Social Service Providers | Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa



Understanding Generative AI use in the social services sector

October 2026

Introduction

In June 2026, Te Pai Ora SSPA surveyed social services sector kaimahi and leaders on how they are currently using, or not using, generative AI (genAI) tools. We defined genAI as a type of AI that can create new content (text, images, video, audio, code) in response to human prompts. It is trained on very large collections of existing content which has been taken from the internet and other sources.

We received a significant number of responses, over 300, representing frontline and back-office kaimahi, managers, senior leaders and those in governance positions. This included a range of different social service organisations working in child protection, social work, youth justice, housing, health, sexual violence and family violence services. We'd like to extend a big thanks to everyone who contributed their time and insights to this survey. Tēnā koutou katoa. Your input has been invaluable for helping us formulate our position.

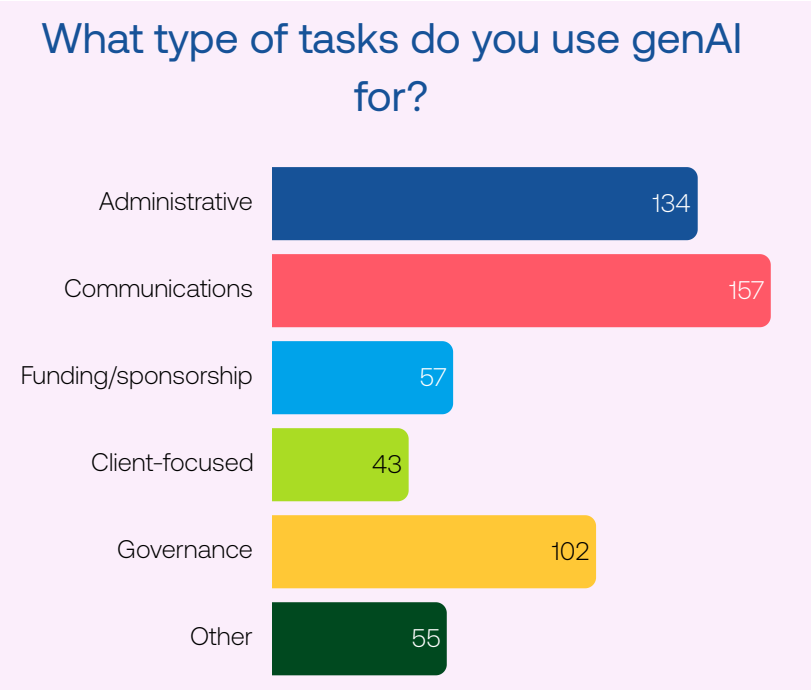
This report discusses the key findings and shares quotes from respondents.

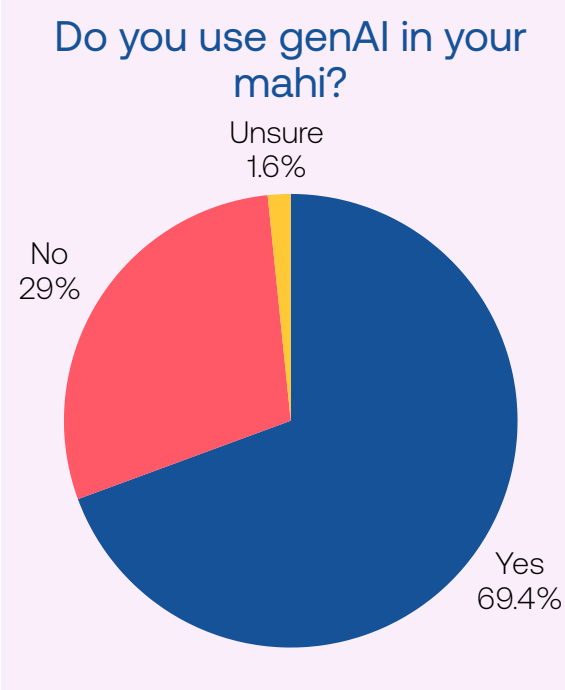
Most respondents are using genAI in some capacity, but experiences are varied

Among the respondents, over two thirds (69.7%) indicated they are using genAI in their mahi. This compares to 29.3% who are not using it and 2.0% who are unsure.

