

# Futures summary report

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FUTURES PROGRAMME

# Overview

**“ What does the future hold? In these uncertain times, it is a more pressing question than ever. Arriving at a single, certain answer is impossible. ”**

However, by reflecting on current trends, exploring our assumptions and engaging a wide diversity of views we can develop deeper insights into the causes and consequences of change, and identify actions that can improve decision-making and assist the play, active recreation and sport sector to be better prepared for a range of alternative futures.

This report forms an executive summary for the six reports associated with the futures process hosted by Sport NZ. It outlines the key observations made through the course of the dialogues and points to the accompanying reports that provide more detail for the respective points.

Two futures thinking approaches have gone into developing these reports. The first was a set of workshops involving representatives from within and outside the play, active recreation and sport sector using a variety of foresight techniques. Parallel conversations with Māori on their perspectives of, and aspirations for, physical activity and wellbeing were facilitated by Te Tuarā and Te Roopu Tūmau groups, ensuring Te Ao Māori perspectives were not constrained.

The sections below briefly highlight the key observations that emerged through the process of the respective scan, wananga, workshops and associated surveys.

# Where we stand

A general theme emerging from the futures workshops was that the play, active recreation, and sport sector is struggling in the face of multifaceted change and suffering from a lack of trust.

## Levels of participation in traditional sports are under pressure

A well-known issue, but the growth of some informal or non-mainstream activities suggest there's a blind spot. The feeling of exclusion for those who do not fit into traditional male sport structures points to a need for the sector to adapt and change.

## Barriers to access remain

Those less abled or on lower incomes continue to experience impediments in getting to or accessing facilities, events, or places. The lack of facilities or open spaces close to where people live combined with poor and expensive public transport exasperates the issue of accessibility.

The sheer cost for some participants (e.g. fees, gear, travel, etc.) remains a significant barrier for broad participation for some community sectors.

## Pressured lifestyles and demands on time

Finding time for active recreation in the context of increasing time pressure is an increasing challenge for many. These pressures are multiplying from a need to secure income with multiple jobs through to a growing focus on academic attainment, church and community service, or from digital technologies.

## Lack of integration and cooperation

The focus on competition can prove an impediment both to retaining individuals within sport beyond school while also proving detrimental for the co-ordination across organisations. Duplicated or wasted resources are the result when groups compete for the same participants leading to poorer community outcomes and a lack of trust between organisations.

## Monocultural dominance

Māori find that a monocultural view of play, active recreation and sport leaves Māori activities unrecognised and unsupported. This is particularly reflected in the Papa Noho report, that reflects a view that organisations often had "hegemonic hierarchies where the pale, stale, male/female typically have the power, influence, and money."

## Risk averse and variable governance

Participants in the workshops noted an inconsistency in the quality of governance and oversight across the sector and a deep perception of mistrust. This is reflected in the perception of a system that can be excessively bureaucratic, with significant volunteer staff time spent on reporting requirements to demonstrate that funding conditions have been met.

## Undervalued volunteer support

Though their support is vital, the value of volunteers appears to be discounted by organisations within the sector. This is particularly concerning at a time when this base of support is ageing and under pressure of time commitments elsewhere.

# What we see on the horizon

Several environmental scans were completed ahead of the workshop series to inform perspectives and highlight key areas of change:

- The influence of technology - whether digital, physical, or biological - will increasingly influence physical activity environment. From the enhancement of elite performance through to the diversion of attention into the digital realm of esports, the impact will continue to be widely felt. The effects may not be evenly shared however, and inequality (already an impediment to access) may be increased.
- The prolific use of data may bring new benefits as individuals gain insight into their wellbeing. The sector will need to become increasingly sensitive to how it is gathered, used, stored, shared and regulated.
- The sector remains aligned to the demographic and social structures of the late 20th century. These are rapidly changing as the population ages and new perspectives increasingly influence New Zealanders' sense of identity.
- While many remain alarmed by the prospect of over-population, it is a baby drought rather than a baby boom, that should be a growing concern. New Zealand, like many other developed countries has a sub-replacement fertility rate, meaning deaths out number births. This has flow on impacts to future labour force supply and availability and may see countries competing for younger immigrants.
- A low birth rate combined with higher life expectancy will make baby boomers into a powerful demographic. They are arriving at age 65 in great numbers, representing not only a much greater proportion of the population, but also amongst the wealthiest. Already people 60 years and over hold over half of the world's wealth. Their numbers and wealth will increasingly influence central and local government decision-making.
- Inclusion and equity are likely to become increasingly important issues. Societal stresses like COVID will increase inequality if left unchecked with implications for social cohesion. All sectors, including active recreation, will need to consider their role in addressing (not compounding) these issues.
- A strong bicultural partnership will become increasingly important for New Zealand to address tomorrow's challenges. Sport and active recreation have long been synonymous with New Zealanders' identity, but the Māori scan highlighted the limits of this. A successful future will demonstrate full commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi.
- There is a growing expectation that greater local community involvement will be essential to develop appealing active recreation and sport options. The increasing need for local resilience also underpins a move toward enhancing autonomy and empowerment.
- Climate change trends will call upon that resilience, especially for more vulnerable communities. The exact extent and effect of climate-related change is unpredictable, but significant impacts are likely inevitable given the global trends to date. These will affect the viability of some outdoor activities and drive greater sustainability practice in the sector.
- The sharing economy will see our spending significantly increase on collaborative consumption, leveraging services that allow us to use rather than own a product. This will extend from simply sharing assets like bikes or camping equipment, to sharing workspace with a mixture of organisations and free-lancers, paying each other's expenses via crowdfunding, and financing each other through peer-to-peer lending. In the process central agents such as banks and realtors will be by-passed. What does this mean for central providers of active recreation and sport?

