MENTAL HEALTH AND TRANSPORT

Credit: Aucklandbikestyle.com

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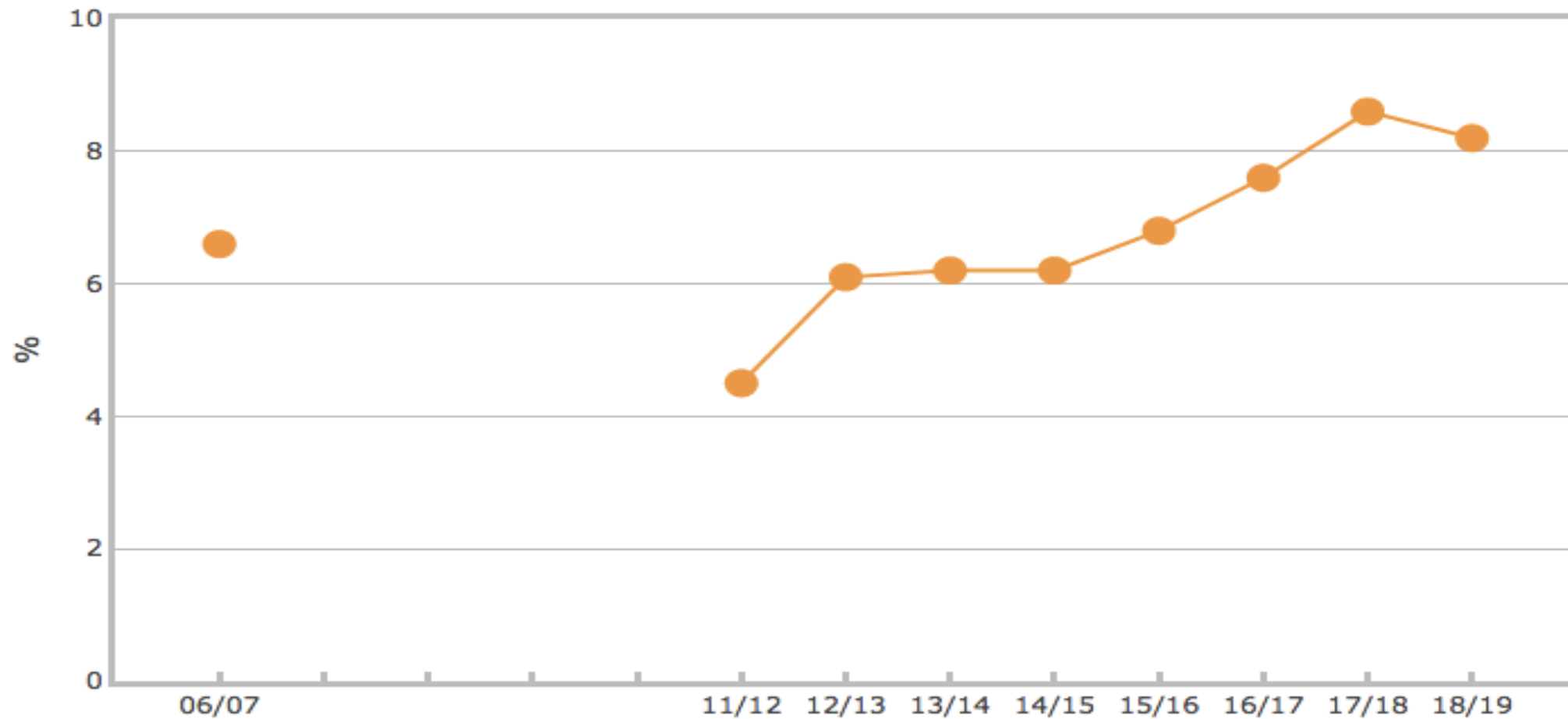# **Mental health experts**

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Psychological distress in New Zealand

Study purpose and objectives

"The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between transport and mental health in Aotearoa New Zealand. We wish to understand the ways in which land transport can affect mental health and well-being (in both positive and negative ways), in order to identify improvements that can be made in the design and planning of transport nationally."

1) To summarise relevant published local and international research on the relationships between land transport and mental health in urban settings;

2) To learn about New Zealanders' experience of urban transport (both direct experience as transport users, and the secondary effects of traffic), and to explore how this affects peoples' mental health and well-being;

3) To provide recommendations, based on the study findings, on how Aotearoa's transport system can be designed in ways that improve mental health.

