

URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Introduction

The following is a position statement on urban environments prepared by the Public Health Unit for Waikato District Health Board (Waikato DHB).

This position statement is intended to provide a high-level policy position for our organisation and guide local response across our DHB catchment and broader as required.

Waikato District Health Board's Position

The way we plan our cities and towns affects the health of New Zealanders. There is a strong link between urban design and aspects of poor health that place disproportionate burden on our communities and health services. Cities and towns can be designed in ways that will improve health and reduce demand for health service costs.

The Waikato DHB will

1. Develop and support formal collaborative approaches to planning and policy development across all levels of government and iwi at governance, management and operational levels where there is potential to maximise health gain, reduce inequalities, and realise co-benefits for all. This aligns with the Health in All Policies Approach recognised by the World Health Organisation. This includes engagement with key stakeholders at an early stage of planning, and providing public health advice and evidence as required to optimise environmental conditions.
2. Advocate for and support neighbourhood characteristics and design that are most consistently associated with decreased non-communicable disease risk factors. These include to:
 - increase residential density and provide multiple transport choices for improved liveability
 - provide greater green space to enable improved physical and mental health outcomes
 - improve access to essential social services such as schools and supermarkets
 - optimise land-use mix e.g. mixed land use planning which can reduce vehicle kilometres travelled
 - enable social capital and create places for social interaction
 - improve walking and cycling and public transport infrastructure and services and transport accessibility to enable access to essential services for all, and
 - improve urban environment design, quality, amenity and safety[1, 2]

Date Issued: November 2017	Review date: February 2022	Version 1.0
Adopted by Waikato District Health Board: 13 February 2019		Page 1 of 4

3. Work with other sectors to ensure access to health and other essential services is not compromised in urban environment planning processes.
4. Raise awareness of and provide information and evidence to help ensure communities in urban environments are less vulnerable and more resilient to natural hazards, and the effects of climate change. Globally and locally, the negative impacts of climate change will be disproportionately borne by the poor and the vulnerable. The human health impacts and health co-benefits of climate mitigation strategies are well documented in the literature.[3, 4]
5. Support and promote the use of impact assessment tools to support the development of urban environments that promote good health, and to enable community participation in urban environment policy development and planning.[5]
6. Support the continuation of the making of submissions to all levels of government and organisations as appropriate to ensure opportunities to improve population health, wellbeing and equity outcomes are optimised.

Health links and the wider environment

Wellbeing is a dynamic process across the life-course. This is reflected in the Ministry of Health’s (2016) representation of health in the wider context (figure 1) which illustrates the various factors that contribute to health and the way in which health influences people’s lives.[6]

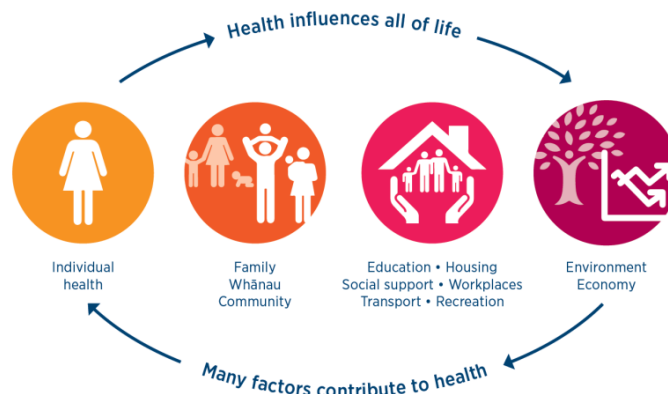


Figure 1: NZ Health Strategy (2016)

Radical improvement in Māori Health Outcomes by Eliminating Health Inequities for Māori

Health disparities are significant contributors to the burden of disease. A key strategic priority for the Waikato DHB is to achieve a radical improvement in Māori health outcomes by eliminating health inequities for Māori.[7] Waikato DHB position statements contribute to the DHB’s commitment to reducing health inequities to improve health and wellbeing for Māori.

