



Te Māhere-ā-tākaro ō Waitematā 2025

Waitematā Play Plan 2025

April 2025

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Waitematā Play Plan 2025

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From the Chair

I'm excited to share the Waitematā Play Plan 2025, a bold and inclusive vision that expands the opportunities for play across our community. Our board has long been committed to providing quality playgrounds, but the play plan takes it a step further by exploring additional ways to create spaces where people of all ages can come together and have fun.

Play is more than just a pastime—it is essential for positive physical, social, and emotional development, especially for children and young people. They are vital members of our community and deserve to feel welcomed and supported in all public spaces. But play isn't just for kids! People of all ages should be able to enjoy playful moments in their daily lives, whether in parks, libraries, or community spaces.

The play plan works hand-in-hand with the Waitematā Local Board Plan 2023, supporting broader community outcomes. It focuses on making every space playful—whether it's a public square or a quiet library. It's about fostering connections, creativity, and fun.

Our initiatives are designed to be low-cost but impactful, offering a variety of ways for the community to participate in and enjoy play. Through community-led projects and collaborations, we'll create a more vibrant, playful city that benefits everyone. I look forward to seeing the positive change this plan will bring, and I encourage everyone to join us in this exciting journey towards a more playful and connected community.

Ngā mihi nui



Genevieve Sage

Chairperson, Waitematā Local Board



Introduction

Te Māhere-ā-tākaro ō Waitematā 2025 – the Waitematā Play Plan 2025 – provides Waitematā Local Board with guidance for future investment in play, particularly beyond playgrounds and for the wider community. It reflects the belief that play should be an ‘everywhere activity’, and gives effect to the Waitematā Local Board Plan 2023. It will be refreshed as new local board plans are published¹.

The Supplementary Information document contains insights from the community, the council’s Advisory Panels, and the wider play sector. These insights have helped to shape staff advice about new ways to support play in Waitematā. It also contains information about the ethnicity and age of Waitematā residents, and how this may influence play investment.

Waitematā Local Board already invests in play, and the Waitematā Play Plan 2025 complements that ongoing support. Waitematā has fantastic playgrounds with accessible features and wheeled play at several sites. The parks and reserves provide great opportunities for residents and visitors to play and have fun at sites across the city centre and beyond.

Waitematā’s four libraries provide plenty of play, particularly for younger tamariki, with an extensive makerspace at Central City Library. The three community centres in Waitematā also provide weekly play activities and school holiday programmes. The local board invests in the council’s Out and About Auckland programme of playful activations, with delivery partners hosting events that encourage the community to have fun in local spaces. An elected member from Waitematā Local Board provides leadership in regional play discussions by participating in the council’s informal Play Leadership Group.

The play plan is also complementary to previous staff advice from the Special Operations team. The advice focuses on assessing the current level of playground provision and provides specific recommendations as to how the playground network can be improved². It includes a collection of project proposals for the local board to consider when planning its annual operational expenditure (OPEX) work programme. The plan sits alongside the Special Operations staff advice to help build innovative ways of improving play for all.

Most local boards have a play provision assessment or play gap analysis, and in several cases, these documents are being updated to reflect recent play investment outcomes. Play provision assessments and gap analyses focus primarily on built capital expenditure (CAPEX) play assets. They:

- Assess play space provision at a network and individual play space scale
- Evaluate the current provision and identify any current gaps (for example, gaps in age-group provision)
- Highlight the presence or absence of specialised play experiences
- Reflect the local context of changing population patterns and forecast population growth
- Identify areas of play oversupply in the network and offer guidance for optimisation
- Recommend where further investment in play is required in specific suburbs or neighbourhoods.

Local path studies and greenways plans support local boards to assess existing local path priority routes for cycling and walking, and make recommendations for future work to improve the path network.

¹ As discussed in the Supplementary Information document, this play plan also aligns with several existing strategies

² The Supplementary Information document explains how different elements of the Auckland play ecosystem work together

Why play matters

Play is self-chosen, self-directed, intrinsically motivated and enjoyable. It's 'stuff we do mostly just for fun', and it brings joy and adds value to the lives of people of all ages. For tamariki, play is a fundamental human right³. Active play helps to develop physical literacy, social play supports the building of stronger relationships with peers and the wider community, and creative play enables tamariki to explore and stretch their imaginations.

Although the importance of play to tamariki development and wellbeing is well understood, opportunities to play have declined in recent decades. Tamariki today have less time, space and permission to play than most adults enjoyed when they were growing up. This is contributing to a rise in poor physical and mental health outcomes. Since 2022 Auckland Council has worked with Sport New Zealand and the regional sports trusts to expand its approach to play. Taking a principles-based approach to support play advocacy and achieves better play outcomes for tamariki in Tāmaki Makaurau. The council is part of a thriving play sector that includes Regional Sports Trusts, Recreation Aotearoa, and membership organisations such as Play Aotearoa⁴.

