

COMPLAINT NUMBER	21/293
COMPLAINT ON BEHALF OF	Suicide Mortality Review Commission & two others
ADVERTISER	Mothers Matter
ADVERTISEMENT	Mothers Matter Television
DATE OF MEETING	20 July 2021
OUTCOME	Not Upheld No further action required

Summary of the Complaints Board Decision

The Complaints Board did not uphold three complaints about a Mothers Matter television advertisement which showed a woman’s journey through domestic abuse and motherhood, which ended in suicide. The majority of the Board said the addition of book-ended warning messages and support information for those who could be triggered by the content, combined with the change to an Adults Only classification, meant the decision of the Board was that the advocacy advertisement had not met the threshold to breach the Advertising Standards Code.

Advertisement

The three-minute television advocacy advertisement for Mothers Matters was titled *Who Holds Our Mothers?* It began with the Mothers Matter logo and the message “If you think you, or someone you know, may be thinking of suicide, call the Suicide Crisis Helpline on 0508 825 865 for support.”

The text “New Zealand’s maternal suicide rate is 5 times higher per capita than the U.K. and 7 times higher per capita in our at-risk communities” then appeared. The film tells the story of Anahira, a young mother who has experienced domestic abuse and neglect. The advertisement shows her trying to cope with a new-born baby, shouting at the child and displaying signs of self-harm. One day Anahira’s father, who appears to have a drinking problem, is unable to contact her by phone, so he breaks into her house finding the baby abandoned and a note saying, “I’m sorry. Love Anahira”. The woman is seen standing on the edge of a cliff by the sea. The following scene is her funeral. Her father is seen tipping away his alcohol and joining a protest march with a “Mothers Matter” placard. The advertisement ends with the text “We approached the Government for help. They turned us away. Raise the Red Flag. Make them listen. www.mothersmatter.nz”. The message about the Suicide Crisis Helpline is then shown again.

Summary of the Complaint

There were three complaints about this advertisement.

The first complaint was from the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. The Committee had the following concerns about the advertisement:

- The warning at the beginning and end of the advertisement was not sufficient to reduce the likely negative effects for some viewers of this content
- The purpose of the film is not clear. It is about getting enhanced funding for three-day hospital stays, post-delivery
- There are potential conflicts of interest relating to the provision of care

- There is potential for real harm as the advertisement seriously violates expected standards for the portrayal of suicide. It glorifies suicide and suggests there are positive outcomes following the woman's death
- It shows in detail a relatively unusual, but very accessible, method of suicide
- It gives the public the impression that there are many deaths among Māori women in the perinatal period – this is not the case
- It is a deficit-based representation of Māori as poor, hopeless, violent, addicts. This is a violation of the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- It reinforces a racist narrative through an individual and agency abusing their position of privilege for financial gain at the expense of Māori. Using a young Māori mother in this video is exploiting Māori whānau trauma

The second complainant was concerned the advertisement portrayed a very negative stereotype of Māori males as “women beaters or useless drunks”.

The third complainant was concerned the advertisement:

- Portrayed suicide in a sensationalised way, portraying it as a solution to a problem and it did not comply with the Guidance provided by the Samaritans (2020)
- Portrayed Māori in a way that reinforces harmful stereotypes
- Reinforced a stereotype of those who suffer maternal mental illness, as if it is only those with significant social challenges. This could prevent those who don't fit this description from seeking or receiving help

Issues Raised:

- Advocacy Advertising
- Social Responsibility
- Offensiveness
- Fear and Distress

Summary of the Advertiser's Response

The Advertiser said:

- Our overarching goals are to reduce the rates of maternal suicide and perinatal depression, improving the wellbeing of our wāhine
- The number of women who are suffering from adverse perinatal mental health is too high, and they believe the government is not doing enough
- There have only been 22 complaints in total since the ad first began airing on TV screens
- They have had a lot of good feedback that the ad has helped people, and saved them from committing suicide
- The media shows a far too idealistic and unachievable form of parenting, particularly motherhood
- They consulted widely when making the film, including midwives, social workers, Māori health advocates, Pasifika health advocates, Plunket, politicians and organisations such as Supergrans. They also referred to the World Health Organisation's PREVENTING SUICIDE, a resource for filmmakers
- International research clearly evidences that if the portrayal of suicide doesn't show the complexity of the social environment it can influence copycat behaviour, the Mothers Matter ad clearly shows the Mother, Anahira's complex environment
- They do not show the carrying out of the act of suicide
- “None of the actors that so passionately play the characters identify as Māori”

