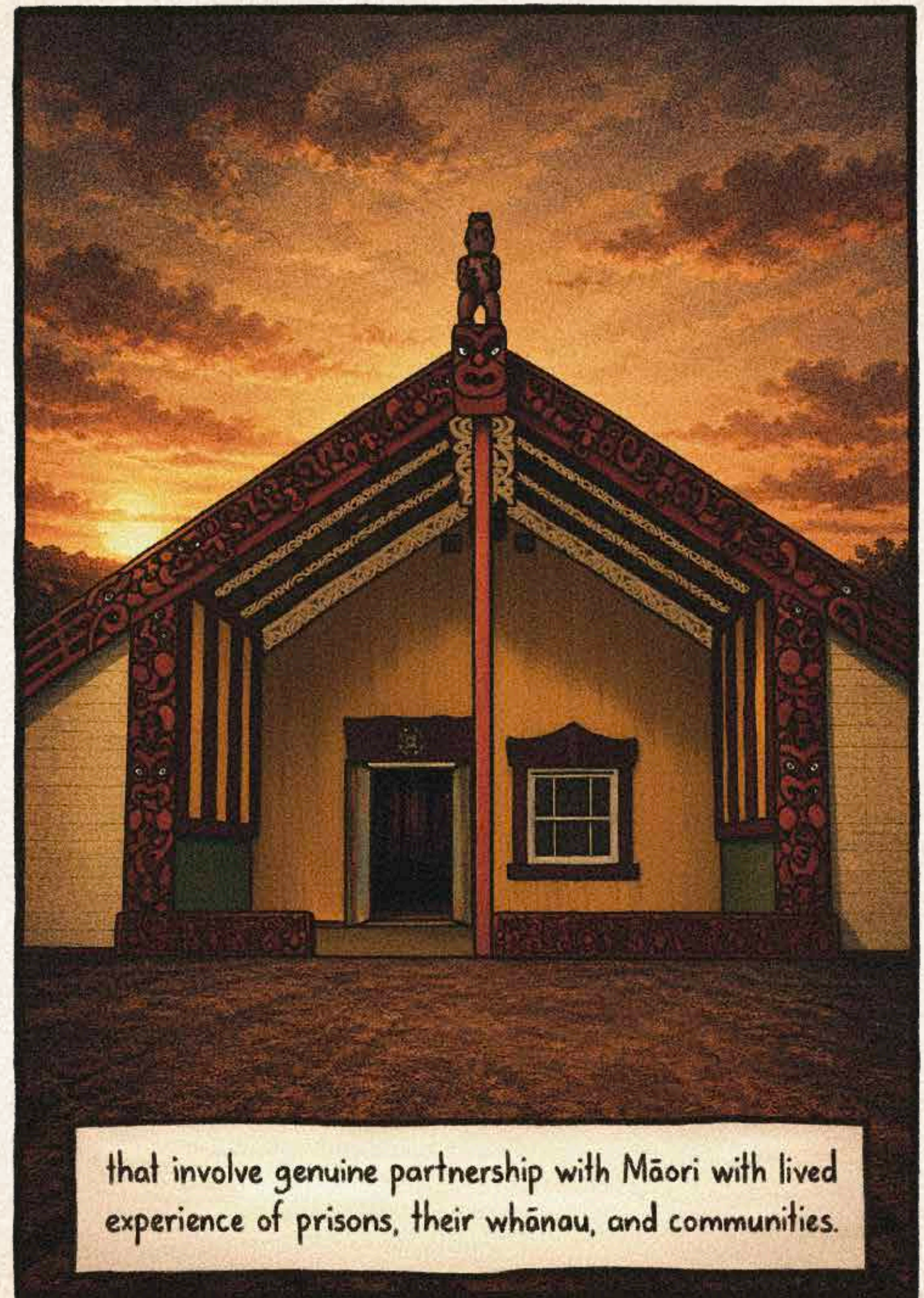
However whilst prisons exist and until there are no prisons left on whenua Māori...



We call for the removal of all structural barriers to accessing high-quality healthcare for people who are, or have been, in prisons.



And the design and implementation of evidence-informed and culturally safe health policies, strategies, and programmes...



that involve genuine partnership with Māori with lived experience of prisons, their whānau, and communities.

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The TIAKI research project was co-led by Paula Toko King, Cheryl Davies, and Ruth Cunningham.

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We also thank Wainuiomata Marae for allowing us to include an image of their wharenui.

Authored by Paula Toko King and Gabrielle Baker.

No generative AI was used in the creation of this zine.

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