

MAYORAL COLUMN

TŌ WAHA

I was absolutely overwhelmed by the roll out and success of last week's Tō Waha adult dental health programme. Wairoa has been without a local dental practice for over two years. We all know how expensive adult dental care is and combining that cost with Wairoa's accessibility and isolation barriers can make it impossible to receive the care that is needed.

For many people, taking a day off work, arranging childcare, maybe a driver, especially if they are receiving anaesthetic and are not able to drive, plus accessing a vehicle and the cost of a return trip out of town is not achievable. This situation has culminated in a massive need for adult oral care for Wairoa people and unique implications for our whānau.



Mayor Craig Little

Last week 307 patients were seen. A total of 290 dental treatments were carried out, well above the initial goal of 250. A total of 79 hygiene treatments were carried out - again above the goal of 55. Patients had 381 teeth extracted and received 277 fillings.

The Tō Waha programme was a community-led solution supported by the Hawke's Bay District Health Board. Based at the dental hub at the Wairoa College it was both heart-warming and heart-breaking to see our community come together and collaboratively ensure this service was provided, while also seeing and hearing the whānau stories of suffering through lack of dental care.

I sincerely acknowledge all those individuals, agencies and organisations which made this event possible. Especially the voluntary dentists, dental assistants and hygienists, more than 30 in total, who gave up their week and travelled to Wairoa to bring improved health outcomes to our people.

Also, a huge thank you to the Wairoa College for making these facilities, including the cooking block and other classrooms, available so this programme could be delivered.

I would also like to extend a thank you to the organisations which made financial contributions; Royston Health Trust, Princess Alexandra Medical Trust, Tremains, Māori Oral Health Quality Improvement Group, GRS Generators. This sponsorship contributed to making a real difference to the oral health of our whānau.



The Tō Waha initiative drew strong interest from out of town media. Pictured being interviewed during a media conference are from left (seated) Kahungunu Executive Manager and Wairoa Community Partnership Implementation co-chairman Sarah Paku, Hawke's Bay District Health Board Chief Executive Officer Keriana Brooking and Wairoa District Council Chief Executive Officer and Wairoa Community Partnership Implementation co-chairman Kitea Tipuna.

People I spoke to described the service as lifechanging, saying they felt relaxed and comfortable, were not judged and really benefitted from the after-care.

This was a community driven initiative with the Wairoa Community Partnership Groups a catalyst to bringing this collaborative approach.

Dental care sits outside of mainstream health but locally, and with support of the Hawke's Bay District Health Board, we were able to deliver a community-led and agency-enabled service.

While it is acknowledged this is a short-term solution to our adult dental health care problem, it is a great start and I know everyone is working towards securing a long-term solution.

RED TRAFFIC LIGHT

The Omicron COVID-19 variant is now in the community and New Zealand has moved to the red setting under the Government's COVID-19 Traffic Light system.

I urge our community to please be prepared. Double vaccination and booster shots are the best defence as well as following the guidelines around wearing facemasks, using the tracer app and social distancing.

We have seen internationally that Omicron is highly contagious and is having a massive impact on the supply and delivery of products and services. People need to be taking action now to ensure they have everything they need, including plenty of food, medical, baby, hygiene and cleaning supplies, for a longer period of time than usual.

The Wairoa community has been collaboratively working to support Wairoa's wellness since New Zealand first responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in March last year.

Community organisations, in conjunction with local social and health service providers, local government, local iwi entities and agencies, have been working together preparing plans around vaccination acceleration and COVID preparedness.

However, we need to be realistic, we have limited services at our local hospital, and we are two hours away from the Hastings base hospital. We have one GP clinic, one supermarket and one chemist so we are vulnerable.

Whānau need to be prepared with plans in place to take care of themselves and their loved ones for when COVID arrives in Wairoa. They need to talk about how they will support each other and what they need in their homes for when COVID-19 gets to Wairoa.

THREE WATERS

I believe New Zealanders will pay more and receive less under the Government's proposed Three Waters Reform model.

The Wairoa District Council is part of the Communities 4 Local Democracy He hapori mō Manapori (C4LD), the local government action group formed to bring fresh ideas to the Three Waters debate. This group represents more than a million New Zealanders and has 24 partner councils from around the country.

This group is advocating for a completely fresh approach to water delivery which is more likely to deliver the Government's water reform objectives than the Government's current proposal. It will be presenting the government with straightforward and workable alternatives that deliver on all of the government's requirements, while preserving local responsiveness and accountability.

Our submission will provide fresh ideas for better water. Our ideas aren't complicated or unique; they're just ways of improving on what's mostly been done successfully for decades.

Ownership is a big issue; the Crown does not own the water assets so should not be allowed to confiscate these assets without compensation.

We are also concerned the proposed model will result in diluted representation. Currently all communities and iwi have input into how their water assets are managed through their local Councils.

This representation will be diluted under the government's model of bigger organisations. For us in Entity C, we will only have six people representing all 21 Councils and six iwi representatives who will represent 37 iwi - this is not fair representation of either Councils or iwi.

GRASS ROOTS LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government is the feet on the ground, the eyes and ears of Central Government. That is why it is so disappointing that Central Government does not appear to be recognise the relationship it has with its 67 territorial authorities

I am constantly lobbying government to ensure Wairoa has parity with the rest of New Zealand. Current hot topics are the sealing of SH38, the repair of the blowhole dropout and resilience of the Nuhaka to Opoutama coastal road, the re-opening of Te Urewera and reinstatement of the Wairoa Races. Interestingly, of the letters I have written to various Members of Parliament, it is the opposition parties that seem to be more interested and understanding of our concerns.

I met with National Party leader Christopher Luxon last week and was encouraged by his passion and that we finally seem to have an opposition leader who understands the concerns of local government. This is not about a personal party preference. I believe every Government needs opposition parties that question and hold them accountable.

The Central Government Reform of Local Government creates uncertainty and I look forward to the relationship between Central Government and Local Government getting back on track.

FOR YOUR DIARY

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, February 8 2022, 1.30pm

Due to COVID restrictions, all meetings will be held by video conference, the link will be available on Council's website.



CONTACT US

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