Relevant ASA Codes of Practice

The Chair directed the Complaints Board to consider the complaint with reference to the following codes:

ADVERTISING STANDARDS CODE

Principle 1: Social Responsibility: Advertisements must be prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.

Rule 1(c) Decency and Offensiveness: Advertisements must not contain anything that is indecent, or exploitative, or degrading, or likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence, or give rise to hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule.

Rule 1(g) Fear and distress: Advertisements must not cause fear or distress without justification.

Principle 2: Truthful Presentation: Advertisements must be truthful, balanced and not misleading.

Rule 2(b) Truthful Presentation: Advertisements must not mislead or be likely to mislead, deceive or confuse consumers, abuse their trust or exploit their lack of knowledge. This includes by implication, inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, unrealistic claim, omission, false representation or otherwise. Obvious hyperbole identifiable as such is not considered to be misleading.

Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising: Advocacy advertising must clearly state the identity and position of the advertiser. Opinion in support of the advertiser's position must be clearly distinguishable from factual information. Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

Relevant precedent decisions

In considering this complaint the Complaints Board referred to a precedent decision, Decision 21/128, which was Upheld in part.

The full version of this decision can be found on the ASA website:

<https://www.asa.co.nz/decisions/>

Decision 21/128 concerned the same Mothers Matter advertisement, but without the book-ended warnings and with a GXC (General Except Children) rating which means that it cannot be broadcast during children's programming.

The Complaints Board said the classification and placement of the advertisement were inappropriate given the confronting subject matter and the depiction of a method of suicide. The Complaints Board also said the lack of a warning message and support information for those who could be triggered by the content meant the advertisement had not been prepared and placed with due sense of social responsibility.

Complaints Board Discussion

The Chair noted that the Complaints Board's role was to consider whether there had been a breach of the Advertising Standards Code. In deciding whether the Code has been breached the Complaints Board has regard to all relevant matters including:

- Generally prevailing community standards
- Previous decisions
- The consumer takeout of the advertisement, and
- The context, medium, audience and the product or service being advertised.

Consumer Takeout

The Complaints Board agreed the likely consumer takeout of the advertisement was it portrayed a confronting and serious story of a mother in a disadvantaged situation dealing with alcohol abuse, domestic violence and abandonment, which led to suicide. It also included a call to action to invest more in maternal health services in New Zealand and challenged the Government's policy in this area.

Does the advertisement fit the definition of advocacy advertising?

The Complaints Board said the advertisement before it fell into the category of advocacy advertising and noted the requirements of Rule 2(e) of the Advertising Standards Code. This Rule required the identity of the advertiser to be clear; opinion to be distinguished from factual information and factual information must be able to be substantiated. The Advocacy Principles developed by the Complaints Board in previous decisions considered under Rule 11 of the Code of Ethics remain relevant. They say:

1. That section 14 of the Bill of Rights Act 1990, in granting the right of freedom of expression, allows advertisers to impart information and opinions but that in exercising that right what was factual information and what was opinion, should be clearly distinguishable.
2. That the right of freedom of expression as stated in section 14 is not absolute as there could be an infringement of other people's rights. Care should be taken to ensure that this does not occur.
3. That the Codes fetter the rights granted by section 14 to ensure there is fair play between all parties on controversial issues. Therefore, in advocacy advertising and particularly on political matters the spirit of the Code is more important than technical breaches. People have the right to express their views and this right should not be unduly or unreasonably restricted by Rules.
4. That robust debate in a democratic society is to be encouraged by the media and advertisers and that the Codes should be interpreted liberally to ensure fair play by the contestants.
5. That it is essential in all advocacy advertisements that the identity of the advertiser is clear.

Role of the ASA when considering an advocacy advertisement.

