



New Zealand Nurses Organisation

Submission to the Department of Internal Affairs

on the

Building Sustainable Urban Communities Discussion Document

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SUMMARY

1. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) thanks the Department of Internal Affairs for this opportunity to comment on the building Sustainable urban Communities Discussion Document.
2. NZNO is the leading professional body and nursing union in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing over 41 000 nurses, midwives, kaimahi hauora, students, health care assistants and *allied* health professional.
3. We have consulted our members in the preparation of this submission in particular NZNO staff (Management, Professional Nursing Advisors, Policy Analysts, and Industrial Advisors) and NZNO members (Colleges and Sections, Board Members and other health care workers).
4. NZNO supports, with reservations, the concept of a place-based approach to sustainable urban development predicated on community decision-making and enabling infrastructural and regulatory support from local and national government.

DISCUSSION

5. NZNO members are highly aware of the environmental conditions which impact on health and the need for good planning and regulation, particularly in cities to ensure equitable access to sustainable, healthy, and community living.
6. Health benefits accrue from strong community and communications support networks, reducing the stress of travel, noise and light pollution, and having access to healthy housing, parks and amenities. The converse is also true: when illness develops or is exacerbated by poor understanding, systems or access to appropriate care.
7. As one Plunket Nurse comments: *It is so difficult trying to connect new mothers in local communities that are isolated on the top of a hill somewhere in a new subdivision, with no services and shops etc, who never come out of*

their houses, because there is no life or activity anywhere to be drawn to. Urban areas need a centre where people can walk , collect, pass through, come out of their houses to meet - a heart to develop a sense of community/ connectedness/identity.

8. Such factors have been pointed out many times before, notably in *The Social, Cultural and Economic Determinants of Health in NZ: Action to improve Health. National Health Committee June 1988*, which forms the basis of NZNO's social policy statement and strategic plan.
9. Such factors have also been realised with the government health and disability strategies which focus on preventative and primary community-based health care, alongside high acuity, short-stay and emergency hospital care. Building sustainable urban communities requires greater recognition of the change in population healthcare needs: the need for community family clinics which can provide a range of services, for instance, and parks and other recreational facilities to encourage healthy living. It is essential that access to resources, for example, food outlets, transport, parks, schools, cultural centres and primary health care providers is factored in to the policy planning.¹
10. To ensure that an equitable sustainable plan for a community's health and wellbeing is considered as part of policy development, it is essential that a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) tool be completed. Christchurch City Council already operates on this principle.
11. NZNO notes that the establishment of District Health Boards (DHBs) was similarly motivated - to provide local autonomy for healthcare provision for the disparate populations in 21 separate districts. We suggest that this model could be instructive in terms of outcomes, gaps, governance structures etc.
12. In particular, NZNO draws attention to the lack of infrastructural support and leadership from national government which has resulted in the duplication of administrative systems, and national gaps and disparities in services rather

¹ Pearce J, Witten K, Bartie P. Neighbourhoods and health: a GIS approach to measuring community resource accessibility. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 2006; 60:389-395.

than creative solutions to addressing the healthcare needs of the local population.

13. We believe that place-based communities will only work within a sound social justice and regulatory framework and with strong infrastructural support.

14. NZNO has reservations about several of the proposed “facilitating measures” such as compulsory land acquisition, banking land and reduced rights of appeal. We feel such measures have enormous potential to be divisive as well facilitative. Care will need to be taken to engage whole-of-community participation and to avoid capture by particular interest groups. Strong integrated information and communications systems will be essential for keeping people informed and involved.

15. In particular leadership, in the form of robust guidelines and appropriate operational tools is essential. In this context Philippa Howden-Chapman’s recent landmark research establishing that improved insulation had demonstrable health and economic benefits,² demonstrates a classic public policy problem: there are multiple benefits across different sectors, but no one agency wants to bear the costs of improvements. It is essential that the responsibility for leading policy and regulation in such areas of public good is retained by government and not negotiable.

CONCLUSION

16. In conclusion, the NZNO recommends the following changes or solutions and that you:

- **note** our qualified support for place-based approach to sustainable urban design and planning;
- **note** the need for leadership from central and local government in ensuring good infrastructural support, a sound regulatory and justice

² See, for instance, <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/media-speeches/guestlectures/pdfs/tgls-howdenchapman.pdf>

framework, and appropriate tools to support local participation and decision-making.

- **note** the potential for the DHBs to be used as a model for devolved decision making,
- **agree** that Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an essential tool for sustainable urban planning.

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ABOUT THE NEW ZEALAND NURSES ORGANISATION

17. NZNO is a Te Tiriti o Waitangi based organisation. It is the leading professional body and nursing union in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing over 41 000 nurses, midwives, kaimahi hauora, students, health care assistants and other health professionals. Te Runanga o Aotearoa NZNO comprises Māori membership and is the arm through which our Treaty based partnership is articulated.

18. The NZNO vision is “Freed to care, Proud to nurse”. Our members enhance the health and wellbeing of all people of Aotearoa New Zealand through ethically based partnerships. Our members are united in the achievement of their professional and industrial aspirations.