# Preferred future

While two approaches were employed to explore the future, both arrived at a preferred future where:

- Physical activity is part of a much larger wellbeing agenda.
- Culture and identity are important i.e. Mana Māori, being New Zealanders.
- Communities are empowered to find local solutions within a high trust model.
- There is high collaboration among agents in the system (including Central, regional and local government) to achieve shared goals for the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.
- Boundaries between domains and areas of activity disappear and silos are broken down.

# Key challenges

The sector will need to address key challenges to realise its preferred future. These include:

- Physical activity: still typically pursued through siloed perspectives. Central leadership (e.g. Government, Sport NZ) and funding typically focuses on a narrow definition of traditional, membership-based sports. This is despite the majority of all physical activity being informal and unstructured. Workshop participants commented that sport (typically male) “is king”.
- Culture and identity: There was a palpable sense of exclusion in the conversations from those who did not identify as male, gender binary, Pākehā, or able-bodied.
- Trust and empowerment: There is a strong feeling of distrust and disempowerment within the current sector. Participants are keen to see a diversity in decision making, but too often feel constrained by a process that both feels overly bureaucratic, centralised, and designed for a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

A photograph of two women in dark athletic wear playing soccer on a grassy field. They are both smiling and looking down at a soccer ball on the ground. The scene is backlit by a bright sunset, creating a warm, golden glow. A soccer goal is visible in the background under a clear sky.

“ Physical activity is part of a much larger wellbeing agenda. ”

# Key insights for change

A number of key steps emerge for the sector to take to address the current challenges and future opportunities:

## **Mana Ōrite**

The Sector must deliver on the Treaty Partnership to ensure Māori are engaged in all decision making across the sector to ensure the integrity of the partnership.

## **Mana Taurite**

There is equitable access to resource to ensure this reaches those currently excluded from the mainstream allocation. This will be challenging as it requires leadership courage from those who may need to relinquish power.

## **Overhaul governance**

Current national sports and recreational organisations are based on structures designed for 2 to 3 generations ago. A complete reset is required if the current low levels of trust are to be lifted.

## **Devolve decisions**

Related to the points above is the need to move decision-making closer to those it affects. To achieve this effectively will require significant investment in distributed leadership and capacity building.

## **Adopt the perspective that physical activity is a human right**

The sector should aim to achieve the same understanding of its criticality as the health sector enjoys today. In a future world of uncertainty, wellbeing will be a key factor of resilience.

## **Develop a 'Wellbeing Agency'**

Develop a 'Wellbeing Agency' to provide leadership, co-ordination and insight across sectors in achieving the wellbeing agenda and overcome current fragmented practice.

## **Recognize that physical wellbeing as a fundamental component to daily life**

Recognize that physical wellbeing as a fundamental component to daily life to ensure more holistic approaches are adopted across related sectors (e.g. transport policy; urban and rural planning, food policy, education).

## **Understand, and overcome, barriers**

Access to space, limitations of finance and ability, pressures from a changing working world are conspiring to reduce physical activity for key sectors. The dynamic of this change is not well understood though, and research is required to ensure better targeting of resources.

# Exploring further

The observations above have come through a range of workshops, [environmental scans](#), wananga, and sector surveys. These were aligned across two working streams to provide a Māori specific view and a general view. The Futures Working Group and Te Tuarā Futures developed these perspectives, and each of these resulted in progress reports that provide an opportunity to consider the material in more depth.

There are two progress reports from Te Tuarā. The [first Te Tuarā report](#) describes the conversation and questions that emerged from the first set of workshops that reflected on the challenges of current approaches and aspirations for the future of physical activity and wellbeing from Māori perspective. The [second Te Tuarā report](#) examines in more detail what the future might look and feel like for Māori, and how that future might be realised.

There are also two progress reports from the Working Group. The [first Working Group report](#) focuses on identifying the drivers of change and their implications for play, active recreation and sport. It highlights current concerns, but also some signs of change. It illustrates how we can challenge some of the assumptions we may make about the future and identify what we value in a preferred future. The [second Working Group report](#) focuses on further understanding the causes, barriers and implications of change, and provides a preferred future for physical activity in New Zealand.

Finally, there are two reports which draw together the key themes and provide prompts for further thinking. The Papa Noho report looks at the critical dimensions of partnership and draws on the work done collaboratively by the Working Group and Te Tuarā in a joint hui. It provides a challenging but immensely positive perspective on how the work of partnership can be undertaken to ensure the preferred future we seek can become a reality for all, not just some.

The associated [Scenario Report](#) takes a broader lens and provides a backdrop to examine alternate futures. Some aspects of these may be unwelcome but considering a range of plausible futures allows us to test how particular strategies may fare in different futures to ensure our plans are suitably robust.



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