The Complaints Board noted its role is to consider the likely consumer takeout of an advertisement and complaints about advocacy advertising are considered differently to complaints about advertising for products and services.

The Complaints Board observed that in a free and democratic society, issues should be openly debated without undue hindrance or interference from authorities such as the Complaints

Board, and in no way should political parties, politicians, lobby groups or advocates be unnecessarily fettered by a technical or unduly strict interpretation of the rules and regulations.

Under Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising of the Advertising Standards Code:

- The identity of the advertiser must be clear.
- Opinion must be clearly distinguishable from factual information, and
- Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

If the identity and position of the Advertiser is clear, a more liberal interpretation of the Advertising Standards Code is allowed.

Is the identity and position of the Advertiser clear?

Identity

The Complaints Board said the identity of the Advertiser was sufficiently clear for the advertisement to be considered as advocacy advertising. The Board took into account the “Mothers Matter presents” credit 26 seconds into the advertisement and the call-to-action messages and website details, www.mothersmatter.nz, at the end of the advertisement which consumers could access for more information.

Position

A majority of the Complaints Board said the position of the Advertiser was clear - it is an organisation that supports mothers. The majority said while the statistics shown at the start of the advertisement provided a level of framing for viewers, additional references to the organisation and its website would have been helpful.

A minority disagreed and said the position the Advertiser was advocating was not sufficiently clear. The minority said there were many different social issues raised in the advertisement: poverty, domestic abuse, alcohol abuse, suicide - yet the advertisement didn't make any specific reference to the cause which is outlined on the website. The website promotes increasing funding for maternity and postnatal care, including funding obstetrician-gynaecological health checks pre and post birth.

Does the advertisement contain anything that is likely to cause harm?

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advocacy advertisement had not meet the threshold to breach Rule 1(c) of the Advertising Standards Code in relation to harm. In reaching this view, the majority took into account a number of factors including the more liberal interpretation of the Code for advocacy advertising. The majority noted the amended version of the advertisement contained warning and support messages and had the placement focused on adult audiences. The majority noted the information provided by the Advertiser about the consultation it had undertaken when making the advertisement and that many people had found the advertisement helpful and supportive.

A minority disagreed and said that irrespective of the warning and support messages, rating and placement of the advertisement, the confronting content could act as a trigger for vulnerable viewers and was likely to cause harm to some consumers. The minority said the research shows that when vulnerable people see suicide methods, there is an increased risk they may copy them. The advertisement implied methods of suicide, both with showing the scarring on Anahira's arms and then showing her standing at the top of a cliff, prior to her funeral. It also showed that the world could get better after Anahira's suicide, when her father tipped out his alcohol and joined a protest group. The minority also said the length of the advertisement and the frequency it was played also contributed to the potential for causing harm, both for those suffering from post-natal depression and other mental health issues such as anxiety.

Does the advertisement contain anything that is likely to cause offence?

The Complaints Board considered the complaint that the advertisement was stigmatising in terms of the ethnicity, behaviour and circumstances of the people depicted in the video. The Board accepted the advertisement showed one example of a family where the mother was at risk. The Board said, in the context of advocacy advertising, this aspect of the advertisement did not meet the threshold to breach the Advertising Standards Code.

Does the advertisement cause fear or distress without justification?

A majority of the Complaints Board said the advertisement did not cause fear or distress without justification. The majority said the subject matter was confronting but this was justified when viewed through the lens of advocacy advertising.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the story's narrative could have been told without reference to any method of suicide and the advertisement had the potential to cause distress without justification. The minority referred to the image of the woman on top of a cliff (method of suicide), prior to the scene of her funeral. The minority said this presentation was too distressing for the message. The ending of the advertisement could be interpreted as implying that suicide was a viable option with some positive outcomes, and therefore the advertisement had the potential to cause distress without justification.

Is the advertisement misleading?

The Complaints Board said the advertisement was not misleading. The Board did not agree that the advertisement gave a misleading impression about the number of deaths among Māori women in the perinatal period. The Board said the advertisement depicted the story of one particular family in difficult circumstances.

Was the advertisement prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility?

