

23 April 2021

Upper Hutt City Council
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Tēnā koe

Re: Upper Hutt City Council Long Term Plan Consultation 2021-2031

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the Upper Hutt City Council Long Term Plan.

Regional Public Health (RPH) 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 would welcome the opportunity to speak to our 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
Medical Officer of Health

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

We read with interest your consultation document for the 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 Upper Hutt 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.

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.

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

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 Upper Hutt 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.

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

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-

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).

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, Upper Hutt City 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 Upper Hutt.

By investing in areas that provide long term benefits such as Three Waters, sustainability initiatives and neighbourhood social/community infrastructure, Upper Hutt City 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

Infrastructure investment

RPH notes Council's decision to allocate a lower level of capital expenditure funding than Wellington Water Limited has requested for its work programme, and notes the risks that you have outlined will be managed through the annual plan process.

RPH **acknowledges** the need to improve and increase information about the health and condition of Three Waters assets and we understand the need for Council to prioritise its renewals investment toward critical assets. Ensuring investment in Three Waters infrastructure over the immediate 10 year horizon is sufficient to cope with the increased demand associated with current, planned and potential urban development is important.

We **recommend** Council increase incentives and support for community and residential water storage facilities in the event of emergencies. Wellington Water recommends having 20L per day per person of stored water for as long as the water supply system isn't working. They estimate that a 500 litre rainwater tank could provide a household of four with 20 litres of water per person for 30 days in a summer with average rainfall.⁵ Investment in this area will improve our emergency response preparedness, alongside implementation of the renewals programme.

The follow-on effects of insufficient investment such as sewerage contamination, insufficient supply and reduced freshwater quality have a significant impact on local communities and the environment.

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

⁵ <https://www.wellingtonwater.co.nz/your-water/drinking-water/looking-after-your-water/water-conservation/rainwater-tanks/>

Kerbside recycling

RPH **supports** the inclusion of a citywide kerbside recycling system in the budget to ensure all people in Upper Hutt can participate in recycling. The current system is reliant on personal vehicle use, which excludes many households who may struggle to meet vehicle running costs or who do not own a motor vehicle. It also results in multiple private recycling providers servicing the same streets resulting in greater vehicle emissions. Council could take a lead in developing a coordinated and accessible recycling system for all Upper Hutt residents.

Council could also explore how to better support low income families in waste management and minimisation through subsidised options for example through initiatives for:

- Inorganic rubbish collection
- Green waste collection
- Waste management education in the community (i.e. separating recycling, home composting etc)
- Set up kits for onsite composting etc.

Investing in community spaces and places

RPH **supports** fully upgrading H2O Xstream, including with sustainable technology to reduce Council's carbon footprint.

RPH **commends** Council on your continued investment to develop the Maidstone Community Sports Hub.

RPH notes in your infrastructure plan the decision to defer community hub development until 2024/25 and that this was originally identified in your previous Long Term Plan for implementation in 2021/22. We also note that the preferred option is to locate the community hub in the civic precinct adjacent to the central library. RPH is not aware of consultation on this, but would encourage in-depth engagement with targeted groups in the community, such as young people and communities experiencing higher socio-economic deprivation.

Community spaces and places are valuable community assets that provide:

- a physical space where a range of information, services, programmes and activities can be delivered
- a place to develop social capital, community involvement, ownership and opportunities for democracy
- a place for cultural, leisure, educational, recreational and entertainment activities
- equity of access for all ages, incomes, abilities and backgrounds.⁶

⁶ Porirua City Council, Community and Spaces and Places Provision Framework and Findings Report, Porirua (October 2020)

Some key aspects to consider in the design and development of a community hub and other community spaces include: ensuring drinking water facilities are accessible to all those using the facilities. See attached infographic for more aspects.

We **recommend**, given the significant social and health challenges faced by some communities in Upper Hutt, that investment in community hubs is brought forward to 2021-2023 and that targeted engagement is undertaken to determine the nature and location of facilities. Bringing forward your investment and focusing it toward the communities of greatest need is an opportunity to support wellbeing and resilience. We recommend to you Porirua City Council's recent report providing a framework for community spaces and places provision which you may find useful.

We also note that one of the key options for decision in your Draft Infrastructure Strategy is whether to retain or replace the community houses, noting that continuation of use of sub-optimal services hampers the ability to easily provide wrap around services.

RPH **supports** community facilities near to where people live with high levels of access whether by active modes or public transport. These facilities are even more important in areas of Upper Hutt with high levels of social and health need. RPH recommends retaining and increasing investment in community facilities/houses in these areas in consultation with the affected communities.

Investing in sustainability

RPH **commends** Council on its sustainability strategy 2020 and your work to incorporate sustainability into asset management plans.

RPH **supports** ongoing Council investment to develop the on-road and open space walking and cycling network through your active mode transport programme.

RPH **supports** Council's introduction of a grant for local sustainability initiatives.

In the proposed upgrades of Council facilities, including the Civic Centre, H2O Xtream, the sports hub, and for the new community hub RPH **encourages** Council to use sustainable building design principles to further reduce Council's carbon footprint and to ensure buildings support health.

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.

RPH has worked with Council closely to support policy and planning in areas such as the food environment, alcohol and smokefree. We also offer public health expertise in the areas of emergency management, three waters, housing quality, public and active transport and community development. RPH would like to strengthen the reciprocal relationship we have with Council and are happy to discuss opportunities to loan staff, or host Council staff where there is mutual benefit.