This new approach can be summarised into seven key messages:

Play = 'stuff we do mostly just for fun'

Access to play is a human right for all children

Children need time, space and permission to play every day

Play is for everybody, of every age – we're never too old

Play is an everywhere activity: all places are playful

Playgrounds are the starting place for play – not the only place

We can all make Tāmaki Makaurau a playful city

³ Refer to the Supplementary Information document to learn about play's protected status under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

⁴ The Supplementary Information document includes Sport New Zealand's Principles of Play, which serve as the guiding principles of play advocacy in New Zealand

Through play, tamariki develop resilience, independence and decision-making skills. Playful experiences help them to manage risk and deal with unpredictable challenges. Access to play contributes to happy childhoods and prepares tamariki to be physically and mentally healthy adults. Given the importance of play in supporting tamariki wellbeing, the goal of increasing access to play fits well with the obligations of local government to support community wellbeing in all forms⁵. Nobody should feel like they're too old to play, and we should ensure that everybody is encouraged to join in, even while we keep tamariki at the centre of play conversations.



Playgrounds are hallowed places for tamariki and whānau, and we must continue to build and maintain them, but they are the starting place for play – not the only place. Our vision is for Tāmaki Makaurau to recognise and celebrate the benefits of play by encouraging playful behaviour in nature, in our urban spaces, in our community spaces, and through events, activations and design. Play helps tamariki to love and appreciate their region as they grow. Through play, they can learn about and celebrate te ao Māori and the many cultures that make up our city and our region. Playing in Tāmaki Makaurau's parks and reserves and at its beautiful beaches also ensures that tamariki love and treasure the outdoor world. This promotes kaitiakitanga and supports future Aucklanders to continue to take care of its wild spaces.

Auckland Council's play advocacy approach empowers elected members and staff to support play as 'an everywhere activity' and to celebrate play as an activity that should be enjoyed from early childhood and beyond.

⁵ Refer to the Supplementary Information document to learn about the Local Government Act 2002 and the obligations of councils to support community wellbeing

New play opportunities

This section of the play plan identifies projects that will increase play in Waitematā.

Work programme planning

The table below lists the proposed projects and how they align with the Waitematā Local Board Plan 2023 objectives. It is for reference only, and elected members should read the following collection of one-page project proposals to better understand what is being suggested and why.

This list of projects is not prescriptive, and including these play ideas in the play plan is not confirmation that Waitematā Local Board will fund any specific project. The project list is provided to demonstrate the many ways that operational funding can support play outcomes. These play projects are all good options for the local board to consider supporting, but elected members, staff and the community will have ideas for many other possible play projects that could also be developed in due course.

Play project	Local Board Plan 2023 objective
Sidelines Play Box	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Tree swings	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
On-site adventurous nature spaces	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Installed adventurous nature spaces	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Play at local board-funded events	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
Playful street art	2023WTM5.2 – Regenerate town centres to attract visitor and economic growth
Playful installations	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
Play at libraries	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
Expanded play activation programme	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Expanded beach activation programme	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Loose parts play space	2023WTM3.2 – Our parks and open spaces are well-used and safe
Local community play budget	2023WTM1.2 – Support and facilitate community-driven action
Partnership funding for rangatahi play projects	2023WTM4.3 – Our open space networks meet the needs of our changing and growing communities
Rangatahi fun at Parnell Baths	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
Play project with Sport Auckland	2023WTM1.1 – Partner for positive community outcomes and recognising expertise

Play project	Local Board Plan 2023 objective
Play on the way	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
StoryWalks	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events
Play advocacy general budget	2023WTM3.3 – Connect our communities, through community activities, creative arts, sports and events

Sidelines Play Box



What is it? Gifting a box of local board-branded boxes of loose parts play equipment to sports clubs, to be managed by the club and made available for tamariki to use during training sessions and games.

How will we manage Sidelines Play Boxes? A Play Box is a one-off gift from the local board. The sports club will be responsible for looking after its Play Box.

Why gift a Sidelines Play Box? Tamariki often spend time at sports fields while family members train or compete, and these spaces don't often provide much

scope for play. Providing play equipment (large-format games, blocks, etc) will give tamariki time, space and permission to have fun while sport takes place. Gifting a Sidelines Play Box to a sports club will strengthen its relationship with the local board and activate a council-owned space for play.

Tree swings



What is it? Installing council-funded swings in trees, providing a play opportunity in parks and reserves without playgrounds. Four swings were installed in trees in Devonport-Takapuna in 2024.

