



Te Rōpū Kaitohutohu Take Hunga Hauā

Disability Advisory Panel

Celebrating stronger foundations to build on.

End of Term Report 2022-2025.

11 September, 2025



Introduction

At a time when the disability community is under pressure from all sides, whether it be the cost of living or cuts to disability support, local government is a space where we can and have been able to make progress on some things. There's lots of work left to do. However, this report is an opportunity to take stock of what we've achieved and to reflect on this Panel term.

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Members of the panel

The panel is made up of the following members of the disability community.

Co-Chairs:

- Barry de Geest
- Martine Abel-Williamson

Panel Members:

- Amy Hogan
- Áine Kelly-Costello
- Lavinia Lovo (joined September 2024)
- Gerard Martin
- Lorraine McQuigg (joined September 2024)
- Ryan Meechan
- Chris Orr
- Note: three panel members resigned during the term; Sam Smith in February 2024, Toa Te Wheoro in July 2024, and Bonnie Robinson in August 2024.

Supporting Staff:

The panel is grateful for the support of our Auckland Council staff, including:

- Co-Lead Officers – Elise Copeland and Jonathan Bengé
- Governance Advisor – Milly Athy-Timmins
- Principal Advisor Panels - Victoria Wicks-Brown

Elected Members:

We appreciate the Councillors who attend our hui when available and help relay information to and from other elected councillors, including:

- Liaison Councillor – Councillor Sharon Stewart
- Chief Liaison Councillor – Councillor Julie Fairey

Highlights from the 2023-25 term

Disability-inclusive emergency management

The Disability Advisory Panel (DAP) helped to make sure Auckland Emergency Management (AEM) understands the importance of having a disability-specific work programme so disabled people aren't left behind in emergencies. We did this by holding a disability community hui about this, with a dedicated follow-up plan. This included writing a report out of the hui¹ and continuing to collaborate with AEM. In June 2025, we presented AEM's new disability sector inclusion work programme together to the Civil Defence and Emergency Management committee of Council.² We are proud to say it was strongly informed by disability sector engagement including the recommendations from the hui report.

Disability Action Plan overhaul

This term, Auckland Council policy staff, with guidance from the Panel, have given the Disability Action Plan and reporting process a welcome makeover. The DAP will get reports on how the council departments are going with the actions in the plan every six months. A new section has been added to highlight "business as usual" activities where accessibility and disability responsiveness have been embedded in Auckland Council work. It is now publicly available on the [Disability Advisory Panel's Council webpage](#) giving greater transparency to council's actions. The media release about this [can be found here](#).

Accessibility on the radar at Eke Panuku

Last year, media reported that the pilot pool Tidal Steps being installed in Karanga Plaza wasn't going to be physically accessible for many disabled people due to challenges with its location.³ Since then, the panel persistently reinforced this feedback to Eke Panuku and looked for constructive ways forward. Eke Panuku did bring in an experienced disabled accessibility consultant to assess where

¹ Kelly-Costello, Á. March, 2025. "Are we included in your plan?" Report on Auckland Disability community Hui on Planning for emergencies. Auckland Council Disability Advisory Panel. Published by OUR Auckland <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/media/lm5mtzv3/plan-report-auckland-disability-community-emergencies.pdf>

² Auckland Council removing barriers for disabled people before and during emergencies <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2025/06/auckland-council-removing-barriers-for-disabled-people/>

³ Auckland's new outdoor summer pool won't be accessible for everyone <https://thedlist.co.nz/newsfeed/aucklands-new-outdoor-summer-pool-wont-be-accessible-for-everyone/>

improvements could be made. Unfortunately, significant changes to the pilot weren't able to be made for the 2024 / 2025 summer. However, advice from the review is now informing the design of the longer-term Te Ara Tukutuku redevelopment in Wynyard Quarter where two pools are proposed. This wasn't an immediate win as such, but as a result of raising this issue, Eke Panuku are much more aware of barriers facing the disability community and the need to engage with us early on in designing public places and spaces.

Accessibility improved in City Rail Link station design

The panel pushed firmly to ensure that the design of accessibility indicators like tactiles and lighting at City Rail Link stations was consistent with existing above-ground train stations. This had not been set to be the case and required notable change of plans.