Important groups:

Tāngata whaiora, and **population mental health**

Those with higher and/or rising levels of psychological distress: Māori and Pacific peoples, women, young people, and low-income people.
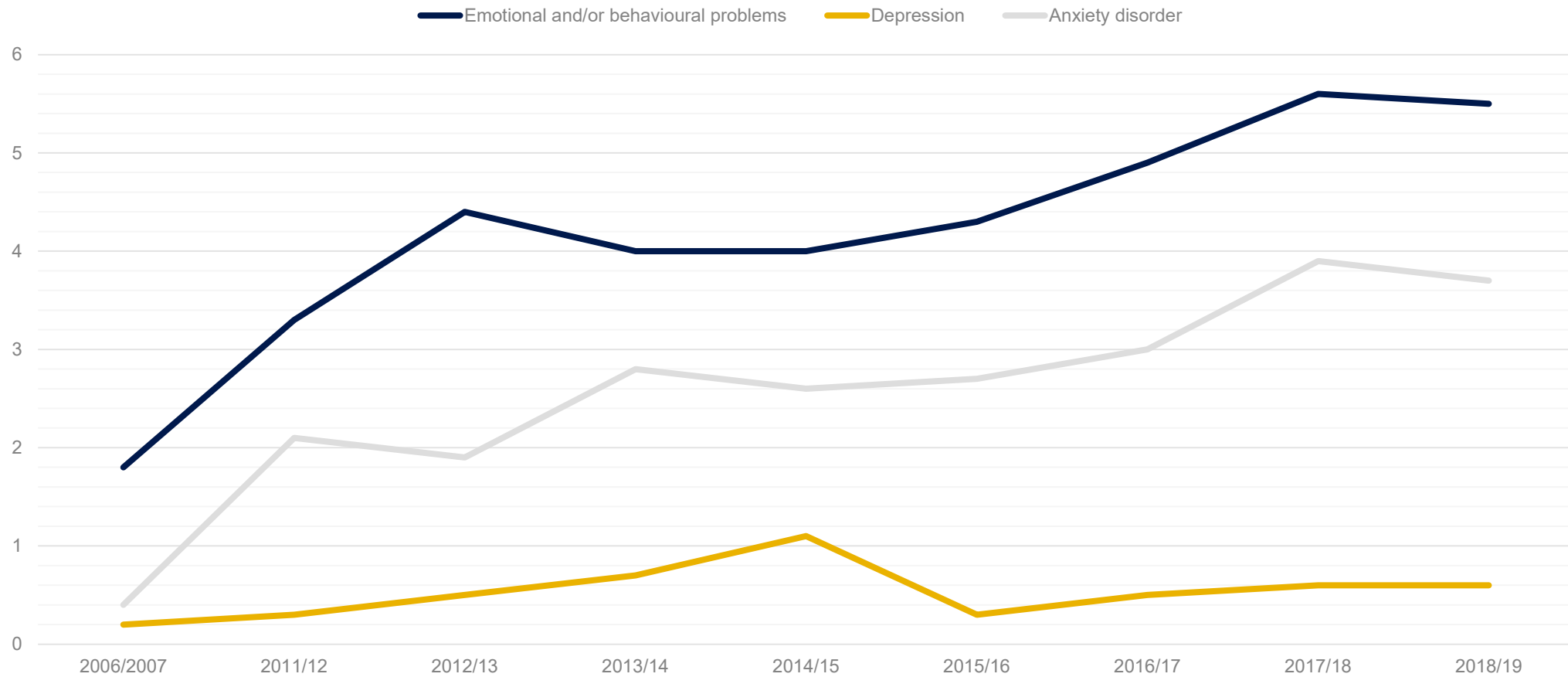
Figure 3. Mental health problems amongst New Zealand