How will we manage tree swings? Tree swings will be inspected regularly to ensure they are safe to use. The trees in which they are installed will also be checked regularly to ensure that the swing is causing no damage.

Why install tree swings? Aucklanders often install swings into trees in council spaces, and people of all ages enjoy

them. Sometimes the community-installed swings are unsafe, or in unsuitable trees. By installing our own swings, we can ensure that they are fit-for-purpose, will not cause damage to the tree, and comply with our council benefit-risk assessment approach for non-playground play.

On-site adventurous nature spaces



What is it? Pruning or modifying a felled or fallen tree, to leave it in place as a natural play opportunity.

How will we manage an on-site adventurous nature space? By adding the space to the council maintenance schedule for the park, to be inspected regularly and modified further if required. The council will take a benefit risk assessment approach for this kind of non-playground play.

Why leave fallen trees as play spaces?

Leaving a fallen tree in place as an adventurous nature space, and using

signage to show that play is encouraged, activates a park as a location for play. Climbing fallen trees can also offer older tamariki in particular, a chance to enjoy more challenging play than is sometimes available at local playgrounds. This kind of play increases the overall play diversity for a neighbourhood.

Installed adventurous nature spaces



What is it? Bringing felled trees to a site that doesn't contain a formal playground, and using them to create a nature play opportunity.

How will we manage an installed adventurous nature space? By adding the space to the council maintenance schedule for the park, to be inspected regularly and modified further if required. The council will take a benefit risk assessment approach for this kind of non-playground play.

Why use trees to create play? We can

use this kind of play to fill gaps in play provision until a formal playground is built. Potential sites identified in previous staff advice include Balmoral Heights Reserve in Eden Terrace, Newmarket, Parnell, Auckland Domain, Aleberon Reserve, Basque Park and Fraser Park. Play like this can also sit in spaces where traditional playgrounds can't fit, such as drainage reserves. As well as providing play where there was none, adventurous nature spaces like this give scope for balancing, climbing and dynamic play like 'floor is lava' games. The natural materials provide sensory play experiences, and as the materials change over time, tamariki can learn about natural processes. Creating an adventurous nature space from raw materials enables arborists to be creative and craft a play opportunity that is unique to its site.

Play at local board-funded events



event more fun for them and giving their parents and care-givers an opportunity to relax and connect with other members of the community.

What is it? Increasing budgets for events like Movies in the Park, so the Events team can book play delivery partners to provide play activations as part of the event.

How would we deliver play at events?

Funding for a play activation could be added to the Events team work programme for the event. The Events team can access play delivery partners through the register of council vendors.

Why add play to local board events?

Including play at events will entertain and occupy excited tamariki, making the

Playful street art



What is it? Commissioning professional artists to design and create playful murals in urban spaces, with input from local tamariki and rangatahi.

How would we create playful street art?

By funding a play advocacy work programme for playful murals. The programme would be commissioned and delivered with support from the council Public Art team, and according to the guidelines in the Murals Toolkit and the Public Art policy.

How can street art make urban spaces playful?

Art can contribute to a playful environment, particularly in urban spaces that could benefit from increased colour and design. Street art adds excitement and interest to spaces, attracting visitors and making town centres feel more inclusive.

Playful installations



What is it? Creative, playful installations to add joy to a park or an urban landscape.

How would we create playful installations? Partnering with community groups and schools, perhaps using council-run facilities such as libraries and community houses to promote the opportunity.

What's the point of playful installations? This is a low-cost way to add playfulness in parks or urban spaces. A playful installation can be community-led, with local board seed funding. Examples include creating a fairy village in

a reserve, or allocating a space for tamariki art in a public space. Installations should ideally encourage further additions by tamariki and whānau, increasing a sense of community ownership and making dynamic, ever-changing public spaces.

Play at libraries



What is it? Additional funding to library branches, so they can refresh or increase their play provision for people of all ages to play.

How would we fund play in libraries? Library staff would identify gaps in play provision and the play team would use its work programme budget to fill them.

Does play belong in libraries? Libraries aren't silent book museums anymore – increasingly, they're used by communities as important places to gather. Waitematā's libraries provide excellent play sessions for younger tamariki, but

staff at some branches have identified gaps in provision for older tamariki and rangatahi. Providing opportunities for older children – and adults – to stay and play reinforces the community value of libraries, and can address issues like social isolation for older residents. Libraries can also be a space where people can borrow outdoor games for an hour or two to use on nearby green spaces or public spaces, as many library branches sit on or near council-owned parks or on public squares.

Expanded play activation programme



What is it? Increased funding for the play activation work programme in Waitematā.

How would we provide more play? The Activation team would allocate an increased budget to its delivery partners, focusing on specific areas of play if required.