A majority of the Complaints Board said the addition of book-ended warning messages and support information for those who could be triggered by the content, combined with the change to an Adults Only classification, in the context of advocacy advertising, meant the advertisement had been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility.

A minority disagreed. The minority said the advertisement had not been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. This is because the confronting content could act as a trigger for vulnerable viewers and was likely to cause harm to some consumers and the advertisement had the potential to cause fear or distress without justification.

In Summary

In accordance with the majority, and taking into account context, medium, audience and product the Complaints Board ruled the advertisement was not in breach of Principle 1, Rule 1(c), Rule 1(g), or Rule 2(e) of the Advertising Standards Code. The Complaints Board unanimously ruled the advertisement was not in breach of Principle 2 and Rule 2(b) of the Advertising Standards Code.

Outcome

The Complaints Board ruled the complaints were **Not Upheld**.

No further action required.

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 calendar days of receipt of this decision.

APPENDICES

1. Complaint
 2. Response from Advertiser
 3. Response from Media
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Appendix 1

COMPLAINT ONE

Television TVR Channel TV3 TVR Programme Name advertisement TVR Broadcast Date
2021-05-14 TVR Broadcast Time 20:30

The Suicide Mortality Review Committee is an independent mortality review committee, established under the NZ Public Health Act 2000, to review all suicides in New Zealand, it also monitors suspected suicides in collaboration with the Suicide Prevention Office; this allows us to determine, amongst other factors, the immediacy of contagion effects from media reporting of suicide, including from social media platforms. We have the following significant concerns about the Mothers Matter campaign.

a. Initial screenings of the material were not accompanied by any trigger warnings or information about support services available. SuMRC has feedback from those with lived experience of self-harm and suicide attempt, that they found this video extremely distressing.

b. However, given the manner in which suicide is portrayed in this film, we feel it is unrealistic to expect that a trigger warning, for which there is little scientific evidence, is enough to reduce the likely negative effects for some viewers of this content

c. therefore, SuMRC is extremely concerned about the very real potential contagion effect of this video; as mentioned above, the SuMRC monitor real time suspected suicide and advise the Ministry of Health on emerging issues.

2. The revised Mothers Matter video continues to engage viewers without being transparent about the purpose of the film; you are not clear what you are watching, it appears at first to be a short film or possibly documentary, however at the conclusion of video, viewers are directed to the Mothers Matter website – so it becomes more clear it is an advertisement.

3. When you look at the website it becomes more apparent it is an advertisement for a lobby activity which appears to focus on enhanced funding for three day stays post-delivery.

4. The Mothers Matter ‘about us’ tab indicates potential conflicts of interest relating to the provision of care, which viewers would unlikely to be aware of when interacting with the material initially. We have anecdotal evidence that the placement and timing of the material on TVNZ gave some viewers the impression this was a factual documentary.

5. Regardless of the mode (documentary/fictional portrayal/advertisement) it has the potential for real harm and seriously violates expected standards for:

a. non-fictional portrayal of suicide <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/media/reporting-and-portrayal-of-suicide/>

b. and fictional portrayal of suicide
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/preventing-suicide>

a-resource-for-filmmakers-and-others-working-on-stage-and-screen

c. and advertising standards outlined by the Advertising Standards Authority.

6. The manner in which suicide is portrayed in this production:
- glorifies suicide making it appear like a reasonable and romanticised outcome for the young woman
 - suggests there are positive outcomes following her death which could only be achieved by her suicide e.g., the father gives up drinking and becomes a more involved Koro with his mokopuna
 - is misleading - while the burden of suicide in Aotearoa is inequitably carried by Māori women and their whānau, this production gives the public the impression that there are many, many deaths among Māori women in the perinatal period – this is not the case; the Perinatal and Maternal Mortality Review Committee has published data suggesting there are a relatively small number of deaths each year in these circumstances; therefore the data cited with this video have been misinterpreted and misrepresented to increase the impact factor; our colleagues at the PMMRC who are the source of the data were not consulted with.
 - shows in detail a relatively unusual, but very accessible, method of suicide in Aotearoa/New Zealand which may lead to 'copycat' deaths using this method.
7. The deficit-based representation of Māori as poor, hopeless, violent, addicts is a violation of the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is morally unacceptable and undermines the suicide prevention aspirations of SuMRC and the excellent work of many agencies.
8. Using a young Māori mother in this video is seizing and exploiting Māori whānau trauma [...] Thank you for hearing us.