Great progress on parks accessibility assessments

We were impressed with the council team internally undertaking thorough accessibility assessments of prioritised parks across Auckland. The DAP advised on how parks accessibility information is shared and mapped. They were beginning, successfully, to seek local board endorsements of their assessment reports.⁴ The DAP have written a letter in support of their business case to prioritise making parks and beaches accessibility information much easier to find online through a new accessibility tab, both text-based information and a map and a search function. This has been warmly received by the General Manager - Parks & Community Facilities. The panel looks forward to staying in touch on this initiative.

Good relationships with other Advisory Panels

This term, the co-chairs of all six demographic advisory panels have worked closely together. These are Disability, Rainbow Communities, Ethnic Communities, Pacific Peoples, Youth, and Seniors. This has strengthened our joined up and intersectional advocacy to Councillors and the Mayor.

⁴ For instance, Rodney Local Board

<https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2025/07/parks-for-everyone/>

The role of the Disability Advisory Panel

As described in the Disability Advisory Panel's Strategic Priorities:

The Disability Advisory Panel inspires and supports Auckland Council to value and utilise the expertise and leadership of disabled people [so that the council] embeds disability impact thinking and universal design as business as usual across places, access, climate action, the council workforce, governance and digital inclusion.

Our kaupapa is to centre the diverse experiences, strengths, and rights of disabled people in all the panel's work. Guided by principles such as inclusion, equity, respect for diverse identities and language, and a commitment to human rights, the panel aims to ensure no one is left behind and to celebrate progress while addressing systemic inequities.

The Panel's role is also described on the Disability Advisory Panel webpage, including:

- identify the issues that are important to people with disabilities
- provide advice on our regional strategies, policies and plans
- help us to effectively engage with people with disabilities.



Work programme priorities and achievements

Our priorities for the 2022-25 panel term focused on areas of persistent inequities for the disability community, where local government has an important role to play.

Engagement on our priorities came mainly through kōrero with presenters from inside and outside of the council at panel meetings. It also involved cross-panel forums along with engagements we ran as a panel, detailed in the community engagement section.

Robust Disability Action Plan Monitoring

The Disability Action Plan (the Plan) is the key document that sets out Auckland Council's strategic approach to creating a thriving and accessible Tāmaki Makaurau. The panel has worked with Auckland Council staff over the term to give high-level guidance on refreshing the plan and in re-establishing regular reporting on the plan every six months.

The refreshed Plan and most recent report provide detailed and compelling evidence of the range of work underway to make Auckland a more accessible and welcoming place for the disability community. Based on advice from the DAP, a new section on “business as usual” has been added to the Plan, to highlight the good accessibility and disability-responsive practices which have become embedded in Auckland Council's work, and therefore are no longer listed as actions in the plan. We also observed that actions varied enormously in their scope and complexity, from the relatively quick fixes to the multi-year work programmes, so guidance will be developed to assist staff to frame up their actions in a way that creates a bit more consistency and ability to report on the long-term ones.

For greater transparency and accountability, the Plan is now also available to the public on the [Disability Advisory Panel's webpage](#), and the reports will also be made available there.

The current reporting structure is quite comprehensive which, given the size of council, makes for an informative if lengthy read. We look forward to continuing to work with the policy team to sustain this fuller picture of disability-related action within the council but no doubt the processes will continue to be refined over time.

Climate and Extreme Weather Resilience and Preparedness, Response and Recovery

The impacts of the 2023 Auckland Anniversary floods and Cyclone Gabrielle were significant for many in the disability community, highlighting the need to build partnerships with key agencies such as Auckland Emergency Management (AEM). We have worked closely with AEM throughout the term, notably through a community hui as detailed in the community Engagement section below. We also interacted with the storm Recovery Office.

On the climate adaptation front, climate lead Áine Kelly-Costello has provided strategic advice with an initiative of Auckland Council's climate adaptation team to work with the disability community to run workshops on climate adaptation and administer a grant scheme \$150,000 in grants for disability-led climate adaptation-related activities. We hope this will be a great opportunity for the disability community to kōrero about how we can build our own knowledge about climate action. It's a chance to contribute our expertise to making our city more resilient to extreme weather, lowering carbon emissions while also becoming more accessible for our community.



