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The eruption of Tonga's underwater volcano, Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai, on January 15 has had a massive impact, both on those in Tonga and on Tongans living in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere. There has been an outpouring of support for Tonga, with people asking how they can donate clothes, food, money, and other support.

In addition to the general desire of people to help others during a disaster, there is another reason why New Zealanders have felt such a pull to help Tonga during this time. Due to a long history of Tonga and Aotearoa being trading partners, there is a large Tongan population here. More than 60,000 people in Aotearoa identify as Tongan, and one third of this population was born in Tonga.

However, the Tongans born in Aotearoa are experiencing a rapid language shift, losing the ability to speak Tongan often within a single generation. This fact is devastating, especially during times like the recent volcanic eruption, as many Tongans must wait for news to be translated into English by family, friends,



Other than events such as Tongan Language Week, most schools in Aotearoa offer little support for Tongan, writes Corinne Seals.
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STUFF

Tokelauan, or Fijian (no information was reported for Rotuman, Kiribati, or Tuvaluan). Even Samoan, which is the third most spoken language in Aotearoa, with more than 80,000 speakers, is available to fewer than 4000 students in just 80 mainstream schools.

In addition to the lack of educational support generally, we also rarely find Pacific languages used in public signage, or in media, outside of each dedicated language week. This also decreases the likelihood that Pacific languages will stay alive and well. Even at home, Pacific language-speaking parents, like all minority language-speaking parents, often do not have the resources or dedicated time to make up for the lack of public support.

Why does this matter?

Researchers such as Leitumalo Paongo-Parsons, Melani Anae, and Sam Manuela among others have found that language plays an important role in wellbeing for Pacific communities. Being able to speak the language of family and ancestors contributes to better mental health and overall improved social and spiritual wellbeing. These researchers have found this to be the case especially for Pacific youth living in Aotearoa.

To loop back to the beginning, it is clear how access to Tongan would support mental health and wellbeing for Tongan youth during the current crisis. So, in addition to asking what you can do to support those in Tonga now, ask what you can do to support Pacific youth in Aotearoa regularly.

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Pacific support

Language Matters

and/or other news outlets to know what is happening. What's more, this language shift is happening across all Pacific communities in Aotearoa at an equally rapid rate.

So what is contributing to the rapid shift?

There are a number of factors involved in language shift, including what type of support is available publicly, and what type of resources are available in the home. Pacific languages in Aotearoa have a long and complicated history, often involving a lack of support from the

government and educational institutions. While there is more language support currently, it is still far below what it needs to be to prevent such rapid language shift.

For example, the 2016 Education Counts data shows that Tongan was offered as a subject in only 18 mainstream schools in all of Aotearoa, which allowed only 1700 primary school students and fewer than 600 secondary school students to enrol across the country.

The issue is similarly stark for other Pacific languages, with only 15 mainstream schools offering Cook Islands Māori, and even fewer offering Niuean,

theguardian

Politics drives end to Covid rules

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by Stuff newspapers.

No one is under the illusion that the ending of Covid restrictions in England from January 26 is driven by science. The prime minister's announcement was prompted by political desperation, not data. The daily death rate last Wednesday was reported as 359.

Scientists warn that infections are likely to resurge. While the level of infection across the population and health staff absences are falling sharply, hospitalisations are double the level that they were when the restrictions were introduced.

It is true that Omicron has wreaked less damage than feared – though many have still lost loved ones, or suffered lasting damage to their health.

Viewpoint

With vaccines and treatments now available, people are rethinking what constitutes appropriate and proportionate responses to the virus. Restrictions have saved countless lives, but they have economic, social and indeed health costs.

The prime minister's recklessness and self-interest have already cost the nation dearly. A more responsible course of action would minimise the risks to the vulnerable through mandatory masking, ensuring testing is available to all and introducing proper sick pay. It is easy to say that we must learn to live with Covid. But to do so ethically means focusing on the welfare of all – not the political survival of the prime minister.