However, this usage varies depending on respondents' roles in the organisation. Generally, people are more likely to use genAI if they are in a governance or senior leadership role (83.9%), a people manager (78.2%), a back office kaimahi (74.0%), or specialist/academic (69.2%) than if they have a frontline role (49.5%).

The most common type of task that respondents use genAI for was communication (73.8% of those that use it), followed by administration (63.1%), governance work (48.1%), funding or sponsorship applications (27.1%) and client focused work (20.6%). Over a quarter (25.7%) used it for some other purpose including research, professional development or client-facing work.

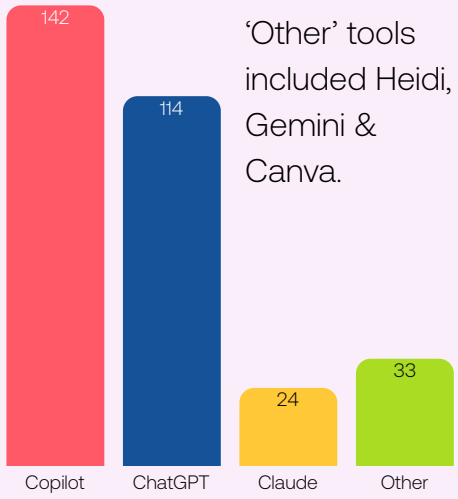




Those that use genAI tend to use it frequently: 42.5% said they used it daily, 42.1% weekly, 6.5% monthly and just 4.2% less than that. 14.5% described themselves as 'very confident' using genAI safely and appropriately in their mahi while 34.1% described themselves as 'confident', 39.3% 'somewhat confident', 6.1% 'not confident' and 1.9% 'very unconfident'.

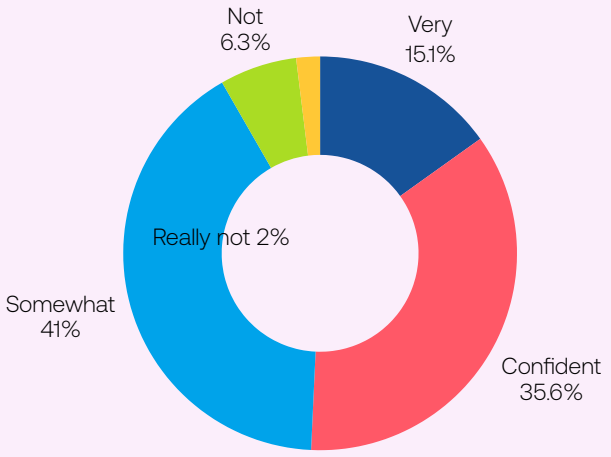
Copilot was cited most frequently among respondents with 66.8% using it. This was followed by ChatGPT (53.74%) and Claude (11.7%). A range of tools were named by those that selected 'other', with Heidi and Gemini frequently mentioned.

What genAI tools do you use?



'Other' tools included Heidi, Gemini & Canva.

How confident are you in using genAI tools safely and appropriately in your mahi?



"Most of my learning is done separately from my mahi. I then apply judgement about what can and can't be brought into my mahi. As a leader in this space, I like to position myself near the leading edge of this tech so I know what my team and the wider organisation can safely adopt."
-People Manager

"No client work. I use it for team development, creating tools (checklists) etc. or helping me set agendas, structuring meetings, also writing my cover letter for job apps etc."
-People Manager

"Strategic planning, developing, using it multiple times a day."
-CEO

"We were encouraged to use AI by our employer."
-People Manager

"I spend a lot of time training AI to develop clear foundations. I do this with each major new topic. If you don't put the work in, the quality is not there."
-CEO

"I haven't been available to take up the trainings that have been offered. I think there was one online training that was too hard to get into - tech was a bit daunting I think so I gave up trying to apply."
-Frontline Kaimahi

Increasing providers have their own AI policies, but want further guidance

Over half (57.9%) of respondents who use genAI, indicated that their organisation had an AI policy. Although we would like the entire sector to have clear internal guidance on the use of genAI, this is higher than we've seen reported in other sectors. For example, in 2025, the Public Service Association surveyed its members on AI use and found only 12% had a policy on the use of AI at work. In Fundsorter's July survey of participants in its AI for Charities course, 32% said their organisation had an AI policy.