Do we need more play activations? Yes! The Out and About Auckland Activation team is skilled at developing great relationships with delivery partners and scheduling activities for local boards. The programme can also respond to specific priorities for a local board. For Waitematā

Local Board, this could include tailored play activities for targeted communities, such as Asian families. Out and About can also help local boards to meet Māori Outcomes with Māori play and recreation sessions. A year-round programme could be developed, using community houses for activities in the winter.

Loose parts play space



What is it? Creating a dedicated site for loose parts play in Waitematā.

How would we deliver a loose parts play space By confirming a suitable site, providing storage if required (for example, a shed for an outdoor play space, or a cupboard or similar for indoor storage), and creating a partnership agreement with a delivery partner to manage the site.

Why would we support loose parts play? This kind of play – also known as ‘junk play’ – encourages tamariki to use their imaginations and create play out of unexpected items. The materials used

tend to be sourced from recycling centres and other organisations committed to diverting items from landfill and giving them a new life. At present, there isn’t a permanent site in Tāmaki Makaurau for loose parts play, although Out and About Auckland provides pop-up junk play activities.

Local community play budget



What is it? A budget to support community-led play activities.

How would we manage a play budget? The local board could call for playful funding requests in its general grant-making programme. If there is an opportunity for ongoing support for an organisation (such as a school, kindergarten, community group, or cultural group) to provide community play, a partnership agreement could be developed.

Why would we fund community play? Providing time, space and permission

for play is the responsibility of the whole community, not just the council or Waitematā Local Board. Supporting community groups to create and deliver play would help to meet the play needs of tamariki in the local area. For cultural groups, this could also support wider integration for newer residents. With schools, this can help to unlock these wonderful play sites for the rest of the community to also enjoy during weekends.

Partnership funding for rangatahi play projects



What is it? A funding partnership with a youth organisation, to learn from rangatahi about how they'd like to have fun.

How would we manage this engagement? By forming a partnership agreement with a youth organisation for engagement focused on rangatahi play and recreation.

Why do we need to engage with rangatahi about play? Nearly all local boards recognise that rangatahi are often overlooked in local board work programmes. In most cases, a youth council is the sole way that local boards can hear the views of rangatahi. We

need insights to better understand what rangatahi would like to do for play. This would also help Waitematā Local Board to give effect to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: that children have the right to express views freely on matters that affect them, and that their views will be given appropriate weight according to the age and maturity of the child.

Rangatahi fun at Parnell Baths



What is it? Programming activities at Parnell Baths for older tamariki and rangatahi.

How would we create pool play? By working with the pools' management to provide space for activations and promote them effectively. If necessary, delivery partners could be used to manage activations.

What's good about pool play? The council-owned Parnell Baths complex is an amazing community facility and is popular

with people of all ages. Delivering water-based activations and events for older tamariki and rangatahi – perhaps late in the afternoon or early in the evening – could provide an opportunity for this demographic to have fun with their peers.

Play project with Sport Auckland



What is it? A play project developed with Sport Auckland and focusing on Waitematā's Asian community.

How would we create a project? By partnering with Sport Auckland, potentially with additional funding from the Sport New Zealand Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa Fund to supplement its contribution.

Do we need a specialist Asian play project? The Waitematā Local Board Plan 2023 includes the key initiative to 'Strengthen a relationship with Sport Auckland for support, and in particular working with the ActivAsian team at Sport

Auckland'. We know that the Asian community has different play interests, and Sport Auckland's team can help to create a play project that meets local community need.

Play on the way



What is it? Playful activities or installations to make walking and cycling more fun.

How would we deliver play on the way?

By partnering with Sport Auckland, Sport Waitākere, or a community house or community group, and involving local schools in projects.

Why promote play on the way? The Waitematā Greenways Plan 2013 identified several walking and cycling routes. With elements like pavement stencilling or installing decorative markers, certain

routes could be enhanced to encourage whānau to use them. Tamariki are always more motivated to walk or cycle if the journey is fun. An iwi-led approach to this work could also support Māori outcomes by sharing local iwi narratives. Play on the way could also link local playgrounds and other play spaces, creating play trails. This could support greater use of local playgrounds, ensuring that lesser-known spaces are also enjoyed.

StoryWalks



What is it? A series of child-height signs in a park or reserve, containing the pages of a picture book.

How would we deliver StoryWalks? By working with a publisher to access rights to a suitable book (which is likely to be provided free of charge in many cases), and by asking for support from a community organisation to build the frames. We would then approach council colleagues to support the installation of the StoryWalk frames. This is the kind of project that could appeal to a Men's Shed or a Rotary Club, with a project grant from the local board to cover the costs.

