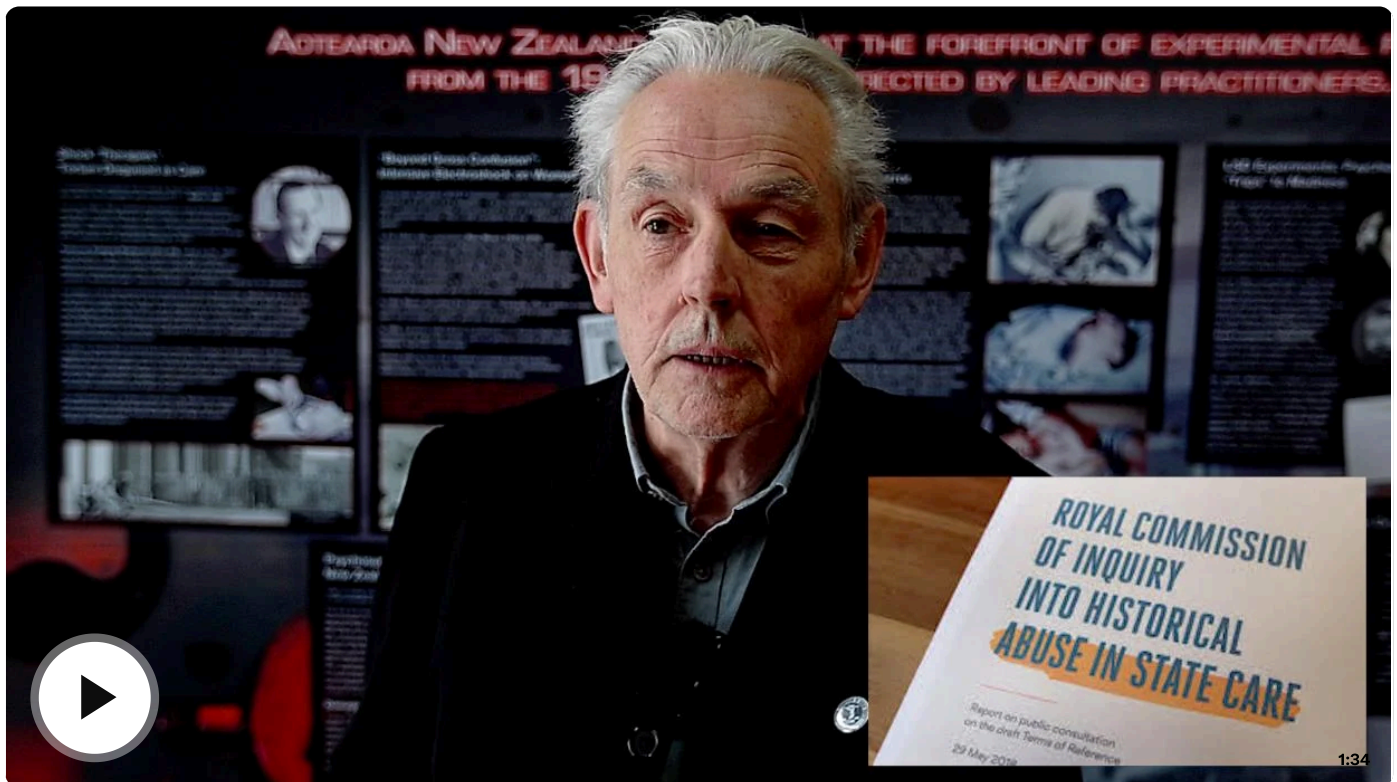


'A legacy of cruelty': Exhibition puts spotlight on psychiatric abuse

Alecia Rousseau | [ManawatuStandard](#)

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Abuse in state care on display for all to see

VIDEO CREDIT: WARWICK SMITH

Inhumane practices inflicted under the guise of medicine have left patients with lifelong injuries and memory loss, with some unable to recall having children or getting married.