"Our organisation is struggling to write a policy that is both focused on tech decisions and on what is best professional practice."
-Back Office Kaimahi

Fewer people had received formal training on genAI—51.0% indicated that they had received some training but most of these responses (34.2%) indicated this was minimal or one-off training. Very few respondents said they had received extensive training. Thirteen specifically mentioned learning and development sessions facilitated by Te Pai Ora SSPA as part of their training.

"... I don't think additional training is required for me, I have done an extensive amount of self-guided learning and assurance from a privacy and ethics POV."
-Back Office Kaimahi

This reflects a strong theme that came through in many of the written responses to the survey: providers want clearer guidance on their use of genAI and if they don't receive it from government, they will do what they can within those constraints. KPMG found similar themes in its 2025 study on attitudes towards AI.

"I really think Te Whatu Ora need to take more action and provide more guidance and expertise to their contractors rather than what is realistically minimal guidance online. From my perspective, organisations are being left to individually develop their processes and AI policies in isolation, which risks creating inconsistent standards of safety, privacy, and quality across the sector. There's also a real concern for smaller organisations who don't have dedicated IT or governance capability. AI has the potential to widen the gap between well-resourced providers and those who are already stretched, particularly when the risks like privacy, ethical use, and safety are so significant... I think there's a real opportunity for a more coordinated, sector-wide approach. Shared frameworks, guidance, and capability-building, so organisations aren't duplicating effort and the sector can move forward more safely and consistently."
-People Manager

This desire for leadership came through strongly in the responses to the last question: "Do you have any other thoughts to share about the use of Generative AI in the social sector?" Over one-in-five responses referred in some way to the need for more training, internal policies or leadership from government.

"The use of Generative AI in the social sector should be guided by clear ethical frameworks, including Te Tiriti-informed practice, equity considerations, and cultural responsiveness. Sector-wide guidance, training, and shared standards would support safe and effective adoption."
-Chief Executive

"We are constantly fighting to control a technology that is scaling faster then we can handle. With limited advice coming from the governing bodies above our organisation, it's being left to us (and all the organisations that sit adjacent to us) to independently develop guidance and policy. We're all doing this in isolation, with limited direction or guidance from above."
-People Manager

Despite the high uptake, reservations remain, especially around privacy

The strong call for leadership and guidance is unsurprising given the number of responses that expressed concerns with genAI, even among the majority who use it regularly.

By far, the most common concern expressed by respondents was the idea that genAI may compromise privacy or security. A number of those not using genAI cited privacy as a reason for this. Of those using genAI, over half (151) mentioned concerns about privacy or security in response to the question: "What are your concerns, if any, about using Generative AI in your mahi?"

Interestingly, within this theme, there were a wide range of different responses and approaches, especially around sharing client information. At the more risk-averse end were respondents who said they would never use AI for client-facing work. Others argued that any privacy risk was over-stated. Responses included a range of views on what kinds of identifying details (e.g. client names) are appropriate to input into large language models.

"I was involved in a private meeting regarding safety of a child. One online attendee said that they had Otter on their computer and were unable to delete it. The professional asked the meeting if we were ok with that. Through lack of knowledge, we agreed. In hindsight, and after consultation with others, it was determined that the meeting should not have proceeded with Otter active. If the attendee had not commented the others attending would not have known that Otter was recording the meeting."
-Frontline Kaimahi

"If I'm honest, I don't really understand the privacy issues around AI. I need to do some further research however I have overheard kōrero that this is potentially a big issue."
-Frontline Kaimahi