Accessible and Inclusive Recruitment

The Panel met with previous and current heads of Diversity , Equity and Inclusion (DEI) to explore what's needed for Auckland Council to be an attractive employer to disabled people where people feel safe to disclose disability and have a flexible working environment. Auckland Council is introducing optional questions to understand what proportion of its workforce is disabled to better enable it to support disabled kaimahi.

The council also has its own disability network who panel members met with earlier in the term and who the DEI team are in touch with.

The DEI team are working with the NZ Disability Employers Network on an Accessibility Tick assessment, which will deliver a comprehensive set of recommendations on next steps Auckland Council can take in this area. It is anticipated that these actions will be reported on in the Disability Action Plan.

We also had a related priority around advocating for Auckland Council entities to appoint more disabled people. We sought to profile the importance of disabled voices in all positions when we could. We also hope that working to make our local elections processes more accessible to our community will over time reduce barriers leading to more disabled people standing for and being elected to Auckland Council itself.

Housing Accessibility and Affordability

While the Panel was unable to engage as much as desired in this area, Co-Lead Officer Elise Copeland spearheaded research on the experiences of disabled people in medium density housing in the city. The panel had input into the research primarily via housing lead Amy Hogan.

Via Elise Copeland's work on Plan Change 79, the panel discussed pedestrian safety and accessible parking requirements for new housing developments. We would often comment in other contexts on the need for accessible public and private housing which meets robust universal design standards given how foundational it is.

It has been disappointing to see central Government gutting emergency housing protections, among other regressive measures, and this was one of a number of issues highlighted in a letter from the six advisory panels to the Mayor, in requesting he advocate to Government on our shared concerns.

Disability Awareness Within Council

We have reason to believe that disability awareness, and indeed action on that awareness, is increasing in many areas, given the steady progress from the Disability Action Plan, along with ongoing discussions with Eke Panuku which is new this term. We are less certain about Tataki Auckland as they have not engaged much around the Plan nor with the panel, so this may be an area for future panels to explore. DAP support staff are enthusiastic backers of disability community input and help to raise the profile of disability by being able to mention or sometimes enact DAP advice through their own work. Max Hardy of Council's Executive Leadership team has met with the DAP and helps increase visibility of the panel at the highest level. As they should, various parts of Auckland Council also engage and/or partner with other disability organisations and disabled people.

A challenge is that Council's usual way of working has been by department which can create siloes, and processes for sharing good practices are thus more limited but we hear there is work to embed different ways of working and an appetite for more joined up working.

Accessibility of Council-Funded, Owned, or Operated Facilities

After it was reported by disability media outlet the D*List that the pilot pool Tidal Steps being installed in Karanga Plaza wasn't going to be physically accessible for many disabled people,⁵ the DAP persistently reinforced this feedback and sought a path forward with Eke Panuku. It became clear that Eke Panuku did not have accessibility considerations consistently built into their project planning, and only projects costed over a certain amount would may get scrutinised by Auckland Council's universal design staff, so this one had gone under the radar. The key problem was the choice of location which, for geographical and tidal reasons, posed notable accessibility challenges.

While Eke Panuku were not able to make significant changes to the pilot, an experienced disabled accessibility consultant was brought in to assess in which areas improvements could be made. Her review concluded that achieving universal access in that location was impractical but that advice from the review is now

⁵Auckland's new outdoor summer pool won't be accessible for everyone
<https://thedlist.co.nz/newsfeed/aucklands-new-outdoor-summer-pool-wont-be-accessible-for-everyone/>

informing the design of the longer-term Te Ara Tukutuku redevelopment in Wynyard Quarter where two pools are proposed. The review also recommended focusing on making existing swimming facilities more accessible and usable. We have met four times with Eke Panuku now where there was no relationship with the DAP prior to our knowledge. We have been clear about how crucial it is to have requisite accessibility expertise involved as early as possible within infrastructure development projects which Eke Panuku specialise in.