children, percentage, parent reported, time series. Source: NZ Health Survey.
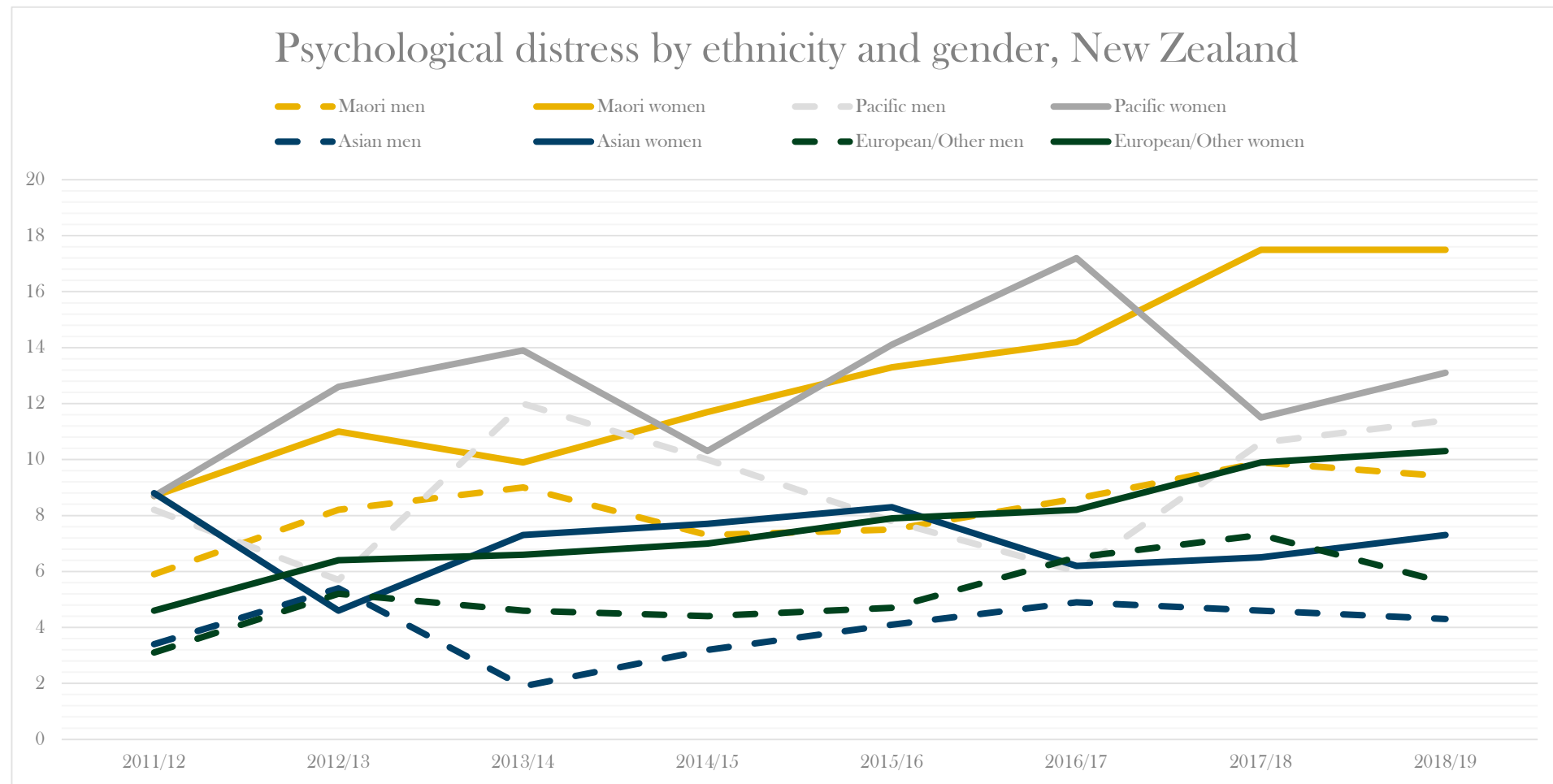
Figure 4. Psychological distress in the last 4 weeks (high or very high probability of anxiety or depressive disorder, K10 score ≥12), by ethnicity and gender, New Zealand. Source: NZ Health Survey.