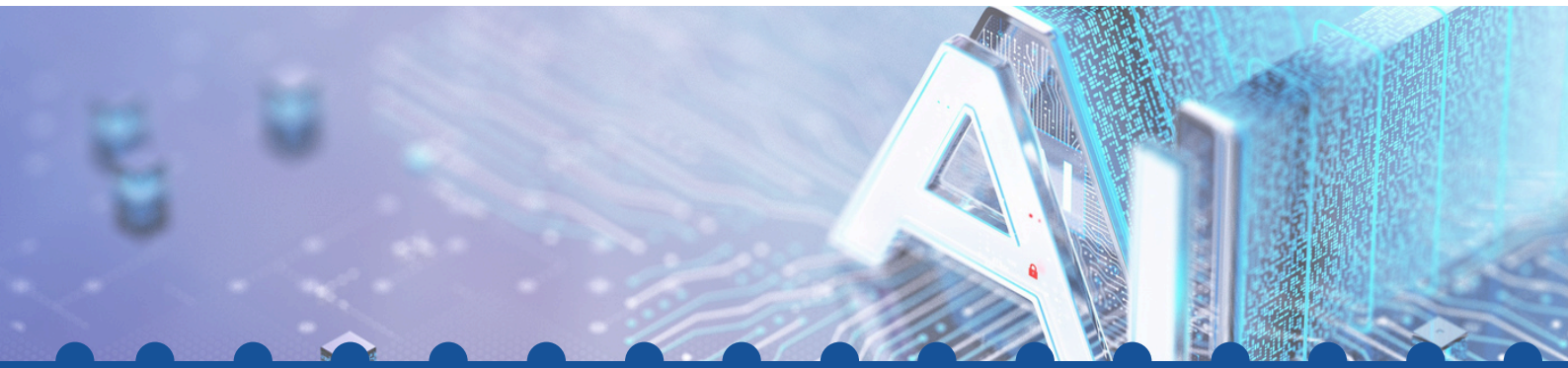
"Company policy is that no client data is to go into AI. I understand this but also think there is a lot of potential to support front line work to be sped up through AI use but need to find ways to do it safely."
-People Manager

"Social-service clients often cannot meaningfully opt out, which raises ethical concerns around consent and power imbalance. Privacy issues remain the predominant concern."
-People Manager

"I was against it, until I employed a new staff member who slowly showed me the benefits while also maintaining my non-negotiables like privacy."
-People Manager

"While none of the data or information I give it is identifiable, it is not stupid and has figured out who we are."
-People Manager

"Confidentiality is not breached with first names only."
-Frontline Kaimahi



A range of other concerns were raised

Other than privacy, respondents expressed a broad range of concerns about genAI. Responses to the question "Why are you not using Generative AI in your mahi?" included 57.8% who selected 'Lack of training/knowledge', 76.7% who selected 'Ethical concerns', 14.4% who selected 'Lack of funding', 20.0% who selected 'Lack of access to tools', and 32.2% who selected 'Other'. Free-text responses to this last category included concerns about privacy and security.

Amongst those using genAI, further themes that emerged from the question "What are your concerns, if any, about using Generative AI in your mahi?" These included:

- that responses generated by AI may contain incorrect information (81 responses)

"I have seen the AI hallucinating information and fabricating sources / quotes in response to my queries, so I am wary of it."
-People Manager

"I also like to use my own brain rather than outsource problem solving, writing etc. There are plenty of studies already that show its negative impact on cognition."
-Back Office Kaimahi

- that kaimahi may rely on genAI to the extent that they stop being able to do their job effectively (71 responses)

- that people may use AI without fully understanding how it works, or the risks involved (52 responses)

"you have to know the basics of how to use it and more importantly cross checking and checking case notes, data analysis and recommendations, not everyone you work with does this and this can be dangerous."
-Frontline Kaimahi

"Whanau will be interacting with a 'robot' not a real human."
-Back Office Kaimahi

- that use of genAI may undermine or contradict the human or emotional aspects of a role (46 responses)

- the environmental impacts of the technology, especially driven by data centres (19 responses)

"At a time when climate change is worsening, we've invented a way to speed it up dramatically - sucking up enormous amounts of water, polluting the earth, draining massive amounts of electricity."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"Ensuring that information is accurate, unbiased, and is relevant to our context in Aotearoa."
-Back Office Kaimahi

- the bias of algorithms (18 responses)

- the sovereignty of data stored offshore, especially Māori data (16 responses)

"I have concerns about the place of indigenous knowledges within AI spaces."
-People Manager

"the AI industry in itself promotes a philosophy which I believe is incompatible with the principles at the heart of social work."
-People Manager

- the political orientation of the tech industry, the individuals who own the platforms and their military applications (15 responses)

- that widespread uptake of genAI may erode labour rights (11 responses)

"That it hides just how much work we are doing in a day, month, year and that it will become the norm and expected to keep up the pace of work it allows."
-People Manager

There are a few enthusiastic adopters

Scepticism about genAI is far from universal. Even among those who expressed reservations, there are a number of people who are finding ways to use it in their work. This enthusiasm can be seen in the responses to the question "What do you see as the benefits or opportunities, if any, of using Generative AI in your mahi?"