What's good about StoryWalks? StoryWalks bring children's literacy to life by sharing a picture book in an outdoor setting. This will encourage young readers and their whānau to be active while enjoying the tale. Stories can be printed in different languages, acknowledging the cultural diversity of an area and celebrating Te Ao Māori by providing te reo versions.

Play advocacy general budget



What is it? A small annual operational expenditure (OPEX) budget to enable staff to respond to ad-hoc play opportunities as they arise.

How would we deliver a general play budget? By allocating a small budget to a general play advocacy work programme.

How would we spend a general play budget? An ad-hoc play budget will enable staff to respond to new project opportunities as they arise. It would be useful for local Play Week celebrations, for example, or to respond quickly to projects resulting from Sport Auckland's school engagement.

Integrating play into work programmes

Play outcomes can also be achieved by partnering with council colleagues to find opportunities for play to form part of broader work programmes funded by the local board. Many of these opportunities will flow from the local board's own guiding documents.

Play can also help to give effect to local board-specific plans regarding increased community engagement, and support for ethnic communities. During the work programme planning process for future financial years, the Play, Sport and Recreation team will work with colleagues to identify projects that have potential to include play.

Advocacy within the council group

Waitematā Local Board can advocate for council decision-making that enables play across the Auckland region. It can influence council-controlled organisations to consider the importance of play as part of their business-as-usual, which will help to turn Tāmaki Makaurau into a playful city.

Play Opportunities Through Environmental Design

Play Opportunities Through Environmental Design - 'POpTED' - is a principles-based approach to urban play, modelled on CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). It encourages applying a play lens to the design of urban spaces, both when new spaces are created and as an opportunity to retrofit play into the urban landscape. Local boards can use the POpTED approach to evaluate and advocate for play in town centres⁶.



Multipurpose design



Permission



Journey



Context



Inclusion

⁶ Refer to the Supplementary Information document to learn more about the POpTED framework and how it can be applied

Play in urban spaces



Eke Panuku sees play as an essential element of urban spaces. It seeks to include play in its urban regeneration projects, either by building new play spaces, or by designing playful and playable elements into a streetscape or public space. The value placed on play is further emphasised by Eke Panuku's placemaking team, which uses playful installations and activations to engage with communities and bring projects to life.

The opportunity to advocate for urban play is not restricted to projects led by Eke Panuku. Waitematā Local Board

could also consider installing playful street furniture when town centres are upgraded. This increases the playfulness of an urban space, and provides a clear invitation to tamariki that playful behaviour is welcomed. While bringing joy to a space, playful street furniture still serves its core purpose as seating, rubbish bins, etc. Play equipment can also be installed in urban spaces, enabling people of all ages to enjoy it.



Play opportunities in infrastructure projects

Council Controlled Organisations (CCOs) like Auckland Transport and Watercare have a significant impact on how our urban landscape is developed and maintained. These two organisations can contribute to creating a playful city in a number of ways, if play is included as a project outcome. Local boards can lead these conversations with their CCOs on a project-by-project basis.



For both Auckland Transport and Watercare, this could include embracing the opportunity to incorporate playful and playable elements in capital infrastructure projects – if a project involves rebuilding a streetscape, can the new version include play in some capacity? Berms and pavements can be designed to include play, and doing so as part of a wider project is a more cost-effective option than adding these elements later.

Auckland Transport's work has a big impact on whether tamariki can access play: many whānau worry about busy traffic and will not allow their tamariki to travel to playgrounds and local parks without an adult. Traffic calming measures and pedestrian crossings in suburban areas make it safer for tamariki and whānau to travel locally. The crossings themselves can also add

playfulness to the urban environment: Waka Kotahi has guidelines for roadway art, and Auckland Transport could apply these locally with support from the local board.

Pavement stencilling and pavement art are quick and effective ways to add play on the way in local streets, making it more fun to walk, bike or scooter around a neighbourhood. Staff will work with Auckland Transport to develop guidelines for this kind of small-scale project.

The physical spaces controlled by Auckland Transport and Watercare can also be sites for play, although this has occurred only on an ad-hoc basis in the past. The learn-to-ride painted bike track on top of the water reservoir at Greville Reserve in Forrest Hill is an excellent example of this approach (Devonport-Takapuna Local Board).

Similarly, road reserves controlled by Auckland Transport could also be sites for play. For example, there may be suitable spaces for tree swings to be installed.



Making Space for Water

This substantial project to address future flooding risks across Tāmaki Makaurau will impact several local board areas, including Waitematā. Preliminary conversations between play staff and Healthy Waters indicates that the Healthy Waters team are eager to ensure that any new linear reserves created through Making Space for Water support a range of uses. When appropriate and safe, this could include play outcomes. Staff will continue to engage with Healthy Waters to keep play on the agenda, but Waitematā Local Board can support this work by also advocating for play when concrete details of new reserves are developed. As with many other spaces, linear reserves will not be suitable sites for traditional playgrounds, but they could provide scope for playful bike trails, adventurous nature spaces, and other less formal play elements.

