



The first in the country

Hamilton Age Friendly case study

As the first city in Aotearoa/New Zealand to join the World Health Organization's (WHO's) [Global Network of Age friendly Communities and Cities](#), Hamilton City Council is leading the way in age friendly planning.

Hot tips from Hamilton

1. Have well-known and influential community advocates to champion your cause
2. Ensure you have a committed and consistent group to keep driving this forward
3. Identify a handful of organisations prepared to work with you as key stakeholders

Hamilton City Council changed the way they plan for their older population's well-being, while embracing their city's unique qualities. See how they learned these tips below.

"Hamilton is well suited for older people, being relatively flat and easy to negotiate, and with many facilities and services that cater to the needs of older people already existing."

Andrew King, Mayor of Hamilton, 2016 to 2019

New Zealand's largest inland city (with over 160,000 people in 2016), Hamilton is known for its dairy farming, coal and energy. It has a diverse population with almost a quarter of the population born outside New Zealand, and one in five of Māori descent. The population of older people is expected to rise from nearly 16% to over 20% in the next 15 years.¹ Being on this path highlights the importance of Hamilton joining the WHO's [Global Network of Age friendly Communities and Cities](#).

Hamilton City Council's past strategies for seniors fell short of changes that make a difference for older people. Planning focused on the Council's point of view instead of engaging with residents and organisations in the community. Their plans also left a lot of room to grow, as they often fit neatly into one page. The [Hamilton City Council Age-Friendly Plan](#) is set to change that.

Developing the plan

Looking for arm's-length guidance, the council's Older Persons Advisory Panel formed a skills based steering group rather than representatives from the sector. They created a focused brief and set a work period of 18 months for the development of Hamilton's Age friendly strategy.

The project began with a large public meeting at which over 100 people were introduced to the key categories of the [WHO Age friendly Cities and Communities model](#) with the addition of safety which the team felt was missing. Participants were asked to give their opinions on what an age friendly community would look like and brainstorm their ideas.

"Through our many public forums we were surprised, and delighted, to find that already Hamilton had many, many services and facilities for older people, along with numerous friendship groups."

¹ Hamilton City Age-friendly Plan

Dame Peggy Koopman-Boyden Chair of the Age friendly Steering Group

Ideas were recorded and themed, and highlighted issues of accessibility (physical, social and communication), transport and intergenerational activities. These key issues for older people in Hamilton were shared in targeted conversations with a range of organisations and leaders from the community.

“We now have a really increased understanding of why it’s important to work together, others have been doing work but in isolation, starting to see collaborative projects coming out of the plan that otherwise might not have happened. An example of that is the Libraries have teamed up with Age-Concern and a local playgroup and they’re doing intergenerational story time.”

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

Meet Doris, who is over 100 years old and championing the work of intergenerational story time on behalf of Age Concern at [Hamilton City Libraries' facebook page](#). Council staff quickly discovered that their go-to mode of communicating through social media would fall short in achieving real engagement. Face-to-face and genuine conversations are important to older people so the team regularly updated the community in face-to-face visits, via community noticeboards and newsletters.

“We heard from our community that they wanted notice boards in the community, so we put together a whole bunch of material that could be put up anywhere – magazines, flyers from Age Concern and a few copies of the Age friendly Plan. We trialled this for a month and were blown away at how often we had to go and replace that information. So that told us we need to do more of this kind of thing.”

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

Communication and consultation that makes a difference

One in five Hamiltonians identify as Māori and the steering group felt fortunate to be able to work closely with the [Rauawaawa Kaumātua Charitable Trust](#).² The area has been home to the Tainui Iwi since the 13th century and is famous for the Kīngitanga (Māori King movement), which began when chiefs realised that Māori would have to unite to survive. In 1863 government troops forced out Kīngitanga supporters into the area now known as the King Country. Much Māori land was confiscated, and the Māori king and his people only returned to Waikato in 1889.³

While the [Rauawaawa Kaumātua Charitable Trust](#) were represented on the steering group from the beginning, at times, honest conversations were needed to make sure the relationship stayed on track. Waikato’s history means that it was important to the trust that their working relationship with Hamilton City Council be genuine and for the long term.

The council’s steering group and the trust worked together and continue to do so in ways that are beyond tick-box ‘consultation’. Council staff visit the trust regularly, supporting its events and are very grateful for the on-going relationship. Being in close contact not only creates stronger relationships, but also allows Council to be more aware of what is important to the Māori community.

² The Rauawaawa Kaumātua Charitable Trust were endorsed for the project by Waikato Tainui

³ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/search/teara?keys=Story+Waikato+region>

Housing, for example, was a big issue for their older people, as well as having strong links to culture and a concern that history would be lost.

“One of the really cool projects that came out of these was that Hamilton libraries have an oral historian on staff, who are now working with Kaumatua to gather their histories. We were officially welcomed onto Rauawaawa late last year to start this project, which was a real highlight for me.”

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

Be prepared for the unexpected

A key challenge for the project during the consultation phase was an unexpected political decision. The council decided to sell pensioner housing. While the purpose of the sale was to improve the service by passing it to a provider better equipped to manage it than the council, this was not the narrative represented in the media.

“There was definitely a [media] narrative that we couldn’t control. A lot of times that media talked about this as being a bad thing for older people even though that wasn’t actually the case. So that meant that we had to work even harder to make the case that what we were going to do was going to be good for older people and the selling of pensioner housing was not going to undermine the value of having an age friendly plan.”

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

A positive (and easily solved) challenge was the unexpected high level of interest by Councillors who wanted *more* engagement and asked for more regular reporting on actions.

An action orientated plan that works

Hamilton’s Age-Friendly Plan focuses heavily on action-based items. The four-year plan includes 48 actions over nine themes and has been written so that it is easy to read, understand and attribute to the myriad of partners involved. It is now monitored and supported by council staff, quarterly meetings of the Age-friendly Steering Group and six-monthly updates to Council. The plan has had so much interest that, as soon as it was written, new groups asked to be included and become a part of it.

Interestingly, and perhaps speaking to their belief in how important the Age friendly plan is to their community, most of the original Steering Group asked to stay on to be part of implementation and have been joined by a range of CEOs of big organisations and community advisors within council to round out the skill set. The group meets every 2-3 months.

Of the actions, about a third are transport related and about two-thirds are actions being managed by community groups - some of which are well resourced and others not. There are several ‘tentpole’ organisations; Age Concern, Kaumātua Trust Hamilton Libraries whose contribution is key. Resources for achieving actions are generally absorbed within existing budgets.

“While some community groups may have their own budget for projects, at the council there is no assigned budget for the project. Everybody is fitting it in and around their current workload and budgets. That was the view of the outgoing council and there may be an opportunity for that to change with the new council. We will only know that in the fullness of time.”

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

What's next

This first Age friendly Plan has focused on Hamilton City Council, but those involved want to take it further out into the district.

"We deliberately chose to focus on our city first, but our idea was always to move to having discussions with our wider district so we could include them in future plans."

Nick Chester, Hamilton City Council

Watch this space!