"The ability to have a real time log that retains each child's entire data history. It further tailors the care based on the entire historical context of each child and makes it easier for us to do our job more effectively while reducing human error."
-Frontline Kaimahi

By far, the most common benefit or opportunity cited was the potential for genAI to save time and improve productivity which was alluded to in 153 responses.

Other themes included that:

- genAI could be better at writing than kaimahi (64 responses)

"It has helped me with my tone, summarises what I am trying to say respectfully and can be strengths based."
-People Manager

"Increased productivity, ability to act as a critical thinking partner (for example, getting it to critically review things for alternative perspectives), as a way of quickly understanding a topic..."
-General Manager

- the idea that a genAI can 'think' on behalf of kaimahi (58 responses)
- administrative tasks can be offloaded to genAI, reducing this burden (53 responses)

"It allows me to do administrative tasks much faster, freeing up time for work that requires my level of expertise. Leading a small NGO means you have to do everything and create things from scratch. This is exhausting. Especially when administrative demands from funders are constantly increasing."
-CEO

"It has been really useful when creating policy, developing strategy and researching/summarising information - saving time. I know I am only scratching the surface of what is possible though and would like to dive into developing agents etc."
-People Manager

- genAI can access resources or research (51 responses)
- genAI can create reports (37 responses)

"For repetitive mahi like funding applications and reports AI saves me a lot of time that I can devote to team members and the community."
-People Manager

"Huge benefits for me with time, as writing a draft in minutes for me to then define and cross check, on matters that are purely administrative and not requiring interpersonal interactions. There are sometimes an uplift in quality due to language, especially if I am fatigued due to high volume of mahi to complete.. It is like having a Personal Assistant."
-Back Office Kaimahi

- genAI can be used for notetaking (32 response), proofreading (24 responses), data analysis (16 responses) and assisting in visual design work (six responses).

Open questions demonstrated diversity of opinions on genAI

The final question of the survey asked "Do you have any other thoughts to share about the use of Generative AI in the social sector?" Responses to this can be sorted into four general groups:

1. 'The Underserved' who want more in the way of guidance and training (44 responses)
2. 'The Opponents' who are mostly negative about the use of genAI (36 responses)
3. 'The Enthusiasts' who would like to see more genAI in the sector (34 responses)
4. 'The Cautious' (66) who take a careful approach to the use of genAI

The Underserved:

"Training for our social services team to be able to use the tool would be helpful. Our team are not confident to use the tool in their line of mahi at the moment because of data security."
-People Manager

"We need to be talking about it and the implications. And have to keep doing that. So important that we develop policy around AI use for our individual organisations as well as the sector."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"Generative AI has potential to support the sector, but it needs to be approached thoughtfully. Its use should compliment, not replace the relational and whānau-centered nature of our mahi. Clear guidance, shared learning and a focus on ethical and safe use will be important as the sector continues to explore this space."
-People Manager

"I personally think we should be looking at locally hosted solutions to protect privacy. You cant stop this technology and people will adopt it within our sector, I think its about how do we do this in a safe way that protects our families."
-Frontline Kaimahi

"The use of Generative AI in the social sector should be guided by clear ethical frameworks, including Te Tiriti-informed practice, equity considerations, and cultural responsiveness. Sector-wide guidance, training, and shared standards would support safe and effective adoption. It is important that AI remains a tool to support kaimahi, rather than replace relational practice, and that lived experience, professional judgement, and community voice remain central to service delivery.."
-Chief Executive

