

10 May 2021

Regional Public Health

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

Wellington City Council
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Tēnā koe

Re: Wellington City Council Long-term Plan Consultation 2021-2031

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission on the Wellington City 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. 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 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

The Wellington City Council Long Term Plan 2021-2031 clearly demonstrates the wide range of work Council undertake 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 recognise 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.¹ Health truly begins where we live, work and play.

RPH **commends** Council on the publication of your Long Term Plan (LTP). 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 Wellington community. We then raise some opportunities to work together to address our shared challenges to help build local resilience and wellbeing.



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

¹ Magnan S. Social Determinants of Health 101 for Health Care: Five Plus Five. (2017).

COVID-19

Together, we need to ensure that community organisations are well supported, particularly 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 of Councils 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 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 older people. 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 inequities that continue to exist for communities.

Community organisations and groups in Wellington 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 to meet the needs of the community. RPH is committed to working with Council to support our communities to ensure everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC LONG-TERM PLAN QUESTIONS

RPH **supports** Council's investment in three waters infrastructure.

We **support** option 2; enhanced investment. We **commend** Council's focus on improving the condition and reliability of the network in an affordable and sustainable way.

E kore tātau e mōhio ki te waitohu
nui o te wai kia mimiti rawa te puna.

We never know the worth of water until the well runs dry.

We **acknowledge** 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. It is important to ensure 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. The follow-on effects of insufficient investment such as sewerage contamination, insufficient supply and reduced freshwater quality have a significant impact on surrounding communities and the environment.

RPH supports the implementation of the full cycleway programme through a priority order.

RPH commends Council's investment to provide an opportunity for better access to active transport. Active transport helps to alleviate traffic congestion, saves energy, reduces air and noise pollution, conserves land, and produces various other environmental benefits. Furthermore, active modes of transport can contribute to a reduction in long-term health conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes, and improving safety can reduce injury events.²

RPH commends Council's progress and commitment to the Te Atakura: First to Zero goals.

RPH recommends that the Healthy Streets Design Indicators³ be considered and incorporated into the design of road types in new developments. These guidelines should be utilised in the design of active transport routes to ensure an effective, accessible and safe space for community use.

RPH supports Council in fully funding Te Atakura action plan.

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.^{4,5} Reducing emissions involves changes to behaviours and environments that can significantly improve peoples' general health. When implemented appropriately, strategies that address climate change can often

² Ministry of Health. 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 (2016).

³ Guide to the Healthy Streets Indicators: Delivering the Healthy Streets Approach, Transport for London. Retrieved 25/06/2020 from: <https://healthystreetscom.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/guide-to-the-healthy-streets-indicators.pdf>

⁴ New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. Policy Statement on Climate Change. Wellington: New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. (2013).

⁵ 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).

provide significant health co-benefits (e.g. increased physical activity, dietary improvements and reduced air pollution) and decrease existing inequities.⁶

To ensure a fair and equitable transition we need to consider and address the potential impacts of the proposed climate actions on populations with less access to the personal, neighbourhood and system resources needed to live healthy lives, particularly Māori.

Active consideration must be given to the impacts of climate change policy decisions on Māori, in line with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Engaging meaningfully with Māori and other population groups will help to ensure a just transition to a low carbon economy for all New Zealanders. It also provides a significant opportunity to foster an environmentally and socially sustainable economy, driving job creation, and job upgrading, social justice and poverty eradication.

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, Wellington 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 communities
- 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 Wellington City.

By investing in areas that provide long term benefits such as three waters, sustainability initiatives and neighbourhood social/community infrastructure, Wellington 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.

RPH supports Council to develop Te Ngākau Civic Precinct, Council Office Buildings and to fix the central library.

Community spaces can provide communities the opportunity to express and explore their identities and provide safe, supportive environments that contribute to healthy lifestyles. Strengthening cultural identity is important for mental wellbeing of our Pasifika and Māori whānau.⁷

RPH strongly supports Council investment in community spaces. These spaces are important in facilitating community resilience.

RPH **recommends** the following key points are considered when designing and investing in community infrastructure facilities to help build community resilience.

- A breastfeeding friendly space

⁶ Frumkin. Climate Change: The Public Health Response. (2008).

⁷ Ataera-Minster J, Trowland H. Te Kaveinga: Mental health and wellbeing of Pacific peoples. Results from the New Zealand Mental Health Monitor & Health and Lifestyles Survey. Health Promotion Agency. (2018).

- Breastfeeding has many benefits for mother and baby, and is recommended exclusively for the first 6 months of life. A supportive environment for parents to breastfeed includes: comfortable arm chairs, hot water access, power points, microwave, sink and running water, a door/ divider for privacy
- Greenspace or community gardens for mental health
 - Greenspaces provide vital health services as well as environmental services; they reduce socioeconomic health inequalities, facilitate activity and promote better mental health and well-being.⁸ Including greenspaces or community gardens can function as an upstream preventive mental health promotion intervention⁹
- Accessibility to the venue to ensure it is able to be used by all
 - Ensuring adequate pedestrian crossings or traffic light, wheelchair and pram accessibility
- Supportive environment for healthy eating
 - Limiting or having no unhealthy food advertising including unbranded drink fridges or vending machines. No or limited sugar sweetened beverages available, and having healthy food available.

Please see the attached infographic for more aspects to consider in the design and development of community facilities.