In addition to the priorities outlined in your Long Term Plan, RPH would like to suggest the following areas where we could work together and with other local partners to build community resilience.

Community hubs and houses

Community hubs and houses, if resourced effectively and developed with communities, can strengthen local delivery of services and provide improved services that enhance community wellbeing.

RPH would like to explore with you how we can support your mahi to determine the location and nature of community hubs.

Housing

Access to housing

RPH **acknowledges** the work Council is doing to provide areas for future housing growth in Upper Hutt. In its new developments, RPH encourages Council to ensure a minimum percentage of affordable housing options, and to work with social housing providers to consider opportunities for community housing within new developments.

RPH **recommends** Council strengthen its support to social housing initiatives in Upper Hutt.

RPH believes everyone should have access to an affordable home that is safe, warm, dry and livable in neighbourhoods where they can thrive. Too many people are currently missing out on this opportunity. In the last five years, the number of Upper Hutt applications to the social housing register has ballooned from 11 in December 2015 to 178 in December 2020. The number of people this represents with urgent housing need is far greater than the application numbers indicate. In Hutt City the number is higher still with 45 applications in December 2015 and 586 registered in December 2020.⁷ RPH understands that only those applications of the highest priority are able to be housed in a timely way, with many applicants staying on the register for months or years.

The issue of access to housing does not respect Council boundaries, with many people moving across the wider Hutt Valley in the search for safe and stable accommodation, whether through the private rental market, home ownership, social housing, living rough or relying on the generosity of friends and family. Access to safe and affordable housing is a prerequisite to ensuring that other important health needs can be met. If housing is not affordable or secure, whānau are unlikely to be able to afford other requisites of health e.g. access to nutritious food and the ability to safely heat their homes.

RPH **recommends** Council continue to work with community partners, social housing providers, agencies working to sustain tenancies, Orongomai Marae and others to explore how Council can support these issues to be addressed across the Hutt Valley.

⁷ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/index.html#LatestresultsndashnbspdDecember20201>

Healthy housing

RPH **recommends** Council also invest in and support activities that improve the housing quality of **existing** homes in Upper Hutt.

A warm dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life⁸. Housing is an important underlying determinant of health, with housing quality and household crowding playing a major role in respiratory illnesses such as asthma, skin infections and acute rheumatic fever. Housing is contributing to hospitalisations that are easily preventable for children in New Zealand. These poor housing conditions also increase risk of future ill health and poorer performance across a range of social indicators and the burden of disease associated with housing conditions is particularly high for Māori and Pacific whānau.

There are approximately 200,000 homes in the Wellington region⁹ and according to BRANZ research, as much as 49% of these homes will be damp or mouldy.¹⁰ Key issues contributing to damp and mould are inadequate insulation, ventilation and heating; with rental housing quality generally lower than in owner-occupied housing. Added to this, increasing rental and housing costs contribute to household crowding which further adds to the serious risks of infectious diseases and hospitalisation.¹¹

Council can play an important role in improving housing quality in Upper Hutt e.g. through enabling regulation, advisory and support services, incentives to homeowners and developers, and working with communities to invest in improving housing through retrofitting insulation schemes. The latter provide a benefit: cost ratio of more than 5:1 with both health care savings and carbon emissions reductions.^{12 13}

RPH **encourages** Upper Hutt City Council's 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.

⁸ New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (2013). "Housing Policy Statement." Available from: https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcpmh_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf

⁹ 2018 New Zealand Census

¹⁰ BRANZ 2015 House Condition Survey.

https://d39d3mj7qio96p.cloudfront.net/media/documents/SR372_Warm_dry_healthy.pdf

¹¹ Johnson, A., Howden-Chapman, P., Eaquad, S., (2018) *A Stocktake of New Zealand's Housing*

¹² Cost Benefit Analysis of the Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart Programme. <https://tinyurl.com/yxg68gjf>

¹³ The impact of retrofitted insulation and new heaters on health services utilisation and costs, and pharmaceutical costs. Evaluation of the New Zealand Insulation Fund. <https://tinyurl.com/y555towc>

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.¹⁴

Currently too many people in our communities are dependent on charity and food waste from industry. In 2020/21 RPH and Common Unity Project Aotearoa 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:

- 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, RPH recognises that our food system contributes an estimated 24% of greenhouse gas emissions (UN, March 2021) from transportation and the use of artificial fertilizer. A significant lever for reducing our national carbon footprint and building local resilience is therefore producing and consuming food locally, and utilising compost instead of artificial fertilizers.

The draft Wellington Regional Growth Framework implementation plan includes the development of a regional strategy for food production to ensure food security and efficient supply chains and to include an emphasis on employment opportunities. This will require strong partnership between and within local government, iwi, central government and other groups.

RPH **appreciates** Council's contribution and 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 plans for future housing growth and activities to build in resilience to climate change and other public health threats.

A domestic food economy that is increasingly local, circular and participatory is good for people's health and the environment

RPH also **acknowledges** Council's contribution and support in establishing the Hutt Valley Food Resilience Network, alongside Common Unity Project Aotearoa, Regional Public Health, Healthy Families and Kōkiri Marae. We look forward to continuing to work with Council in this forum.

¹⁴ World Health Organisation, 1996, World Food Summit definition of food security.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your Long Term Plan. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with Council officials on the opportunities we have raised.