COMPLAINT TWO

Television TVR Channel 70 TVR Programme Name Team selvage TVR Broadcast Date 2021-05-16 TVR Broadcast Time 21:54

The advertisement shows the Māori males to be women beaters or useless drunks. Why could not the father be at work or fallen asleep in his work gear after a hard day's work. Still unavailable to help his daughter when she wanted help. Why depict only Māori as useless, hopeless, drunken males. It only makes the prejudiced minds worse and feel justified in their thoughts and actions towards the majority of Māori when it is only a minority like that.

COMPLAINT THREE

Television TVR Channel Disney TVR Broadcast Date 2021-02-01 TVR Broadcast Time 21:22

Perinatal wellbeing is a topic of vital importance that needs to be better addressed by our health system, in order to prevent further morbidity and mortality. Mothers Matter's "Raise the Red Flag" campaign aims to highlight this need, and has gained a great deal of support. This campaign includes the advertisement "Who Holds Our Mothers" which has already gained significant support - and criticism. It appears that the criticism was largely due to the way the advert portrays suicide, which is a concern. Guidance for the dramatisation of suicides suggests that sensationalising them and portraying them as solutions to a problem should be avoided (Samaritans, 2020). Unfortunately, this guidance has not been followed here. Just as concerning however, is how the ad portrays Māori. It tells a story of a young Māori woman in a relationship with a violent Māori partner, who beats her up on finding out of their pregnancy. She turns to her Māori father but finds him a drunken mess, surrounded by empty alcohol bottles. In short, Māori are portrayed in this advert as a loveless, careless people, prone to violence and abuse of alcohol and tobacco. There is no portrayal of the determinants that might have influenced these outcomes, and that reinforces harmful stereotypes. In Te Ara Tika - Guidelines for Māori research Ethics, The Pūtāiora Writing Group suggests that when

working with Māori from a mainstream perspective, consideration should be afforded to the following:

1. In what way does this project impact on Māori?
2. How will Māori be included in this project? Is that helpful and respectful?
3. Do I need to consult with Māori for this project? If so, how do I do that?

These considerations could have been advantageously applied to this project and thus prevented harm. Lastly, I am also concerned about the reinforced stereotype of those who suffer maternal mental illness. This story may reinforce the harmful narrative that only those with significant social challenges experience perinatal depression. This could prevent those who don't fit this description from seeking or receiving help. In all, I feel that this cause is vitally important, and applaud Mothers Matter for taking it on. However, I feel it should have been done in a way that more fully considers the potential harm that telling the story in this way may cause. Samaritans. (2020) Media Guideline for Reporting Suicide. (PDF). https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Media_Guidelines_Final_v2_TABa8C6.pdf
The Pūtaiora Writing Group. (n.d.). Te Ara Tika – Guidelines for Māori research ethics: A framework for ethics for researchers and ethics committee members. [PDF].

<https://www.hrc.govt.nz/resources/te-ara-tika-guidelinesmaori-research-ethics>

Appendix 2

RESPONSE FROM ADVERTISER, MOTHERS MATTER

Thank you for the time you have taken to provide us with an opportunity to respond to the complaints you have received in response to our recent airing of the Mothers Matter Advertisement. We would like to acknowledge those who have taken their time to air their criticism and thank them for their engagement. Maternal Mental Health, suicide and perinatal depression are hard and heavy topics. We appreciate any engagement in this discussion and see it as being of utmost importance to have this korero around maternal mental health and its impact on the wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand. Mothers Matter is a collaboration of individuals, health professionals and parents who are united in a common goal to have a nationwide discussion about the importance of excellent perinatal care. Our overarching goals are to reduce the rates of maternal suicide and perinatal depression, improving the wellbeing of our wāhine.