We also spoke to the council team internally undertaking thorough accessibility assessments of prioritised parks across Auckland, advising on how parks accessibility information is shared and mapped. They have assessed 21 parks and five regional parks so far. They were beginning, successfully, to seek local board endorsements of their assessment reports.⁶ We were very impressed with their work. The DAP have written a letter in support of their business case to prioritise making parks and beaches accessibility information much easier to find online through a new accessibility tab, both text-based information and a map and a search function.

The New Zealand Disability Employers Network is currently completing and Accessibility Tick assessment for Council which dAP members have inputted into. This also covers Council facilities.

Our local boards have a range of responsibilities including the management of facilities like pools, playgrounds and libraries, as well as local community events, environmental restoration and so forth. We have observed a very uneven implementation of accessibility good practices across the local boards and want to encourage their consistent prioritisation going forward. As such, we want to engage more, within our capacity constraints, with local boards. This sits outside the advisory panels current Terms of Reference but is an area under exploration by staff and could be incorporated in recommendations to the incoming Mayor.

Transport Accessibility for the Whole Journey

The DAP inputted into transport planning in a range of projects, complementing the operational role of Auckland Transport's two accessibility advisory groups. We engaged with the City Rail Link planning to ensure that crucial elements of accessibility best met the needs of disabled people. This included the placement

⁶ For instance, Rodney Local Board

<https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/news/2025/07/parks-for-everyone/>

and contrast of tactile indicators and lighting levels on platforms in particular for blind and low vision passengers where greater consistency with existing above-ground stations had been deprioritised. We acknowledge the assistance of the Mayor in resolving this.

In a consultation on the Western Corridor, we emphasised the need for all elements including staff offices to be accessible so that disabled staff would be able to work there. We inputted into a range of parking plans, emphasising the need for taxi drop-off areas, including near Britomart as an emergency evacuation safety measure.

Finally, we engaged with a number of stakeholders on e-scooter use, including the two licensed providers of e-scooters for Auckland. While the power to decide whether e-scooters remains on footpaths remains with Central Government, we were able to explain the hazard risks that poor parking or inconsiderate riding can pose and hear what Flamingo and Lime are doing to minimise these.

We also noted that Central Government's decision to reverse safe speed limits is likely to have negative safety implications for our community and that it would be helpful for the DAP to be able to input on Auckland council's position on how the city localises consequential proposals like this one.



Digital Accessibility

A body of work is underway to improve the accessibility of Auckland Council's public-facing website, in line with WCAG Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, along with the accessibility of documents. This is being led by the Customer Experience and Digital Services team. The panel has had some involvement in advising on the approach for this. Importantly, this team have also been working with web accessibility specialists and carrying out user testing for this work.

Regarding accessible formats more broadly, the Panel are very aware that Auckland Council does not have a consistent approach to budgeting for and providing these even for public-facing communications. We have encouraged a further proactive effort in this area.

Governance Participation and Representation

DAP member Gerard Martin chaired the Cross-Panel Elections Working Group which met regularly with Auckland Council's Elections Programme Team and provided strategic advice in support of marketing and promotional effort to successfully deliver the 2025 local elections in the Auckland region. The Panels proved well-suited to this work due to their efforts to improve the inclusivity of many of Council's initiatives. Two members from each of the six demographic advisory panels met over a dozen times to hear and provide feedback to the Election Programme Team's efforts to engage all Aucklanders to support the 2025 election programme.

In particular, the Working Group supported the goals of the Programme;

- to increase the cultural diversity among local election candidates
- increasing the numbers voting, particularly from communities that tend to have low voting rates
- ensuring a positive experience. for voters and candidates alike.

The Elections Working Group supported efforts to leverage community events to promote the election programme by hosting their own election events including successful promotions from the Pacific and Rainbow panels. The Elections Programme Team and working group worked together to address the need for better efficacy for a phone-based system to assist those from the blind low vision community to participate more effectively in voting. In turn, the Elections Working Group provided useful guidance for the team's promotion of information and

creative design for the Vote Auckland website and for the provision of interpreted content for diverse communities.

The Elections Working Group also lent its support to the council's determination to host online events for candidates, while also making it easier to nominate candidates online. The efforts of the Auckland Council team to reach out to communities, including seniors as well as school leavers was acknowledged by the Working Group as a means of developing a more sustainable and engaged voting community over the longer-term.