RPH supports Council's decision to minimise sludge and waste through alternative funding.

This decision aligns with waste minimisation and Zero Carbon plans and will remove a significant pathway for pathogens to enter residential environments. Minimising sludge and waste will reduce public health risks from the improper disposal of waste and promote sustainable waste management creating a healthier, safer and more sustainable environment.

UPCOMING DECISIONS

Let's Get Wellington Moving

RPH supports Councils vision to ensure Wellington is a great harbour city, accessible to all, with attractive places, shared streets and efficient local and regional journeys.

RPH supports the move towards quicker and more reliable bus journeys and a better walking and cycling environment which would be implemented in concept three. Evidence shows that active transport is beneficial for physical health and wellbeing, as well as having economic and environmental benefits.¹⁰

Transport planning decisions have a significant impact on health and wellbeing by reducing traffic accidents and vehicle emissions, and improving physical activity, access to services, and mental

⁸ Pitt H. Therapeutic experiences of community gardens: Putting flow in its place. *Health & place*. May 1;27:84-91 (2014).

⁹ Barton J, Rogerson M. The importance of greenspace for mental health. *BJPsych International*. Cambridge University Press; 14(4):79–81 (2017).

¹⁰ Ministry of Health. *Regional Data Explorer 2014–17: New Zealand Health Survey*. (2018).

health. By adjusting the bus network in response to public concern, Let's Get Wellington Moving (LGWM) has the opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of its population.¹¹

Affordable Housing City housing financial sustainability

RPH supports Council's aim that everyone in Wellington is well housed. A warm dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life.¹² Housing is an important 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.¹² Housing is contributing to preventable hospitalisation and rehospitalisation rates for children and elderly across Aotearoa. These poor housing conditions also increase the risk of future ill health and poorer performance across a range of social indicators. Māori and Pacific whānau are over represented in the burden of diseases associated with poor housing conditions.

RPH commends Council for recognising that increasing access to affordable housing is key to a successful growth plan. The need for affordable housing is high, as evidenced by the increasing demand for social housing. RPH believes that everyone should have access to an affordable home that's safe, warm, dry and liveable in neighbourhoods where they can thrive. Too many people are currently missing out on this opportunity. 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 the other requisites of health e.g. access to nutritious food.

RPH encourages Council to continue work with iwi, other community partners, social housing providers, agencies working to sustain tenancies, and others to explore how Council can support these issues to be addressed in Wellington.

RPH commends Councils progress in the social housing unit programme upgrade. **RPH recommends** Council continue to invest in and support activities that support access to social housing in Wellington.

RPH supports Te Mahana (Homelessness strategy). **RPH commends** Council's collaboration with other agencies to work to ensure instances of homelessness are rare, brief and non-recurring.

RPH recommends Council continue to invest in and support activities that improve the housing quality of **existing** homes in Wellington. There are approximately 200,000 homes in the Wellington region¹³ and according to BRANZ research, as much as 49% of these homes will be damp or mouldy.¹⁴ Key issues contributing to damp and mould are inadequate insulation, ventilation and heating. This is a significant issue for people who rent their homes as rental housing quality is

¹¹ Macmillan A., Connor J., Witten K., Kearns R., Rees D., Woodward A. The Societal Costs and Benefits of Commuter Bicycling: Simulating the Effects of Specific Policies Using System Dynamics Modelling. Environmental Health Perspectives. (2014).

¹² New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. "Housing Policy Statement." (2013). Available from: https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcphm_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf

¹³ New Zealand Census. (2018).

¹⁴ BRANZ. House Condition Survey. (2015).

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

generally lower than in owner-occupied housing.¹⁵ Increased rental and housing costs contributes to household crowding, further exacerbating the risk of infectious diseases and hospitalisation.¹⁵

Council can play an important role in improving housing quality in Wellington 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.

OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER

Wellington City Council and RPH have a common agenda – working with communities to improve and protect their quality of life. RPH see LTPs as an opportunity to identify areas of collaboration and we are keen to provide our support and expertise to help the Council achieve their outcomes.

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.

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.

Food environment

RPH **welcomes** the opportunity to work with Council on strategies for building food resiliency and tackling food insecurity.

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi

With your food basket and my food basket, the people will prosper.

Currently too many people in our communities are dependent on charity and food waste from industry. Providing ‘good food for all’ in a way that is mana-enhancing is vital for the well-being of our communities. Our vision is to change our current food system by promoting opportunities for food resilience and locally produced food. We believe a co-ordinated regional response is required to achieve this. 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

¹⁵ Johnson, A., Howden-Chapman, P., Equb, S., A Stocktake of New Zealand’s Housing. (2018).

- the importance of including those most affected and co-designing for change from the top down and the bottom up.

RPH would like to **invite** Council’s participation in this work to further strengthen food resiliency and security in the city and across the region. It has strong alignment with Council’s structure plan to allow appropriate housing growth and to build in resilience to climate change and other public health threats.

Additionally, RPH recognises that our food system contributes an estimated 24% of greenhouse gas emissions¹⁶ 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.



Housing

RPH **commends** Wellington City Council for your involvement in the cross-sectoral [Wellington Regional Healthy Housing Group](#). Their vision is that “Everyone in the Wellington region lives in warm, dry and safe housing by 2025”.

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.

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.

¹⁶ UN News. Food systems account for over one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions. (2021). Available from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086822>