This is the state of maternal mental health in Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Postnatal depression affects up to 15 percent of mothers after they have given birth, with lack of support recorded as a factor (depression.org.nz)
- Maternal suicide in New Zealand is five times higher per capita than that of the UK, with Māori women overrepresented (PMMRC, 2021)
- Suicide is a leading indirect cause of perinatal maternal death in New Zealand. The Perinatal and Maternal Mortality Review • There have been 22 maternal deaths from suicide between 2006-2013 (Mellor, 2019 Jnl-55-article-4-maternal-mental-health.pdf (midwife.org.nz))
- It was found that many of these women had risk factors for major depression that were not recognised (Mellor, 2019 Jnl-55-article-4-maternal-mentalhealth.pdf (midwife.org.nz))
- Thirty-two percent of these 22 deaths were thought to be potentially avoidable (Mellor, 2019 Jnl-55-article-4-maternal-mental-health.pdf (midwife.org.nz)). Any mother that suffers from adverse perinatal mental health is a woman too much for us, tragically we know that numbers are too high, for too long. Too long for these women, these mothers, their children, their whānau, and their community. The Perinatal and Maternal Mortality Review Committee (PMMRC, 2021) have again reiterated in their executive findings, their call on the Ministry of Health to invest in maternal and infant mental health. The PMMRC (2021) state “Year after

year, the Perinatal and Maternal Mortality Review Committee (PMMRC) reports show inequity continues and no significant progress is being made to reduce mortality and morbidity for whānau Māori, Pasifika families, Indian families and those living in areas of high deprivation”.

The PMMRC recommends addressing Maternal and Infant Mental Health as a priority. The statistics, our women who are suffering from adverse perinatal mental health is too high, and we believe the government is not doing enough. This is why the Mothers Matter campaign exists. Our women are suffering and as a result our children and future generations are at risk. Research just released, prepared by Dr Felicia Low and Sir Peter Gluckman from Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures, and Professor Richie Poulton of the University of Otago tells us that “stress during pregnancy is linked to impaired child brain development and can reinforce the cycle of cumulative intergenerational disadvantage” (Gluckman, Low & Poulton, 2021).

Thus far, official media statistics have informed us that this advertisement has been viewed by over 887,000 people in New Zealand. Of this number, there have been only 22 complaints in total since the ad first began airing on TV screens. Therefore, we can resolutely state that this advertisement has been widely received across the country. We have been inundated with feedback from viewers that have vehemently expressed their support. However, more than that these viewers have expressed to us that they finally feel seen, that this short film finally shows their story or that of someone they know. Here is a tiny snapshot of the vast amount of support that we have received:

- “Love this! What a powerful short film with such a strong message. Well done!”
- “I’m in Perth and I’ve watched this film 5 times already while sitting next to my almost 2 year old son...I felt this. Mothers Matter.”
- “Heart-breaking truth and video. I really hope this makes the government sit up and pay attention. Make maternal mental health the attention and funding it deserves.”
- “Finally someone has seen the importance of this story, it is so real for a lot of people in our country, bring on more like this we need powerful statements about so many areas in our lives here in NZ. Yes it is confronting but we as a society need to confront the issues, we need our children to learn these situations are not acceptable bring the real out and then we can all learn and bring about change”.
- “I’m so happy this is back. As someone who’s been personally affected and have lost a family member to perinatal depression I feel this is the only thing that genuinely stops people in their tracks and makes them listen to the message that’s being said. Thank you so much for bringing awareness to this really important issue.”
- “Thought the film was incredible. Moving, compelling, powerful and the message came through clearly. What an incredible initiative. Well done”

“So sad to watch...but thank you for showing the very sad truth. It is such a very important issue. help is NEEDED NOW”.

- “Man I just saw this on TV for the 1st time a minute ago and I'm in tears!!! I've never experienced this but gosh it needs to be seen. Thank you for putting it out there.”

Maternal mental health is tragically too high in New Zealand, it is not easy to watch this being conveyed but, New Zealand has been far too silent on this issue for too long. This advertisement has increased the conversation in New Zealand, we know from the interactions we have had on social media as you can see from the tiny snapshot above. We know from the outpouring of support to volunteer with us and be a force across the country.

