

**Governance and Administration
Committee's**

**Submission on Local
Government (Community
Wellbeing) Amendment
Bill**

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Submitter Details

1. Nelson Marlborough District Health Board (NMDHB) (NMH) is a key organisation involved in the health and wellbeing of the people within Te Tau Ihu. NMH has a duty to reduce of adverse environmental effects on the health of people and communities and to improve, promote and protect their health pursuant under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000 and the Health Act 1956. NMH welcomes the opportunity to comment from a public health perspective on the Local Government (Community Wellbeing) Amendment Bill.

General Comments

2. NMH supports the revised Bill to restore the purpose of local government to “promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of communities, taking a sustainable development approach”. Public policy plays a significant role in shaping the health of populations. As legislation, the Local Government Act 2002 has significant implications for communities’ health and wellbeing.
3. The conditions in which people live are impacted by a range of environmental, social and behavioural factors which are referred to as the ‘social determinants of health’. The diagram¹ overleaf shows how the determinants are complex and interlinked. Councils formulate and administer policies in a number of key areas and offer a broad range of services related to land use, infrastructure, and community facilities which shape the contexts and environments in which individuals and communities live, and the degree that healthy behaviours are enabled and promoted. Therefore councils can influence substantially the health and wellbeing of local residents.

¹ Campbell, F. (Ed) (2010) The social determinants of health and the role of local government. Improvement and Development Agency, Local Government Association. London, England.

<http://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/Publications/Local-government-and-public-health-in-2013-and-beyond.pdf>

6. Reinstating the wellbeings into the Local Government Act will enable councils to consider the wider impact of their decisions on the health and wellbeing of communities rather than being restricted to considering the cost-effectiveness of decisions and solutions as it currently stands in the Act. This narrow focus has disempowered Councils to think broadly about issues such as climate change, air pollution or housing where the most effective solutions may not be the least expensive in the short term.
7. By including the wellbeings into the Act, Councils are enabled to work on a wider collaborative front with local partners such as Health Boards to develop a shared local understanding of wellbeing that will ensure all areas of local government and external partners are able to work towards the same objectives. Many of issues that communities face such as housing problems, standards of living, and unemployment don't fall under the remit of one agency. By being able to work broadly, Councils are able to work with other agencies to share resources and capacity to effectively address local problems.
8. The Treasury's Living Standards Framework is being developed to measure the success of New Zealand's human, social, natural and physical capitals. This Framework could be used to measure the progress of initiatives by local government and other agencies to improve the four wellbeings⁴.
9. The revised purpose of the Act will also help to shift responsibility back to local communities who can work with Council to set specific priorities for their area to create conditions that enable citizens and communities to do well in life. This empowerment means that communities are able to shape the programmes and interventions at the local level that will boost wellness and reduce inequalities.
10. The current legislation has provided uncertainty for some councils in regards to what services to offer their communities and whether these services are defined as core services. It has also meant that there have been higher compliance costs as Councils justify how particular services fit into the restricted legislative purpose^{5,6}. As highlighted in the Regulatory Impact Statement, the proposed amendments will remove the inconsistencies and the incoherence in the current Act and will enable councils to shift their focus from a "are we allowed to do this" to a "should we do this" approach (pg. 4, 12-13).⁷

⁴ <https://treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/living-standards-0>

⁵ Public Health Association (2013) *Local government and public health in 2013 and beyond*.

<http://www.lgnz.co.nz/assets/Publications/Local-government-and-public-health-in-2013-and-beyond.pdf>

⁶ [https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/RIS-Local-Government-Community-Well-Being-Amendment-Bill/\\$file/RIS-Local-Government-Community-Well-Being-Amendment-Bill.pdf](https://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/RIS-Local-Government-Community-Well-Being-Amendment-Bill/$file/RIS-Local-Government-Community-Well-Being-Amendment-Bill.pdf)

⁷ Ibid

11. In addition, it is pleasing to see that sustainability has been interwoven into the new purpose. It is important that Councils are cognizant to the needs of the present and future generations. This aligns the LGA with the purpose of the Resource Management Act that focuses on sustainable management. Sustainability is a core driver for local government. The Ministry of Health stated that “a community’s current and future social, environmental, economic and cultural circumstances affect people’s ability to attain and sustain good physical and mental health (pg. 5)”⁸.
12. It is important to note that evidence has shown that the original inclusion of the four wellbeings in the Act did not result in additional expenditure nor proliferation of new activities being undertaken by councils.^{9,10}
13. To support the revised purpose of the Act, it would be useful to have a pool of money available for Councils to enable them to work collaboratively with Health Boards and other community agencies on bolstering wellbeing initiatives. The Canterbury Health in All Policies Partnership¹¹ is one example of a Health Board working closely with both a territorial authority and a regional authority on specific work programmes identifying common activities and focusing work on achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes for Canterbury communities.
Recommendation: Additional funding for this type of collaborative partnership would be beneficial across the country.

⁸ Ministry of Health (2009) Public Health in New Zealand: Local Government’s Contribution to Wellbeing.
<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/public-health-local-government-oct09.pdf>

⁹ Local Government Commission. 2008. *Review of Local Government Act 2002 and Local Electoral Act 2001*. Local Government Commission: Wellington

¹⁰ Joint Central Government/Local Authority Funding Project Team. 2005. *Local Authority Funding Issues – Report of the Joint Central Government/Local Authority Funding Project Team*

¹¹ <https://www.cph.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/chiappinfosheetoverview.pdf>

Recommendation

14. Additional funding for local governments is established to enable collaborative partnerships to be formed to improve wellbeing.

Conclusion

15. NMH supports the revised changes to the Act as these will result in better health outcomes for local communities.

16. NMH does not wish to be heard in support of this submission.

17. NMH thanks the Governance and Administration Committee's for the opportunity to comment on the Local Government (Community Wellbeing) Amendment Bill.

Yours sincerely



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