A HOLISTIC MODEL OF MENTAL HEALTH

1. Mental health is "a state ... in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community".

2. He Ara Oranga: Incorporating Māori and Pacific visions of mental health and wellbeing.

World Health Organisation. 'He Ara Oranga'

He Ara Oranga identifies four important elements of a holistic approach to mental health in a New Zealand context:

> *[M]ental health is a function of:*
>
> 1. *Meaningful work,*
> 2. *Healthy relationships with family, whānau and community*
> 3. *Good physical health;*
> 4. *Strong connection to land, culture and history.*
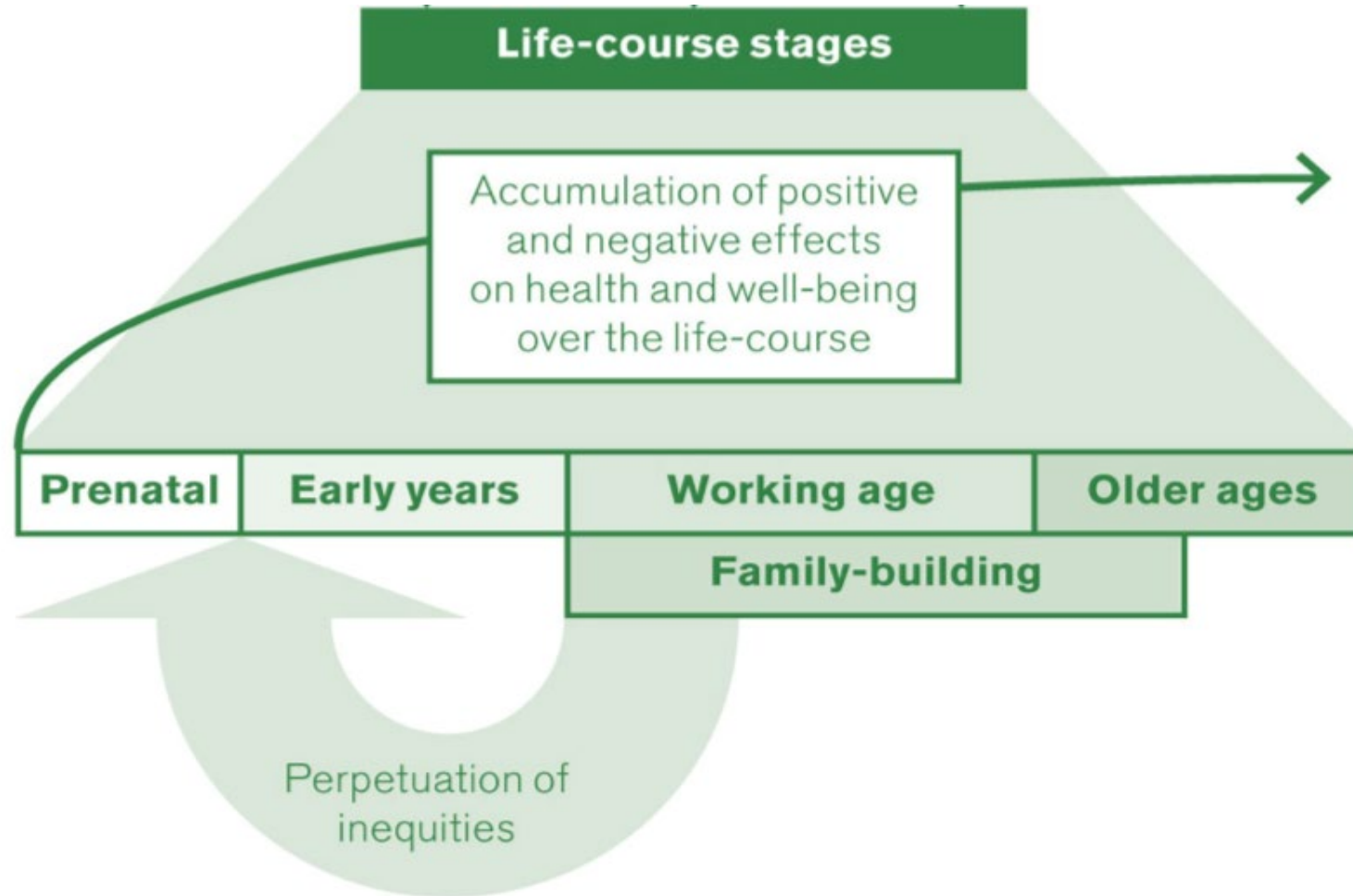
Effects across the life-course

