

30 April 2021

Regional Public Health

HAUORA Ā IWI KI TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
Better health for the greater Wellington region

South Wairarapa District Council
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Tēnā koe

Re: South Wairarapa District Council Long term Plan Consultation Document 2021-2031

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the South Wairarapa District 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. Our staff include a range of occupations such as medical officers of health, public health advisors, health protection officers, public health nurses, and public health analysts.

We are happy to provide further advice or clarification on any of the points raised in our written submission. We **do not** wish to make an oral submission. The contact point for this submission is:

Demelza O'Brien, Technical Officer
Email: Demelza.obrien@huttvalleydhb.org.nz

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 and prevent diseases to 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

We read with interest your Long Term Plan 2021-2031 and note the potential it has to support community health and wellbeing. We are heartened to see you are using your role as Local Government in strengthening community wellbeing through local economic development and through creating a healthy physical and social environment for all residents.

RPH recognises the important role that social and economic factors such as housing, healthy food, water quality, transport, the shape of our neighbourhoods, and health related behaviours play in our communities' health. These factors together drive as much as 80% of health outcomes leaving medical care to account for only 10-20% of the modifiable contributors to health for a population.¹ Health truly begins where we live, work and play.

RPH **commends** Council on the publication of your Long Term Plan. We recognise the changing context within which you work, in particular the reform of Three Waters, the Resource Management Act, and the regional approach to managing future population growth.

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 South Wairarapa community. We then raise some opportunities to work together to address our shared challenges that will help to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and build local neighbourhood resilience.



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

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

COVID-19

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

Over the past year, the pivotal role councils play in the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been made clear. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of building local neighbourhood resilience to the challenges that our communities face. It has shown how features of our neighbourhoods such as access to safe and healthy housing, community facilities, public transport options, active connections, water quality, parks and open space as well as local food sources all contribute to individual and collective resiliency.

COVID-19 has also demonstrated the impact of unequal 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, refugees, and seniors. The pandemic increased the challenge of providing vulnerable people with access to health and other resources, and safe, secure and 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 to whānau in need of support. RPH recognises that greater collective investment and resource is required to address the causes of food insecurity.

Community organisations and groups in South Wairarapa and across the 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 meeting the needs of the community. RPH is committed to working with Council to support our communities.

Climate change

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
- Indirect health effects e.g. changes in ecosystems and subsequent disease patterns, microbiological contamination of water, poor mental health, food insecurity, destruction of infrastructure, homes and livelihoods.

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.^{2,3} Reducing emissions involves changes to behaviours and environments that can significantly improve peoples' general health. Strategies that address climate change can often provide significant health co-benefits (e.g. increased physical activity, dietary improvements and reduced air pollution) and decrease existing inequities when implemented appropriately.⁴



Many of these strategies are directly within the locus of control of Councils and will have positive health and social benefits for the community as well as result in reduced emissions. For instance, South Wairarapa District Council has the potential to create environmental, social and wider health co-benefits through:

- Continued prioritisation of walking and cycling routes and connections between towns
- Ensuring areas of new housing development have community facilities including communal areas to grow food, access water, play and socialise
- Supporting initiatives that improve the 'health' of existing housing stock and neighbourhoods across South Wairarapa.

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

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Three Waters

RPH notes that Wellington Water's review of the district's town water supplies has identified the need for extra barriers of protection to meet compliance with the Drinking Water Standards and to ensure safe drinking water. RPH **supports** Council's assessment that such work is essential and agrees that it should be Councils main focus in the next year.

There is a move both regionally and nationally, including through the Proposed Greater Wellington Natural Resources Plan, to mandate the efficient use of water. Water metering can be a useful

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

³ 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).

⁴ Climate Change: The Public Health Response. Frumkin. (2008).

strategy for conserving fresh water resources, raise consumer awareness and promote the value of water. RPH **supports** the proposal to develop a Water Conservation Action Plan and suggests that consumer education and positive reinforcement of key conservation measures may complement the existing provision of meters.

Rural roads - no comment

Footpaths - RPH **supports** option 1

The need for safe and accessible footpaths is important for many in the community, especially those with mobility scooters, prams, and wheelchairs. Providing a safe space for active transport on footpaths helps to alleviate traffic congestions, save energy, reduce air and noise pollution, conserve land, and produce various other environmental and health benefits.

Berms - no comment

Greytown Play Space - RPH **supports** option 2

Children's play is fundamental to their development. Playing is learning, as it helps children develop muscle strength and coordination, language, cognitive thinking, and reasoning abilities. It has proven to be a critical element in a child's future success.⁵ Play also teaches children how to interact and cooperate with others, laying foundations for success in school and the working world, and exercise has been shown to increase the brain's capacity for learning.

Children who have access to safe green space, such as parks and playgrounds, are more likely to be physically active and less likely to be overweight.⁶ Quality, safety and ease of use are also important aspects of open space for children. Concerns about safety can impact on their use. Children's mobility is often limited to their immediate surroundings and the constraints of their parents or guardians.⁷

RPH **supports** Council investment in safe, accessible playgrounds as it provides and encourages opportunities for physical activity, access to the natural environment and active play for children. We ask that you consider the location of this investment, to ensure all communities have equitable access to high-quality open spaces such as playgrounds.

RPH **recommends** Council consider an additional playground in Featherston instead of Greytown as this would be more suited to the community needs. As stated in your Long Term Plan, Greytown is the only town in the Wairarapa without a skate park, however it does have existing playgrounds that are accessible for the community. In Featherston, there is need for a refurbished or new playground. The need for a new playground is discussed in 'Our Future Featherston Community Plan'⁸ which is

⁵ Isenberg J, Quisenberry N. A Position Paper of the Association for Childhood Education International PLAY: Essential for all Children. Childhood Education. 2002;79(1):33-39.