"I'm apprehensive about AI generated videos of children. I know it's somewhat acceptable and possibly seen as better from a safeguarding / consent perspective, but it instantly makes things feel unauthentic and a bit strange. But organisations in our network have started generating videos with children in them to deliver certain messages, and I'm unsure whether there are ethical concerns with that and how to categorise these versus ethical concerns around actual footage of children."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"We need more training and awareness, kaimahi are seeing clients use AI as a form of self-help and this has both good and not so good implications, especially in terms of safety. We need to understand the confidentiality/privacy aspects and we need to ensure that it remains a tool and doesn't displace the human essence of the social sector."
-People Manager

The Opponents

"I believe the sector has an opportunity to challenge its use as being "inevitable" or "necessary". It seems to have become the 21st century arms race and to date, and it has had more negative consequences than positive. So far, the broader consequences of AI (particularly generative) have been:

- A tool for spreading misinformation
- Job losses
- Huge environmental impact
- Weapons/missile creation
- Risks to people's data
- A rise in deepfake pornography
- Decrease in human ability to create, synthesise and understand information
- People experiencing psychosis at higher rates

That doesn't mean it lacks the potential to do good... Our laws and social structures are currently set up for a world where AI use is so completely ubiquitous. We don't have the social and economic structures to sustain the people who will be affected by job losses. I think that any sector which claims to care for people, should be taking a very decisive stance against the AI industry, as it currently exists. Without a new kind of social contract (which we have no reason to expect will be formed), rapid expansion of AI exacerbates existing tensions within a social hierarchy where rights and wellbeing are already treated as a zero-sum game."

-People Manager

"The risk of misuse is extremely high. The consequences of mismanagement and people assuming it's 'ok' to get ideas but compromising Tino Rangatiratanga of data and identity is not well understood in a sector where resources are stretched and time is precious. It feels like an easy way to get a good result but the reality is, is that it can take us backwards if misused."

-Director

"People trust 'people' and I worry that using AI to support fundraising strategies may erode 'trust' between our organisation and donors/supporters."

-People Manager

"Humans are not disposable, and companies and government are excited to get rid of us in droves before they even know for sure if AI can replace people, or functions, or even be of economic use as the costs are only going to increase more and more as companies need to turn a profit. Don't passively walk into oblivion, or buy the lie that we have to comply because 'it's the future'."

-Back Office Kaimahi

"Currently I don't really see how the use of AI in the social sector can be congruent with the ethics and principles that underpin our work - generative AI as a whole is actively harming our communities and environment and left unchecked poses huge risks, so how as the people that are supposed to be caring for people are we supposed to be okay with this?"

-Frontline Kaimahi

"I don't think that the social sector should jump in boots and all. A comment was made that we need to get on board or be left behind. I don't agree with this comment. There needs to be systems and boundaries put it place. AI is still very new and there needs to be a degree of caution. If we don't use our brains, we will lose it. I do see a use for it, but client confidentiality should be paramount."

-Back Office Kaimahi

"My work is based on trust. I and my clients are not inclined to trust personal information to AI."

-Frontline Kaimahi

The Enthusiasts

"I fully support the use of AI in all sectors. We are so under-resourced we need to use every tool we can to enable us to help the people we are here to serve."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"As a sector let's take the initiative, actively work together to explore how we can safely use this for front line workers. It is here to stay, let's be active about how we define its benefits."
-CEO

"There is a huge amount of paperwork in the social sector. To be able to reduce this by using AI, would allow the sector to do more face to face work with families."
-People Manager

"Once you get a good understanding of how to use it appropriately you'll never look back!"
-Frontline Kaimahi

"It would be great for our clinical staff to have robust, safe AI tools to make their note taking and other admin tasks more efficient so they have more client time."
-People Manager

"yes a few jobs could be made redundant, but as a benefit I see jobs could be created to be proactively supporting people instead of ambulance at the bottom of the hill and information type services that just refer on."
-Frontline Kaimahi

"Recently I wrote a parenting programme for fathers, then asked AI to provide a Māori/Pasifika lens to the programme. The result was excellent and saved me some considerable time."
-People Manager

"The kaimahi in my team ask when our organisation will be investing in AI to support their case noting and client file administration. They want this technology to make their work life easier and have more time to work with people, rather than databases. Fair enough too!"
-People Manager