The ‘He Ara Oranga’ Report (Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, 2018) tells us that “People agreed that awareness and understanding of mental health challenges has improved in recent years, thanks to promotional campaigns and the actions of thought leaders in many sectors, including sport, business and the arts. But they said shame and stigma continue to shape attitudes and are embedded in our laws and the way services are structured and delivered”.

We know from the consultation and feedback that we have had around perinatal mental health that stigma and shame exist for women and forms a barrier for them in accessing help. We are inundated with messages across media which show a far too idealistic and unachievable form of parenting and notably in this case motherhood. This is why our Mothers Matter Ad has resonated so loudly with the audience of Aotearoa, we are not seeing or hearing this voice of maternal mental health in the media. "The 'good' mother dominates the media marketplace, with few alternatives to this maternal depiction. As such, the ideology of intensive mothering appears as a powerful, persuasive and indeed, potent image of motherhood that audiences feel compelled to try to emulate, or to judge themselves by" (Feasey, 2016).

The Mothers Matter short film, forms one part of our overall strategy of the Mothers Matter campaign, one that is determined to improve the perinatal mental health outcomes for women in New Zealand and improve access to care. We are committed to doing this through our continued nationwide conversations in New Zealand, representing the voice of those affected and collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders in the field, such as PADA NZ.

Consultation on this short film was extensive and is evidenced in attached documents. Noting the World Health Organisation's (PREVENTING SUICIDE: A resource for filmmakers and others working on stage and screen, WHO, 2019) best practice guidelines which coincidentally has been referenced by SuMRC in relation to how suicide is conveyed on screen. International research clearly evidences that if the portrayal of suicide doesn't show the complexity of the social environment it can influence copycat behaviour, the Mothers Matter Ad clearly shows the Mother, Anahera's complex environment, showing the build-up of her adverse life events. WHO explains that "if portrayals of suicide do not accurately represent reality, they can contribute to public misunderstandings of the nature of suicide, nurture myths and hinder effective suicide prevention"

The resounding goal of the Mothers Matter Ad is not only to increase awareness but to create a call to action from the public by displaying such a hard-hitting real depiction of a mothers life. We absolutely can state, women, mothers, and their whanau have expressed feeling seen and heard by the showing of the Mothers Matter advertisement, it shows their experience, finally.

WHO (2019) backs this up when it states that "content portrayed on-screen informs the general public about social issues such as mental health which in turn affects public attitudes, creating an opportunity for those involved in the production of stage and screen content to contribute to suicide prevention". The response to the Mothers Matter campaign has been overwhelmingly positive, 22 complaints of 887,000 views to date, is a total percentage of 0.025%. This is not statistic that shows a need for removal of this advertisement. However, the statistic by Oates (2003) that tells us, devastatingly "It is estimated that 50 per cent of the women who died from suicide might not have died if their past history had been accurately identified and plans for proactive management put in place.

<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/healthybeginnings-final-jan2012.pdf.pdf>

The Mothers Matter short film depicts the real-life, complex nature of maternal mental health, it is informed by first-hand lived experience account of maternal mental health (as explained in attached documents). The Mothers Matter Ad does NOT sensationalise or dramatize suicide, responses from the public attest to this reliability and relatability.

- "I saw this ad for the first-time last night. Powerful and realistic. It made me recall everything I felt when I experienced post-natal depression and isolation. It also showed me how strong I had to be to overcome it all. It brought tears to my eyes the realisation that many of us don't get the support and aroha we need. Not all of us have whanau or friends to step in or guide

us. I know what it felt like to be alone in that situation and my heart hurt for the young mum in the film. Too many are quick to judge. Turn a blind eye. Let's all stop and think that if we wrap our arms around the mums the children too become nurtured instead of lost and can grow up healthy. Happy and loved we should not have to lose even one mum. Glad to see an ad like this. Sad but true."

"They should never have removed it but so glad it is back. Being someone who suffered from Pre-natal and post-natal depression, I know how important it is to get your message across and for woman to know there is help out there".