⁶ Health Scotland. Health Impact Assessment of greenspace: A Guide. Sterling: Greenspace Scotland; 2008.

⁷ Ewing R, Kreutzer R. Understanding the relationship between public health and the built environment. A report prepared for the LEED-ND Core committee. U.S. Green Building Council; 2006.

⁸ Fab Feathy. Our Future Featherston Community Plan. 2019: 40-43.

based on community feedback. It includes the need for new fencing around the playground, new playground equipment, and equipment that suits the needs of the community including babies, teenagers and adults.

OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER

We note Council has undertaken a lot of ground work to shape the direction of the Long Term Plan. RPH is always keen to participate in these early direction-setting discussions and understand that this is a significant opportunity to influence. Please add us to your database of community and agency consultation stakeholders.

RPH offers its support, skills and knowledge in the areas of emergency management, three waters, housing quality, public and active transport, community development and empowerment, and healthy food environments to ensure the people of South Wairarapa are thriving.

Housing

RPH **encourages** South Wairarapa District Council participation in the cross-sectoral [Wellington Regional Healthy Housing Group](#) (WRHHG). Their vision is “Everyone in the Wellington region lives in warm, dry and safe housing by 2025”. The group is made up of more than 50 organisations including central government departments, local councils, district health boards, Regional Public Health as well as research, social outreach, health and community organisations. Members work in partnership to reduce housing related health inequities.

A key value of the Group, from RPH’s perspective, is the strengthened connections between Council members and wider stakeholders such as ourselves on regional housing issues. The Group provides a forum for the sharing of ideas, information and resources and provides meaningful opportunities to work in partnership toward the vision. RPH would be happy to discuss this further, or you can contact Amanda Scothern, WRHHG Executive Officer on: info@wrhhg.org.nz.

The local food environment

RPH welcomes the opportunity to work with Council on strategies for building food resiliency and tackling food insecurity. A local food production and distribution system based on ecological sustainability, able to withstand natural and man-made shocks is a vital part of food resilience.⁹

Currently too many people in our communities are dependent on charity and food waste from industry. In 2020/21 RPH and the Common Unity Project co-hosted ‘Kai and our community’ hui across the greater Wellington region to explore the potential and purpose of a regional food network. This identified:

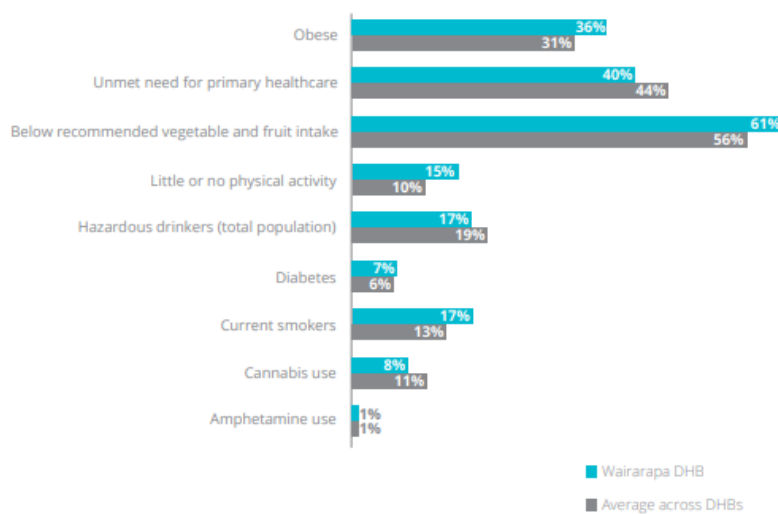
⁹ World Health Organisation, 1996, World Food Summit definition of food security.

- How fragile our current linear food system is, requiring handouts and dependency for those who can't afford to participate
- The need to begin a movement to develop a circular food system/economy which is participatory and walking with vulnerable people and communities
- The importance of including those most affected and co-designing for change from the top down and the bottom up.

Additionally, the Wairarapa DHB population profile in 2016/17 shows that 61% of adults across Wairarapa have an intake of fruit and vegetables below what is recommended.

DHB POPULATION HEALTH PRIORITIES

Adult prevalence of each indicator (health priority)



This graph shows the prevalence of specific key indicators (results of the 2016/2017 New Zealand Health Survey) per DHB, and the sub-regional averages. These indicators relate to the population health priorities identified for each DHB.

RPH recognises and appreciates Council's participation in this work, including with council officers and the Mayoral Forum. Addressing these issues and regionalising our food system will require a collaborative approach across councils, and has strong alignment with Council's structure plan to allow appropriate housing growth and activities to build in resilience to climate change and other public health threats.

Five towns trail project.

RPH **acknowledges** Council for its work on the Five Towns Trail Project. Cycling, walking and jogging/running are becoming increasingly popular in New Zealand, with both walking and cycling among the most popular sports for tamariki and whānau from low and medium economic backgrounds in urban areas. Active modes of transport enable our population to participate in higher levels of physical activity, resulting in reduced levels of long-term conditions which are some of the leading causes of health loss in New Zealand.¹⁰ Additionally active transport helps to alleviate

¹⁰ Ministry of Health. 2013. Health Loss in New Zealand: A report from the New Zealand Burden of Diseases, Injuries and Risk Factors Study 2006-2016. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

traffic congestions, save energy, reduce air and noise pollution, conserve land, and produce various other environmental benefits.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your Long Term Plan. We are happy to provide further advice or clarification on any of the points raised in our written submission.