Date Issued: November 2017	Review date: February 2022	Version 1.0
Adopted by Waikato District Health Board: 13 February 2019		Page 2 of 4

Key information

Urban environments are a key determinant of health and wellbeing. The determinants of health are the social factors and physical conditions in the environment that influence where people are born, where they live, learn, play work and age; the opportunities they have and the choices they make. These circumstances are shaped by how money, power and resources are distributed at the global, national, regional and local levels and can contribute to health inequities.

Although genetics and personal behaviour play a strong part in determining an individual's health, up to half of what affects this is determined by our social and physical environment.[1]

Identified public health risks associated with sub-optimal urban environments include a lack of integrated land use and transport planning which limit opportunities for physical activity and safe recreation which in turn lead to declining rates of physical activity and increased chronic disease risk e.g. heart disease.[2]

Positive impacts on health and overall wellbeing or mental wellbeing can come from provision of and access to greenspace, and improved social connectedness. Land use mix can result in issues related to general access to public amenities. Proximity between home, work and community services can also impact on health.[8]

Poor health outcomes, associated with the urban environment, can lead to economic and social costs. A study completed in 2016 identified that physical inactivity in the Auckland, Waikato and Wellington regions, where about half the country's population live, costs \$648 million a year, of which Waikato accounted for \$106 million.[9]

We have growing evidence about the long-term life costs as our population grows and/or ages and is exposed to health risks associated with an unhealthy urban environments, especially in regard to chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. Improved health is strongly linked to sustainable development. Many interventions which promote better human health at the same time also promote better environmental health.[2]

The major influences on the health of people in communities lie outside the health sector. Given this, productive partnerships within and outside of the health sector is a Waikato DHB strategic imperative. As part of our strategic commitment to productive partnerships/whanaketanga, we will work alongside other organisations that plan and develop urban environments to identify shared agreed goals that help protect and improve community health and wellbeing outcomes.[10]

References

- [1] Public Health England, "Spatial Planning for Health: An evidence based resource for planning and designing healthier places," Wellington House, London 2017.
- [2] Canterbury District Health Board, "Associations between urban characteristics and non-communicable disease: A rapid evidence review," Christchurch 2016.
- [3] Royal Society of New Zealand, "Human health impacts of climate change for New Zealand: Evidence Summary," Wellington 2017.
- [4] World Health Organisation, "Health co-benefits of climate change mitigation: Transport sector. Health in the green economy," 2011, Available:

Date Issued: November 2017	Review date: February 2022	Version 1.0
Adopted by Waikato District Health Board: 13 February 2019		Page 3 of 4

- https://www.who.int/hia/green_economy/transport_sector_health_co-benefits_climate_change_mitigation/en/.
- [5] Public Health Advisory Committee, "A guide to health impact assessment: A policy tool for New Zealand," Wellington 2005, Available: [http://www.moh.govt.nz/NoteBook/nbbooks.nsf/0/D540E1D80F7DB72CCC2578670072F996/\\$file/guidetohia.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/NoteBook/nbbooks.nsf/0/D540E1D80F7DB72CCC2578670072F996/$file/guidetohia.pdf).
- [6] Ministry of Health, "Health in the wider context of people's lives," 2016, Available: <https://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/new-zealand-health-strategy-future-direction/health-wider-context-peoples-lives>.
- [7] Waikato District Health Board, " Waikato District Health Board Strategy: Healthy People Excellent Care," 2016.
- [8] J. McDonald, M. Wise, and P. Harris, "The Health Impacts of the Urban Form: A Review of Reviews," University of New South Wales, Sydney2008, Available: http://hiaconnect.edu.au/old/files/Health_Impact_of_Urban_Form.pdf.
- [9] Auckland Council, Waikato Regional Council, and Wellington Regional Strategy Committee, "-The costs of physical inactivity: Towards a full cost accounting perspective," Prepared by Market Economics Limited2013, Available: http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/PageFiles/25488/The_Costs_of_Physical_Inactivity.PDF.
- [10] Waikato District Health Board, "Healthy People Excellent Care. Waikato District Health Board Strategy," Hamilton2016.

Date Issued: November 2017	Review date: February 2022	Version 1.0
Adopted by Waikato District Health Board: 13 February 2019		Page 4 of 4