"I think it is a reality that the sector needs to embrace or be left behind. Just like when people used to say you can only do kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) and now people regularly have supervision or whānau hui online when needed. So if it is not embraced then we can't have conversations about appropriate use, limitations, etc. It is also a timesaving tool if used appropriately, which could be a valuable asset for an already stretched workforce."
-People Manager

"Organisations that do not embrace with controls in place will become and be seen as outdated and unable to adapt to the current environment."
-Board Secretary

"AI has a place in all sectors. It would be great for the sector to understand more about how this technology can support their work. I think there is an opportunity for governance at a high level to support the knowledge and provide understanding."
-People Manager

"I highly recommend based in my experience."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"SW need to be oriented on this recent technology so that our sector will not be left out."
-Frontline Kaimahi

The Cautious

"You have to remember it can create an incorrect statement from what you say to make it seem correct and accurate - but you still need to verify and challenge the accuracy of what it provides - it is after all a machine connected to global information that may or may not be correct."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"AI tools are expensive. The use of consumer services is useful for some tasks but they don't provide appropriate protections. Social sector organisations should look for targeted use cases that allow them to make use of their own data in meaningful and secure ways. Targeting these use cases allows "bang for buck" use of AI tools. Some tools that are provided within an organization's current subscription services provide a degree of protection. Gemini for Google Suite and Copilot for Microsoft 365 customers. A focus making the most of these offerings is beneficial."
-People Manager

"The increasing use I see in emails/reports - while it could be good for someone with poor writing skills - I also find the writing lacks integrity. Also, overall concern about the impact of AI on our future, our kids future and the environment!"
-COO

"an excellent tool in the right hands, a scary tool in the wrong hands."
-Chief Executive

"I know kaimahi are keen for anything to help with prompt recording of our mahi. Although I can see that this may be helpful, I would want to ensure that systems were secure, that clients were aware, and that we review what AI comes up with rather than just ticking off "job done". I wouldn't want to see things like letters to clients being written by AI - not if we are truly valuing the relationship. We have to be ok challenging something AI has come up with, not just accepting it because it's AI."
-People Manager

"Remember we work in a people based industry, keep AI for administration, don't use it to replace your people skills/soft skills."
-Back Office Kaimahi

"Social services fundamentally depend on trust, dignity, and relationships. AI can support those things, but it cannot substitute for them."
-People Manager

"I have no other thoughts around using AI it all depends on the reason for use but that comes down to the need per role or position you are in. Being frontline I don't see a need to use it. But it would be good to get some training around it so we can discuss the pros and cons with our Rangatahi."
-Frontline Kaimahi

"Observing wildly different responses to Gen AI use. Some are very for it, others are dead against it. It seems to trigger strong view points either way. We don't know what we don't know, yet. So we are learning together and mistakes will be made a long the way. The mistakes must not be learnt at the expense of the people we serve."
-People Manager

Next steps

In the months since we've undertaken this analysis, developments in the AI space have continued apace. These include increased calls to regulate and examples of regulation in action. Te Pai Ora SSPA echoes these calls and has been clear in our interactions with politicians that genAI needs to be regulated in a way that prioritises the wellbeing of mokopuna and whānau and honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is vital that this includes clear disclosure of any instance in which genAI is used in social services.

We have also been involved in the development of Kaiāwhina AI, in partnership with Hui E! Community Aotearoa, Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services, Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated and Making Everything Achievable. This tool is being built by Māori and Pacific technologists, with funding from the Workforce Futures Fund | Tahua Rāngaimahi Anamata. It will support kaimahi across social services, youth work and mental health by providing a bilingual kaupapa Māori platform that reduces documentation burden, strengthens wellbeing, and makes whānau impact visible.

For leaders in any organisations developing their own policies, guidance and training, we would encourage you to engage with any concerns and risks raised by your kaimahi and subject matter experts. Consider if these risks are relevant to your own organisation and how they could be mitigated. Consider also, how you are supporting kaimahi or clients who have personal ethical objections or reservations to using genAI.

We have identified several social service providers, peak bodies and organisations across other sectors who are taking a principled, informed approach to how they approach genAI. We will continue to collaborate with and amplify these voices.