

8 June 2020

Wellington City Council
Annual Plan Engagement
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Re: Feedback on Wellington City Council's 2020-2021 Annual Plan

Tēnā koe,

RPH serves the greater Wellington region, through its three district health boards (DHBs): Capital & Coast, Hutt Valley and Wairarapa. RPH works with our community to make it a healthier, safer place to live across the greater Wellington Region. We promote good health, prevent disease, and improve the quality of life for our population. Regional Public Health (RPH) has been, and continues to be, actively involved in responding to the COVID-19 public health pandemic to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. While RPH has not been able to respond to submissions during the peak of COVID-19 response, we appreciate the opportunity now to provide feedback on Wellington City Council (WCC)'s Annual Plan.

RPH appreciates the important role that WCC plays in providing support for communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the coming months, the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 will become increasingly apparent for many communities. The COVID-19 crisis and the outcomes that lockdown have had, and will continue to have, will impact significantly on vulnerable communities and will exacerbate existing inequities among Māori, Pacific, low-income families, refugees, and seniors. In light of this, RPH commends WCC for reviewing the priorities outlined in their 2020-2021 annual plan and redirecting efforts and funds to support communities, households and businesses in recovery. RPH would like to support council in considering how COVID-19 recovery efforts can promote the health and wellbeing of your community and advance equity.

Tackling the Housing Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of warm, dry, safe and affordable housing, particularly during lockdown when whānau spent more time in their homes than ever before. Whānau living in damp, cold and overcrowded houses are at a greater risk of contracting respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. There have been nine cases of acute rheumatic fever notified in the year to date in the greater Wellington region. This is an increase on recent years: in each year between 2013 and 2019, no more than 2 cases had been notified by this time of the year. This has directly impacted Māori and Pacific whānau and tamariki who are disproportionately represented due to poverty and poor housing conditions.

As part of an equitable recovery, **RPH recommends that WCC invest in supporting warm, dry, safe and affordable homes**, including providing subsidies to retrofit houses, increasing access to an Ecodesigner, and supporting homeless communities who have been highly vulnerable during the pandemic. The greater number of people working from home also provides an opportunity for councils to think about innovative ways of dealing with the housing crisis, for example, by repurposing office buildings into affordable, quality housing.

Resilient Communities

Unemployment and financial pressures due to the COVID-19 pandemic has, and will continue to have, significant social, health and economic impacts, particularly on vulnerable communities. Community organisations provide a range of essential supports to communities including food security programs, youth groups, recreational activities for whānau, housing supports, mental health programs, and employment services. Community organisations that provide these much-needed support services in the region are experiencing financial pressures due to COVID-19, as many funding streams are no longer available due to closures and loss of funding (i.e. fees for service, Community Organisation Grants Scheme (COGS), social enterprise income, grants and philanthropic funding, gaming trusts). Despite the greater need for community support services in the recovery from COVID-19, many community organisations are at risk of closing because, without funding, they are not able to provide these important services. This will exacerbate social inequities, leaving low-income, Māori, Pacific and other vulnerable groups worse off. To ensure a recovery that promotes collective wellbeing and builds resilient communities, **RPH supports WCC's commitment to increase funding and resources for community organisations in 2019/20 and 2020/21**. It will be important to ensure that the funding is adequate, and sustained over the long-term, to meet the service and support needs of communities coping with the social, economic, cultural and health impacts of COVID-19 in the coming months and years.

WCC can also invest in building community wellbeing and resilience through council services by offering free recreational services for whānau, mental health supports, employment and financial management services through libraries and community hubs. Other positive steps could include taking stock of how community hubs and council buildings are being used to support communities, particularly vulnerable groups, and making future plans on how community services can continue to operate and be utilised to their best potential in the event of future emergencies. For example, this could include ensuring that food banks have sufficient volunteers and staff who can sustain delivery and operations during an emergency (e.g. diversity in age and location of volunteers). RPH values the partnership with council in the welfare response via the Emergency Coordination Centres. It is important for council to continue to support the role of a welfare liaison to advocate for the welfare of communities.

Food Security

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the level of food insecurity and the need for food resiliency in our communities. Over lockdown, the demand for food assistance grew significantly across the country. We recognise the enormous amount of work done by WCC in responding to the increased demand and providing food parcels to whānau in need of support. Given the ongoing economic impacts of COVID-19, we expect more communities will begin to experience challenges with food security.

COVID-19 has emphasized the need to build a sustainable and resilient food system in the Wellington region and we recognise the work already underway by your council in this area. **RPH would like to work in partnership with Wellington City Council to further strengthen food resiliency and security in the city; one way this can be achieved is by signing the Good Food Cities^[1] declaration.** Mayors from around the world have signed the Good Food City Declaration committing to aligning procurement policies with sustainable, healthy plant-based foods, reducing food loss and waste by 50%, and introducing policies to promote healthy, low-carbon foods that are affordable and accessible to all. RPH has already begun conversations with your staff and will follow-up with further recommendations to council on strategies for building food resiliency and tackling food insecurity.

Three Waters Infrastructure

RPH supports the need for significant investment and activities by WCC in ‘three waters’ infrastructure to ensure the provision of safe drinking water and sustainable storm and wastewater systems. Ageing infrastructure in the city has significant impacts on the short, medium and long term wellbeing of the community, and can have adverse impacts on residents’ quality of life, particularly on vulnerable communities who already experience poor social and health outcomes. It is of vital importance to ensure that three waters infrastructure functions properly to protect the wellbeing of the community. **RPH recommends that WCC prioritises investment in strengthening three waters infrastructure.**

Public Health Bylaw - Nail and Beauty Salons

RPH congratulates the council with the recently passed Public Health Bylaw to address health and safety issues in beauty and nail industry. This is consistent with similar bylaws from other regions in New Zealand, national regulation is likely to be years away particularly given that a number of councils have now established bylaws, in particular a large proportion of the national population is covered by the Auckland Unitary Authority Bylaw. You may recall that our 2017 Survey of 57 nail and beauty salons in the Wellington Region showed an overwhelming need for minimum standards within the industry, with few operators providing adequate infection control practices¹. There is an ever increasing range of new and invasive procedures in the hands of an unregulated industry. Your

^[1] https://www.c40.org/press_releases/good-food-cities

¹ RPH found that only 12% of salons visited followed procedures that would maintain sterility of equipment used for manicures/pedicures.

bylaw, which requires businesses to comply with minimum standards for infection control and hygiene, will protect beauty operators who may be working in unsafe conditions and unaware of their rights, as well as the health and safety of the wider community. There was very strong industry support for the enhancement safety that the bylaw brings. **RPH welcomes the opportunity to continue to support WCC with the bylaw implementation.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on WCC's Annual Plan 2020/21. Wellington City has an important role to play in safe guarding the wellbeing of communities and advancing equity in the coming months and years, as the region recovers from the social, health and economic impacts of COVID-19. RPH wishes to support council by offering our public health expertise, knowledge and skills, where appropriate. If you have any further questions and/or would like to arrange a meeting to discuss ways in which RPH can support council on key public health issues in your community, please contact us.

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Ngā mihi

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