The story depicted in this Ad was heavily researched and inspired by real life experiences, it was consulted on by various professionals. Avenues for help are bookended at both the beginning and end of the advertisement. We do not show the carrying out of the act of suicide. Lastly, in relation to the cultural portrayal in this ad, we are saddened to note the biases at play in our critic's response. This ad has never said it is depicting a wahine māori, in fact none of the actors that so passionately play the characters identify as Māori. Nonetheless, The Mothers Matter campaign has been co-designed in consultation with our cultural adviser Pouroto Ngaropo.

It is with pleasure to present this letter to you to convey our reasoning for the need for this short film to stay on the air, it is for the wellbeing of our women and our future generations.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our voice and for providing a space in the media for the voice of the too often unheard and unseen women across Aotearoa New Zealand.

A letter from Chloe Wright, Founder, Mothers Matter, in support of the advertisement, was included with the response.

Thank you for bringing to our attention the complaints. As the Founder of Mothers Matter and the architect of the three-minute film, I would like to address the points of the complaints in the 'first person' narrative.

There are three actors in the film. The 'father' is played by a well-known actor who states he is 'half Welsh and half Te Arawa'. He rejects being named as solely māori. The other two actors are in fact not māori. Both of these actors and their families are extremely proud of this work. The young woman who has experienced trauma in her own life has stated "if I never do anything else this has made my life worthwhile". The young man is an example to his community and has addressed his community on the reasons why suicide is so prevalent among young men. His conversation to me suggests that what happens behind closed doors can condition a child to believe they are worthless. All actors believe transparency is critical to a circuit breaker. They believed the story needed to be told.

The concept of the film was widely discussed among groups involved in the real lived experiences of many of our people. These included midwives, social workers, Maori health advocates, Pasifika health advocates, Plunket, politicians, organizations such as Supergrans. In fact, the people who not only have access to the data and research but also, importantly, connect with those who suffer horrendous crimes to their humanity. It has been widely recognized that to break the cycle of generational abuse and despair that reality needs to be brought to the fore of public attention. Removing the advertisement on the first round of screen, resulted in an outcry from the public. The response across the nation by women who 'have been there' has given countless women across the spectrum of age, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic circumstance a voice. This has been a platform of hope and a springboard for change in public awareness and support. Government is yet to turn their gaze to what is possible.

The 'interpretation' of the story is the responsibility of the viewer and in the cases of the complainants, are flawed. [...]

Critical to the story, and I have written to every scene, we see a young woman and man (happy in the bedroom), the young woman has no mother (an abandonment that is not uncommon), a young man who has not had the role model to create a self-regulating young adult. Both feel they have found in each other what has been missing but the damage caused by a lack of security causes him, in particular, to crumble at the responsibility. (Young men and women looking for love in the wrong places is a constant in our society).

The scene where she presses her face against the opaque glass tells of the barriers countless people have to accessing support (constantly in the headlines). The scene at the bus stop portrays how desensitized our society has become to the suffering of others. She sleeps and self-harms (no support). She sits on the swing (remembers a childhood without responsibility). She looks out over the ocean (Pasifika peoples tell me they always return to the ocean as their place of comfort).

The dad has not had a role model either, he drinks, he smokes, he is not an alcoholic, we see him rubbing his head, suffering when he can no longer reach the daughter, he feels he has failed.

There is no script, no portrayal of suicide but what we know from this clip is that we have had countless women reach out to tell us how this has helped them. It caused two women who were on the verge of suicide to realise how that would affect their children for their entire lives. This film saved them. We fully believe this has saved a number of lives and will continue to do so. Women and families are reaching out and we are there to take their hands in ours.

This film has opened a pathway to connect to other groups passionate about change that is meaningful. Should any complainant take the time to ponder the messages in an intelligent and mindful manner they could only conclude that without this transparency to the world of the vulnerable, nothing will change.

Appendix 3

RESPONSE FROM COMMERCIAL APPROVALS BUREAU

No response was provided by the Commercial Approvals Bureau.

In their response to precedent complaint 21/128, the Bureau said "In our view the advertisement has been prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility. It is undeniably 'robust' and can be distressing to watch but this is surely justified by the seriousness of the issue."