

30 April 2021

LTP Submission  
Greater Wellington Regional Council  
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Tēnā koe

**Re: Greater Wellington Regional Council Long Term Plan Consultation 2021-2051**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the Greater Wellington Regional Council Long Term Plan.

Regional Public Health is the public health unit for the greater Wellington region. We work with communities and local organisations to make the region a healthier and safer place to live. Our vision is: **Pae Ora: Healthy futures for the greater Wellington region**. We promote good health, and work on disease prevention to improve the quality of life for our population, with a particular focus on children, Māori, Pacific peoples and low-income households.

We are happy to provide further advice or clarification on any of the points raised in our written submission. **We would welcome the opportunity to speak to our submission**. The contact point for this submission is:

Demelza O'Brien, Technical Officer  
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Nāku noa, nā

Dr Craig Thornley  
**Clinical Head of Department**

Peter Gush  
**General Manager**

## INTRODUCTION

Regional Public Health (RPH) is the public health unit for the greater Wellington Region (Wairarapa, Hutt Valley and Capital & Coast District Health Boards). Our business works to improve the health and wellbeing of our population and to reduce health disparities through public health action. We aim to work with others to promote and protect good health, prevent disease, and improve quality of life across the population. We are funded by the Ministry of Health and also have contracts with District Health Boards and other agencies to deliver specific services.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

The Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) Long Term Plan 2021-2051 clearly demonstrates the wide range of work Council undertake that has potential to support community health and wellbeing. We are heartened to see you are using your role as Local Government to strengthen community wellbeing through local economic development and creating a healthy physical and social environment for all residents.

RPH recognises the important role that social, economic, cultural and physical factors such as housing, healthy food, water quality, transport, neighbourhood form and health related behaviours play in our community's health. These factors together drive as much as 80% of health outcomes, leaving only about 20% of modifiable contributors to health of a population related to medical care.<sup>1</sup> Health truly begins where we live, work and play.



**80% of our health and wellbeing is determined by our social, economic, cultural and physical environment**

Our submission will offer some general comments on current public health concerns of relevance to Council, as well as some specific comments on elements of your plan that could impact on health outcomes and equity in the greater Wellington Region.

## RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC LONG-TERM PLAN QUESTIONS

### 1. Pushing the go button on electrifying our bus and rail network

- Electric all the way (preferred option)
- Keep some diesel burning

**RPH supports** electric all the way (option 1). We support electrifying our bus and rail network. This is in line with [our submission on the Regional Public Transport Plan](#) which supported decarbonising the Metlink bus fleet by 2030.

**RPH commends** GWRC on your bold commitment to tackling climate change. RPH agrees with your statement “Climate change is seriously affecting our region and the world, and we need to take

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nam.edu/social-determinants-of-health-101-for-health-care-five-plus-five/>

urgent action in the areas we control and influence.” (p.9). In addition we wish to highlight that climate change is likely to exacerbate inequities in Aotearoa, particularly for Māori, Pacific and low-income communities who are at greater risk of poorer health and social outcomes<sup>2,3</sup>.

Climate change is a serious and imminent threat to population health. New Zealanders are at risk of both:

- the direct health effects of climate change (e.g. extreme weather events, injuries, heat waves and damage to infrastructure)
- the indirect health effects (e.g. changes in ecosystems and subsequent disease patterns, microbiological contamination of water, conflict over resource scarcity, poor mental health, food insecurity, destruction of infrastructure, homes and livelihoods)



**Strategies to address climate change can provide significant health benefits to the population**

Reducing emissions involves changes to behaviours and environments that can significantly improve people’s general health. When implemented appropriately, strategies that address climate change can often provide significant health co-benefits (eg. increased physical activity, dietary improvements and reduced air pollution) and decrease existing inequities.<sup>4</sup>

By investing in areas that provide long term benefits such as Three Waters, sustainability initiatives and neighbourhood social/community infrastructure, GWRC can build resilience and prevent or reduce the negative health outcomes that could otherwise deepen inequities and prevent our communities from experiencing full well-being.

## **2. Ramping up our restoration of regional parks to fight climate change**

- Sow the seeds now (preferred option)
- Beat about the bush

**RPH supports** sow the seeds now (option 1). We think this is the right step to reducing the carbon footprint as well as supporting biodiversity, improving fresh water quality and reducing erosion. As you note this will also provide a better recreational experience. Connecting with nature is widely promoted as having positive impacts on our mental wellbeing as well as physical health.

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Policy Statement on Climate Change. Wellington: New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Howden-Chapman P, Chapman R, Hales S, Britton E, Wilson N. Climate Change and Human Health: Impact and Adaptation Issues for New Zealand. In: Nottage RAC, Wratt DS, Bornman JF, Jones K (eds). Climate Change Adaptation in New Zealand: Future Scenarios and Some Sectoral Perspectives. Wellington: New Zealand Climate Change Centre. (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Frumkin H, Hess J, Lubet G, Malilay J, McGeehin M. Climate change: the public health response. American journal of public health. 2008 Mar;98(3):435-45.