Play on local drainage reserves

The Healthy Waters team has been clear that it is comfortable with the prospect of its existing drainage reserves being used as sites for play. This may provide opportunities for additional play at a local level, if a drainage reserve is the most suitable site in a residential area. Beyond using the grass of a drainage reserve for play, in time we could work towards it being incorporated into the very nature of a site – for example, by integrating playful elements such as stepping stones into daylighted streams.

Play in council-owned facilities

Council facilities can also provide opportunities for play as part of the fabric of a building. When buildings such as libraries are refurbished in the future, play can be designed into spaces. Waitematā Local Board can support this approach by advocating for playful and playable elements to be included.

Māori outcomes and play

The Auckland Council framework document *Kia Ora Tāmaki Makaurau* takes a principles-based approach to support holistic wellbeing for Tāmaki Makaurau. This will be achieved through effective engagement with mana whenua in particular, and the Māori community in general. The Waitematā Local Board Plan 2023 draws on *Kia Ora Tāmaki Makaurau* to identify initiatives that will support Māori outcomes. Any project to achieve Māori outcomes through play must involve local iwi from the outset.

Bringing Māori identity to life through play

Auckland Council can use Te Aranga Māori Design principles in the design of playgrounds, buildings and street furniture. Colour choices and cultural motifs can communicate iwi narratives, even in mainstream playgrounds.



Developing and installing māra hūpara – a Māori playground – would share pre-colonial play traditions from local iwi. Māra hūpara is not the same as nature play or adventurous nature spaces, as each element has a whakapapa that is culturally relevant to local iwi. Designing and building māra hūpara therefore involves significant engagement with iwi, and would need to be guided by a māra hūpara expert, and designed and

constructed with support from a consultancy that has expertise in this area⁷. Māra hūpara are capital expenditure (CAPEX) projects.



Auckland Council's Te Kete Rukuruku dual naming project could also create opportunities for play. When names are gifted by iwi, they are typically commemorated with signage that shares both names. However, Waitematā Local Board could work with iwi to explore opportunities for playful interpretation of gifted names, many of which speak of movement or activity.

By taking an iwi-led approach to the design of natural play elements that speak to the narratives of the names, and accompanying the play elements with interpretative signage that helps park visitors to better understand how the play opportunity represents the te reo name, the local board could bring gifted names to life. Depending on the scope and scale of a Te Kete Rukuruku-inspired play installation, a project of this type could be either a capital expenditure (CAPEX) project or an operational expenditure (OPEX) project.

Using play activations to celebrate te ao Māori

The Out and About Auckland activation team's Māori Outcomes Activation Advisor can include te ao Māori-specific activations in its annual programme of events for Waitematā Local Board. This can be done using experienced delivery partners and supporting the local board's Māori outcomes.

⁷ Harko Brown is the leader in this field, and Boffa Miskell is the consultancy of choice for council māra hūpara projects

Play and accessibility

Accessible play aims to ensure that all tamariki can have fun and access diverse play opportunities. To achieve this, it is important to understand what impairments tamariki may have and how this can affect their capacity to use our formal and informal play spaces.

How are tamariki affected?

In New Zealand, disability is typically defined as the presence of a long-term impairment that has a limiting effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. For tamariki, play is a 'day-to-day activity', and we need to ensure that the play we provide is accessible to as many people as possible.

In early 2025 Statistics New Zealand published its Household Disability Survey 2023 findings. All information and data about disability in this play plan is drawn from the Statistics New Zealand survey findings.

The survey gives us reliable and up-to-date data about the prevalence of disabilities amongst tamariki, and helps us to understand what disability looks like for this age group. This was assessed by asking parents and caregivers about their child's 'functional domains', which described elements of life where a person deals with challenges or impairment. Different functional domains were considered for tamariki of different ages, as shown below.

Tamariki: two to four years	Tamariki: five to 14 years	
Seeing Hearing Walking Flexibility / dexterity Communication Learning Controlling own behaviour Development delay Playing	Seeing Hearing Walking Flexibility / dexterity Personal care Communication Concentrating	Remembering Learning Intellectual function Mental health Making friends Accepting change to routine Controlling own behaviour

In other words, tamariki may have visible disabilities (such as difficulty walking), and invisible disabilities (such as sensory impairments, and the various developmental, neurological and behavioural impairments mentioned above).

The disability survey data revealed that 10 per cent of tamariki aged 14 years and under are disabled. According to the most recent census data, 7206 tamariki aged 14 and under live in Waitematā, which equates to more than 700 local tamariki with disabilities.