Figure 8. A life-course approach to mental health.
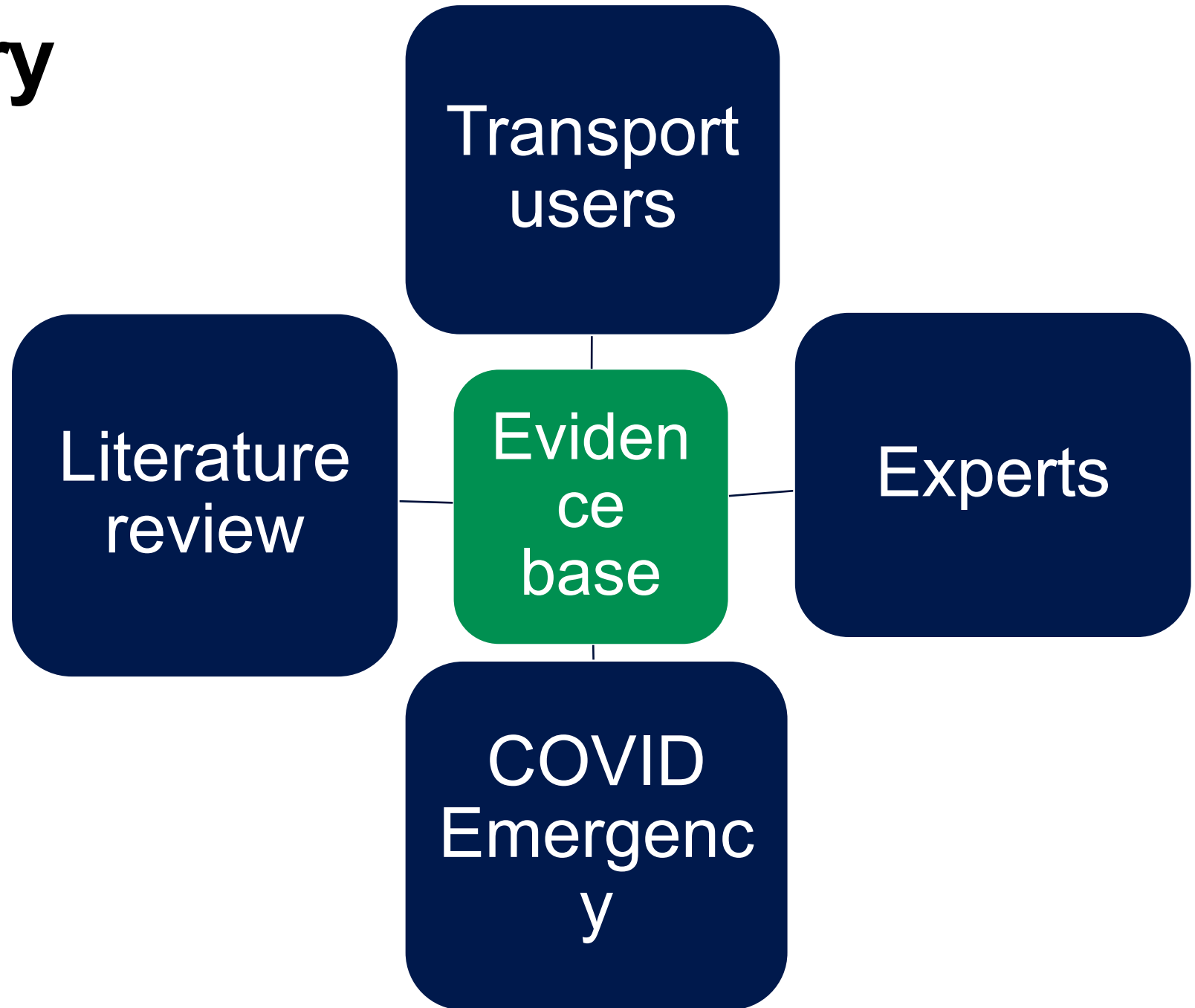Source: World Health Organisation.

3. Effects at community level

2. Neighbourhood effects

1. Individual trip effects

An exploratory study

Transport users

Literature review

Evidence base

Experts

COVID Emergency

Key findings:

Population level mental health effects are strongest for tāngata whairoa

Crisis and recovery, stress and restoration.

Contributing to rising distress:

- Noise pollution
- Neighbourhood severance
- Declining levels of active transport
- Longer commutes and commuting stress
- Transport poverty
- Inaccessible environments

Transport environments that are most protective of mental health:

- High quality walking (or wheeling) environments that provide opportunities for **gentle exercise** and **social interaction**
- **Low cost** and **accessible** – enable people to meet needs for employment, medical care, food and social support without needing to incur debt or financial hardship
- Transport environments that feel **welcoming**, **comfortable** and '**comforting**'

Recommendations

1) Understand, monitor and report on progress towards meeting the transport needs of Māori.

2) Understand, monitor and report on progress towards meeting the transport needs of Pacific peoples.

3) Understand, monitor and report on progress towards meeting the transport needs of women.

4) Understand, monitor and report on progress towards meeting the transport needs of youth.

5) Monitor and reduce transport noise in our cities.

6) Monitor and reduce long commute trips (40 minutes plus), especially those trips made by car and bus.

7) Monitor and reduce transport poverty.

8) Measure, monitor and reduce sources of fear, anxiety and discomfort amongst active commuters.

9) Improve the comfort and vitality of public transport environments.

10) Measure, monitor and reduce community severance.

11) Address historical motorway-related community severance.

12) Further investigate the potential of cycling as a community mental health intervention.

13) Review the scope and style of transport consultation processes to better appreciate the impact of transport infrastructure on health and wellbeing in diverse cultural contexts.