There were also a couple of appreciated opportunities for the DAP to engage with Central Government. In 2023, DAP members met with the then disability minister and the CEO of Whaikaha. Panel co-chairs also met twice with the Ministerial Enquiry Panel about central government enquiring into COVID19 pandemic matters such as lock downs, vaccine mandates, and communication channels, etc.

Community engagement

It's important to the DAP to help bring wider disability community perspectives beyond our own to Council. We're aware we are not always as visible or spending as much time building relationships in the disability community as we might like with our primary mandate being Auckland Council-facing. However, we're hoping that in future, there will be easier ways for our community to keep up with news of likely interest to our community from Auckland Council – having a newsletter is something on our wishlist for next term. In the meantime, this term we focused our community engagement on emergency management and this is described next.

Hui on emergency planning

Recognising the critical need to focus on disability-inclusive emergency preparedness and response in Aotearoa and in the Auckland region, Auckland Council's Disability Advisory Panel took the opportunity to focus our community engagement for the 2023-2025 term on this topic. The DAP ran a hui on 13 Nov 2024 attended by about 80 people including members of disability organisations and service providers, disabled people, whānau, emergency management personnel and Council staff. The hui aimed to

- foster relationships and shared knowledge between disability community and sector, and agencies and elected representatives with key roles within emergency response
- constructively share learnings from Auckland's 2023 extreme weather events
- use learnings to inform local and regional emergency preparedness and response plans.

Disabled leadership, supported by Auckland Council staff, were core to the design and running of the hui. Accessibility for the event included: step-free access, room size, microphone system, NZSL interpreting, koha for disabled presenters who were not staff etc..



The hui included a range of panels and presentations from disabled people with experience of, or policy experience in responding to, extreme weather, as well as key emergency management representatives.

Discussion sessions covered the following questions:

- What practical resources, trainings, or support would you, your whānau or your organisation like to have, regarding:
 - a) emergency preparedness – so that you are better prepared for an emergency.
 - b) at the actual time of an emergency and during the response afterwards so no one is left behind.
- At the time of an emergency, what do I have, what do I need, what can I offer? Participants could respond for themselves or for their organisation.

Outputs from the hui included a media release,⁷ a synthesis report, a 2.5-hour recording for internal and on-request use, presentations to Auckland Council committees about the event, documenting accessibility learnings internally for the council, and using this event as an example of advisory panel community engagement for panel inductions.

The synthesis report covers take-aways from the discussions as well as recommendations.⁸

The value of the hui and importance of collaboration came through strongly from a range of participants across disability community and sector, council staff, and emergency response agencies. Emergency response agencies recognised the importance of meaningful disability community and sector involvement.

Zoom hui on long term plan

In addition to cross-panel participatory forums on the long-term plan, we held a zoom session for the disability community to be brought up to speed on the long-term plan and how to submit. About a dozen people attended so it was a small group but feedback was that it was helpful.

⁷ Kelly-Costello, Á. March, 2025. “Are we included in your plan?” Report on Auckland Disability community Hui on Planning for emergencies. Auckland Council Disability Advisory Panel. Published by OUR Auckland <https://ourauckland.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/media/lm5mtzv3/plan-report-auckland-disability-community-emergencies.pdf>

⁸ [“Are we included in your plan?” Report on Auckland Disability community Hui on Planning for emergencies.](#)

Reflections on ways of working

Below we reflect on how the panel operated in the Council environment this term.

Accessibility

Overall, we found our participation in panel processes, with the active support of our DAP staff, accessible most of the time. Our staff try hard to make sure Panel members can fully participate including by

- hosting in-person meetings in a venue with step-free and wheelchair access (council buildings)
- having online meeting attendance options, where in-person attendees use microphones so they can be heard
- sending out word versions of agenda materials in advance to screen reader users
- meetings are NZSL interpreted whenever needed, and agendas and documents are supplied to interpreters in advance to assist with meeting preparation
- having staff on hand at meetings ready to assist with getting food, guiding etc.
- reimbursing transport to meetings as needed including via a taxi chit (to reduce paperwork).