Disability survey findings

The disability survey findings revealed that the impairments affecting tamariki differ significantly to those that affect disabled adults. These findings are summarised below. The findings group relevant functional domains that were used for assessment, and indicate the disability rate for each grouping.

Disability rates for tamariki (aged zero to 14 years)	
Mental health functional domain	5% affected
Accepting change to routine functional domain	5% affected
Making friends functional domain	4% affected
Cognition functional domains (remembering; concentrating; learning)	3% affected
Controlling own behaviour functional domain	3% affected
Other functional domains (personal care; intellectual; playing; developmental delay)	3% affected
Physical functional domains (walking; flexibility / dexterity)	1% affected
Sensory functional domains (seeing; hearing)	<0.5% affected

These findings show that physical disabilities are not particularly prevalent in tamariki, and that invisible disabilities are far more likely. Several of the functional domains mentioned for tamariki are consistent with conditions like autism and ADHD.

Disability rates for adults	
Physical functional domains (walking; flexibility / dexterity)	9% affected
Sensory functional domains (seeing; hearing)	5% affected
Cognition functional domains (remembering; concentrating; learning)	4% affected
Pain functional domain	3% affected
Mental health functional domain	3% affected
Socialising functional domain	3% affected
Other functional domains (personal care; communication; intellectual)	3% affected
Fatigue functional domain	2% affected

A lot of accessible play for tamariki caters primarily for physical disability, despite this being one of the least prevalent impairments affecting that age group. While physical disability is more common for adults, disabled tamariki often face quite different challenges.

Planning for accessible play

Armed with this data that clarifies what disabilities affect tamariki, we can work towards better consideration of the play needs of tamariki with invisible disabilities. The council teams responsible for designing playgrounds are expected to view diversity and accessibility as part of all built play spaces, including when a playground is refurbished. Here are some ways we can accomplish that.

Making play more accessible for people with visible disabilities

- **Continue** to install accessible, inclusive play equipment that tamariki of all abilities can enjoy
- **Ensure** that supporting play elements, such as soft fall surfaces in playgrounds, also support accessibility
- **Provide** accessible park furniture, toilets and changing facilities, so whānau with disabled family members can be comfortable, and stay and play for longer
- **Publicise** wider park accessibility - for example, is there ample disabled parking near the play space?

Making play more accessible for people with invisible disabilities

- **Design** intuitive play spaces that are easy for people of different abilities to navigate
- **Include** spaces designed for retreat and quiet play
- **Incorporate** sensory play elements, such as water play and sand play
- **Consider** the risk that strong colour schemes may have a negative impact on some disabled tamariki
- **Recognise** that some whānau cannot use play spaces if they are unfenced – fencing is an accessibility feature for these families
- **Install** communication boards in larger and more popular playgrounds, to support non-verbal tamariki to play

Strengthening staff advice regarding accessible play

- **Establish** an accessible play working group of disabled tamariki, their whānau, and disability non-profit groups and communities, to educate and guide council thinking about how to make play accessible to all
- **Engage** directly with disabled tamariki and their whānau regarding specific local play projects
- **Advocate** for a regional network approach to accessible play, to improve equitable access and ensure that all whānau can reach play spaces that meet their needs

The guidance above mentions fencing. Auckland Council considers various factors to determine when playgrounds should be fenced, such as whether the playground is near a busy road. We also recognise that specialist inclusive playgrounds often need fencing.

We will never fence every playground, but given the increased awareness of invisible disabilities in tamariki, such as autism, and how this shapes their play needs, we may want to reassess our approach to better reflect when and why fencing could be considered. Engaging with the wider disability community can help the community to better understand various accessibility issues related to play.

Play for everyone

Who needs to play?

When we think about how to provide play for our communities, we should consider the following points:

- Play is essential for tamariki, but it's also important for people of all ages to have fun
- Adults may call play 'hobbies', but it still counts if it's 'stuff we do mostly just for fun'
- The Youth Advisory Panel and Seniors Advisory Panel both spoke of the importance providing play opportunities for all generations
- Encouraging adults to play and have fun helps them to remember why play matters. This increases the likelihood that they'll support tamariki to have time, space and permission to play
- Rangatahi don't outgrow the urge to have fun, but we need to give them spaces, permission and encouragement to keep playing
- Play can protect older adults from social isolation, boost their mood, and keep them engaged in their communities
- When play is an everywhere activity, it also becomes something that everybody can enjoy



Five ways to support all-ages play

Here are five ways that Waitematā Local Board can make play something that everybody can enjoy.

1

DEVELOP INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY PROJECTS to bring people of different ages together to have fun. This does not only apply to older people and tamariki – a project with tamariki and rangatahi can also be intergenerational. Older people have amazing play traditions and skills that they could be asked to share with younger people, and there is a lot of scope to develop this kind of project with community groups taking the lead. Organisations like Generations Connect NZ can support staff and local boards to develop projects.