### 3. Taking joint action to super charge our region

- Serious support (preferred option)
- So-so support

**RPH supports** taking serious action to super charge our shared region (option 1).

We support the general direction GWRC is taking and agree that a coordinated approach to the regions challenges in particular around housing, urban development, transport and resilience are critical. We are heartened to see that mana whenua are right there with you helping guide these big discussions and decisions. Ka mau te wehi! (how fantastic!)

#### What changes are we expecting across our region?

RPH understands well the “watch outs” you have outlined on page 22. **We commend** GWRC taking an opportunities approach to these potential changes. **RPH would like to highlight** one more potential “watch out” for your consideration - intergenerational equity. “Inter-generational equity occurs when the costs of an asset are spread over the life-time of that asset and paid for by the generations that benefit from, or consume, that asset.”<sup>5</sup>

**RPH supports an intergenerational approach** to health and wellbeing to create environments that support healthy choices for families, children and youth. Once these environments are established they will generate long term benefits for health both now and for future generations.

#### Do you support the general overall direction of the Long Term Plan?

**RPH supports** the general direction of this plan.

#### Have we got the balance right between level or rates/charges and the services we provide?

No comment

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

### COVID-19

**RPH commends** GWRC for your consideration of the impacts of COVID-19.

**Collectively**, we need to ensure that the community and community organisations are well supported, particularly over the next thirty years, to meet community needs resulting from the social, economic, cultural and health impacts of COVID-19.

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<sup>5</sup> Why do councils borrow? [Internet]. Lgnz.co.nz. 2021 [cited 28 April 2021]. Available from: <https://www.lgnz.co.nz/local-government-in-nz/new-section-page/why-do-councils-borrow/>

Over the past year, the pivotal role of Councils in the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been made clear.

RPH **encourages** maintaining a robust and ongoing relationship with Council to provide technical health expertise during emergencies or disasters.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of building local neighbourhood resilience to the challenges our communities face. It has shown how features of our neighbourhoods can all contribute to individual and collective resiliency such as, access to safe and healthy housing, good urban design, community facilities, public transport options, active connections, water quality, parks and open spaces, as well as local food sources.

COVID-19 has also demonstrated the impact of inequitable distribution of these features on our communities. The burden of negative economic and social impacts of COVID-19 continue to be significant for communities and these exacerbate existing inequities for Māori, Pacific, low-income families, disabled, refugees, and seniors. The pandemic increased the challenge of providing vulnerable people with access to health and other resources, and safe, secure, healthy accommodation. It also highlighted the level of food insecurity and the need for food resiliency in our communities with demand for food assistance growing exponentially across the country.

An enormous amount of work was done by Councils and local groups in providing food parcels and hygiene packs to whānau in need of support. Community organisations and groups across the greater Wellington region were and continue to be at the forefront of the response and recovery from COVID-19. Many of these groups are under immense pressure to meet the needs of the community. RPH **recognises** that greater collective investment and resource is required to address the inequities that continue to exist for communities.

## Wellington Regional Growth Framework (WRGF)

RPH has been actively engaged in the WRGF. RPH supports the further resourcing of this important mahi. Challenges facing housing and urban development, transport and resilience do not respect council or District Health Board boundaries, this is why it is important central and local government agencies work together for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

## Three Waters reform

RPH **supports** your prioritisation of the delivery of drinking water. Our communities need safe drinking water.

We **commend** GWRC on the publication of the Long Term Plan (LTP). We recognise the changing context within which you work, in particular the reform of Three Waters programme, the Resource Management Act, and the regional approach to managing future population growth.

## Living wage

Although the living wage is not specifically mentioned in your long term plan. **RPH applauds** GWRC on becoming the first regional council in Aotearoa to become a living wage employer.

Income is a key determinant of health that influences various health outcomes. Poverty, in particular impacts on children and is a major health concern in Aotearoa.<sup>6</sup> Action is required by all to reduce the adverse effects of poverty on the health of children and families with low incomes. Council has the opportunity to support this by increasing the hourly rate of all employees and contractors to the living wage.

Living wage is the hourly rate that has been deemed to be the income necessary to provide workers and their families with the basic necessities of life.<sup>7</sup> The Living Wage Movement Aotearoa was a response to the increasing inequities and increasing poverty in New Zealand.

## CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your long term plan. **RPH would like** to hear more about Greater Wellington activities in the fortnightly e-newsletter To Tātou Rohe - Our Region. We do not wish for our submission to be kept confidential.

We would welcome the opportunity to speak with Council officials on the opportunities we have raised in this submission.

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<sup>6</sup> Child Poverty Action Group. Annual Report, April 2019 – March 2020. [Internet]. 2020. Available from: <https://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/AGM/240720%20CPAG%20Annual%20Report%202020%20pdf%20Version.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Living Wage Aotearoa. Available from: <https://www.livingwage.org.nz/>