However, there were some challenges. There is still no consistency of knowledge across Auckland Council about what constitutes a screen reader-friendly document. This is in part about the document format, but also involves factors like its layout, whether alt text is used to describe images and maps, and the amount and complexity of tables to navigate. This sometimes made meeting preparation more challenging. Also, the council building lifts to talk, but while the system for finding a lift and operating the digital display may technically be accessible without sight, it is not considered easy to navigate or use by our blind panel members.

While cross-panel forums were overall fruitful, the noise levels, sometimes-lack of facilitation at tables and speed of discussions could make interactions challenging.

Recruitment and onboarding

We were glad that the recruitment for our panel round involved previous DAP members and we would like this to continue. It's important to have disabled people familiar with the context as part of the recruitment processes as they will understand the mix of lived experience, expertise and what is required of the DAP best. This did not happen for those coming on midterm, although the control of sorts was that it was a much narrower recruitment where DAP members shouldered people who we considered had some of the skills and lived experience we lacked on the DAP at that time.

While those joining at the start of term got considerable and helpful induction, our two panel members who joined later in the term had individual induction sessions with Council staff. However, there was limited opportunity to engage with other Panel members, which may also have been helpful in familiarising themselves with processes and having confidence to speak up. Also, one thing that was not covered in induction was examples of previous community engagements but we are happy for ours to be used hopefully among other examples going forward, so incoming advisory panel members see what variety of ideas can be possible.



Engagement with presenters and on long-term documents

Our predominant way of working this term involved presenters sending the DAP a presentation or report to read in advance of the meeting, presenting at the meeting, and then opening the floor for discussion. This often led to constructive kōrero, especially on many operational matters which would technically sit outside our Terms of Reference but in reality was often where our advice could be most readily actioned. At best, these processes led to a feedback loop indicating how our feedback had been considered and/or implemented. Auckland Emergency Management, Parks & Community Facilities, Eke Panuku and the Disability Action Plan staff were particularly receptive to the feedback loops and we hope these will continue to become more frequent. Regarding the in-meeting presentations themselves, while short presentations were useful reminders about report content, longer ones ate into the precious and limited time we could have for discussion, and we observed that requests for brevity from the co-chairs were not always honoured.

We also appreciated that engagement on the long-term plan started much earlier and was more thorough this time than in previous terms. A comprehensive report came out of this cross-panel engagement which Auckland Council staff have used to communicate DAP views on long-term issues. Panels largely wanted to see more spent on public transport and community services. In particular, the DAP emphasised the need for investment impact assessments to cover accessibility. In the end, the Governing Body decided to impose lower rates which reduced the long-term budget for these initiatives. While most of the guidance from the panels was not incorporated into the plan, the cross-panel report from the engagement has served as a helpful internal document to guide staff.

Delegation

The co-chairs had overall responsibility for meeting facilitation and representing us at presentations to the Governing Body (councillors).

In some areas, there was a deliberate approach to delegation, to spread the workload outside of meetings throughout the panel beyond the co-chairs, and to align work with members' areas of interest and expertise.

Some examples of where this worked well included:

- Áine's leadership on the emergency management priority community engagement, and representative on various Council climate-related initiatives;
- Chris along with Barry was instrumental in persuading architects of the City Rail Link not to compromise on particular accessibility measures, and asking relevant questions at cross-panel transport engagements;
- Amy worked closely with our co-lead officer Elise to contribute to research on the experiences of disabled Aucklanders regarding medium-density housing;
- and Gerard chairing the Elections cross-panel working group.

One challenge we encountered involved the rules around DAP members not being allowed to be contracted, even for similar advisory-type purposes, to other Auckland Council departments while on the DAP. There are good reasons for these rules – we are not seeking a change to them – but they do present a challenge due to the degree of specific subject-matter expertise held by a small number of people in the community. One way we have worked within this is that DAP members can be paid from the Panel's budget to sit as a DAP representative on various relevant projects.

Conclusion

In any large system, progress is often slower than we want it to be, especially at a time when our disability community is under so many stresses from poverty to inadequate disability support options to housing insecurity just to name a few. However, as a Panel, we are appreciative that we really have seen progress and good will from much of Council towards making Auckland and council itself more accessible and inclusive for disabled people this term. We hope the incoming Mayor will recognise the value of the advisory Panels, and that we can look forward to building on the mahi of this term with a refreshed DAP in 2026.