2

INSTALL PLAY EQUIPMENT THAT ADULTS CAN because most playground equipment is not designed for those of us larger than the average eight-year-old. The small size of many playground features is a barrier to use for larger people, who may be concerned that play equipment will not be able to bear their weight. Many adults who take tamariki to playgrounds would like to play as well. Installing some play equipment that is big enough for adults can help people of all ages to have fun and encourages rangatahi playground use as well.

3

DO NOT STOP AT PLAYGROUNDS by including play in other spaces. Adults without tamariki are likely to find it awkward to visit a playground full of young children. If we include play equipment in other places – swings in trees in parks without playgrounds, for example, or seesaws in town squares – we make play available to a wider range of people. Rangatahi who hang out in town centres are likely to be keen users of play equipment in unexpected places.

4

MAKE PLAY MORE EXCITING by talking to older tamariki and rangatahi about what they value in a play experience. Often ‘climbing high’ and ‘going fast’ are recurring themes, but we cannot always provide these experiences in our playgrounds. Elements like flying foxes are always popular, and if they are not in playgrounds, adults will also use them. And this kind of play does not always need equipment – encouraging tree-climbing can support the appetite for risky play.

5

KEEP THE GOOD TIMES GOING FOR LONGER by investing in supporting infrastructure that extends the time that playgrounds can be enjoyed. Shade, whether provided by sails or trees, makes playgrounds more enjoyable for whānau on hot days. If we start to light some of our destination play spaces, we may find that rangatahi and adults will enjoy using them after the tamariki have gone home to bed.

Play for rangatahi

As previously mentioned, we might just need to install play equipment that can hold the weight of rangatahi who want to have fun:



Another option can be to create specific play experiences that are more likely to appeal to rangatahi and older tamariki. Parkour is an increasingly popular way to have fun for people who have outgrown playgrounds, but Tāmaki Makaurau doesn't have a dedicated outdoor parkour space. Incorporating parkour into a park or playground could create opportunities to play for a much broader audience, and would also be likely to draw visitors into a local board area.



Play for older people

There is growing interest from local boards about opportunities to support wellbeing and good health for older residents. Play is perceived as one of the ways that the council can help people to spend time outside of their houses, combating social isolation and keeping minds and bodies active. Local boards currently aim to meet the recreational needs of older people with clubs and activities in libraries, and with investment in elements such as outdoor gym equipment in parks.

Staff engaged with the council's Seniors Advisory Panel to seek its views about the play needs of the community it represents. This feedback is summarised in the supplementary information document and includes:

- sturdy playground equipment that adults of all ages can enjoy
- the clustering of outdoor gym equipment near playgrounds
- ongoing provision of free or low-cost community spaces for hobby groups.

The Seniors Advisory Panel also supports the development of intergenerational play projects, recognising that these will encourage older people to join in play activities and remove barriers between people of different ages.

If the local board would like to consider investing in play specifically for older people in the future, staff would need to work with colleagues to gather relevant insights to confirm that there is a current gap in play provision affecting this demographic. If research confirmed that older people require local board-funded play, the local board could consider several ways to address this, including:

- directing older people to existing play opportunities, such as board games in libraries
- asking the Out and About Auckland team to develop targeted activities that provide playful experiences for older people
- investing in physical play assets that meet the needs of older people.

Supporting play in Asian communities

Here are some ways that Waitematā Local Board could use insights from the regional sports trusts to increase access to play for Asian communities.

What we could do	Why we should do it
Fund and support play events delivered by the Asian community	• Increase the quantity and quality of culturally-relevant events • Support capacity building in the community
Promote play opportunities using different languages and social media platforms (such as WeChat)	• Increase access to information, particularly for older community members • Directly reach targeted communities using media that is relevant to them
Invest in lighting at destination play spaces	• Extend the scope for use of play spaces later in the day • Respond to different cultures' family rhythms, that may involve spending time together later in the day and in the evening
Invest in shade at playgrounds	• Many Asian communities are very conscious of the risks of sun exposure, making it important that shaded playspaces are available
Develop intergenerational play opportunities	• Support grandparents to be key enabling figures for grandchildren's access to play • Create projects and initiatives that support all-ages play
Seek out Asian community insights to inform decision-making about play	• Encourage Asian communities that may be reluctant to participate in consultations • Ensure that play investments meet the needs of all cultures in a local board area
Emphasise the value of play for tamariki development and wellbeing	• Meet people where they are by helping them to see that play contributes to their children growing up to be happy and successful • Increase the likelihood that families will provide time, space and permission for play