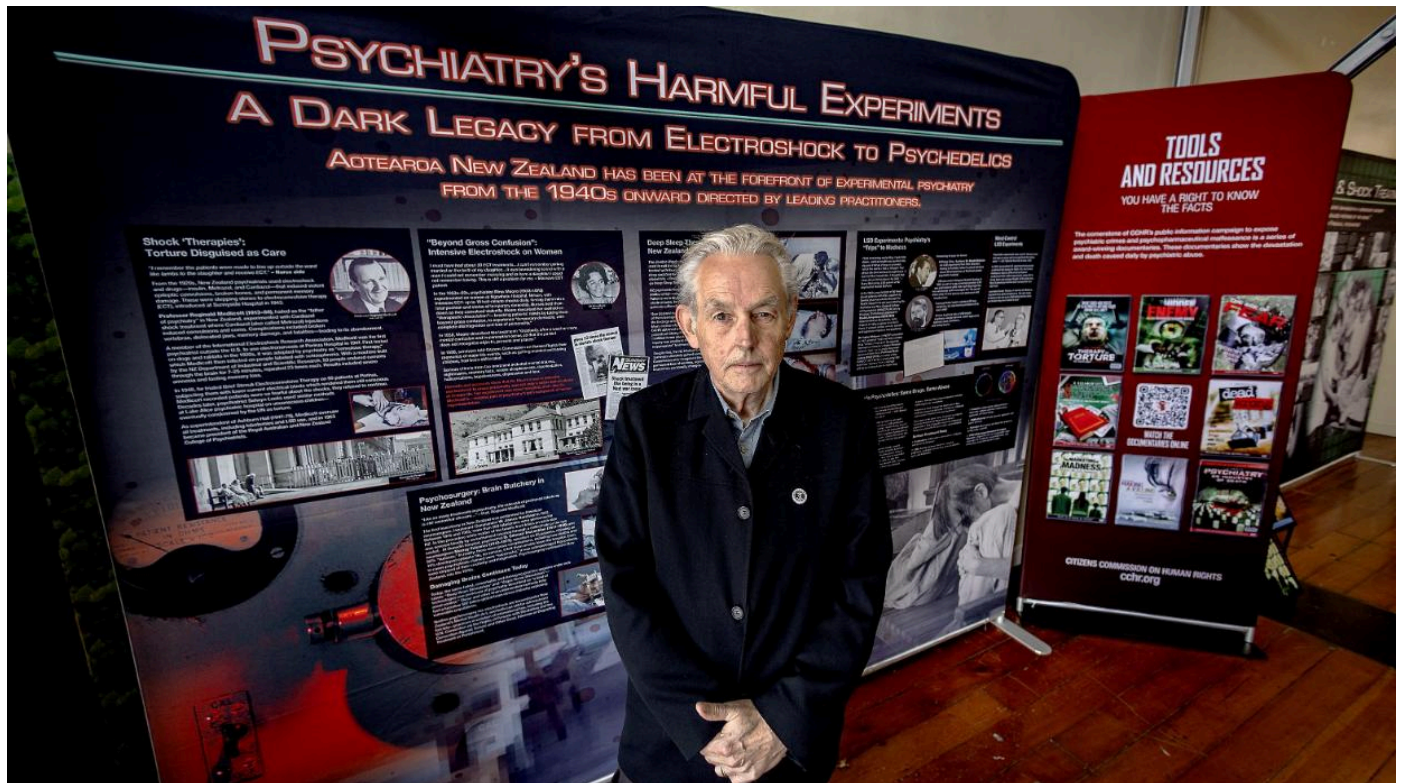
Their harrowing stories are being told in a travelling exhibition detailing cruel and barbaric experiments inflicted on New Zealanders since the 1940s in places such as Lake Alice, the Kohitere boys' home and the Kimberley Centre.

The display, organised by the Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), features life-sized panels detailing "stunning and sometimes shocking" experiments carried out on adults and children as a way to curb ailments or unruly behaviour.

CCHR director Mike Ferriss said the exhibition was based on years of work and research into psychiatric practices, and included harm the commission had witnessed firsthand.

One of the first cases he had worked on was the use of deep sleep therapy in Dunedin's Cherry Farm Hospital in the 1970s and other psychiatric facilities around New Zealand.

Patients were kept in drug-induced comas for up to six weeks and given electroshocks, without consent, and several victims were later compensated for lifelong physical and mental harm.



Citizens Commission on Human Rights director Mike Ferriss says they are hoping to source funding so the exhibition can visit other places around New Zealand.

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Ferriss said deep sleep therapy was also used at the adult psychiatric facility, Cherry Farm, in the 1970s and the commission had pushed for a *Sunday News* story exposing this prolonged narcosis that also involved the use of electro-convulsive therapy (ECT).

He said people were often dismayed that practices such as ECT were still in use today, and the commission was calling for a ban on all coercive and non-consensual measures in psychiatric settings.

“We have people who are absolutely surprised, even stunned, that these things took place and how much New Zealand was not a back water – we were right up there in terms of these experiments.

“Some of the men and women had their minds completely obliterated – they had be taught how to toilet, how to feed – they couldn’t even remember their own families.”

Testimony to that was the study of 25 women at Nelson’s Ngawhatu Hospital by psychiatrist Rina Moore, the first female Māori doctor.

One panel refers to Lake Alice, where children endured electro-shock therapy without anesthetic at the direction of lead psychiatrist Dr Sewlyn Leeks.
WARWICK SMITH / MANAWATŪ STANDARD

A study published in the *NZ Medical Journal* in 1985 detailed her experiment and said that Moore used intensive electric shocks that caused gross confusion, dementia and a loss of personality.

One observation written by Moore said a patient “may show gross regression until she curls up into the antenatal position”.

Ferriss said despite being exposed to these cases for many decades there were still times he read material and thought to himself, “my God, there are people behind this”.

“Today, these types of people would go before the Medical Council or even a criminal court, but back then no-one was disciplined.”

It was also hard to reconcile that people who had caused enormous harm, such as Portuguese neurologist Antonio Egas Moniz, went on to receive awards and recognition for being pioneers in the industry.



Survivor Denise Caltaux has been a patient at Kingseat Psychiatric Hospital and her story is told in the panels behind.
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Moniz received a Nobel prize for developing the prefrontal lobotomy, a practice which involved cutting nerves in the brain's frontal lobe and leaving patients with irreversible damage.

Procedures like this were hailed as breakthroughs, but survivors accounts “detail a legacy of cruelty” that included receiving these lobotomies with no anaesthetic.

Ferriss said the use of seclusion and chemical restraints were still routine in state care and psychiatric facilities, and psychiatry had retained its “inherent power to act above the law”.

“But, these people they are treating are not criminals – they have the right to their own sanity, choices and health decisions.”

