



**Community
and Social
Recovery
Needs
Assessment:
Summary
Report**



January 2024, Version 1.0

Executive Summary

To understand key recovery needs following the severe weather events of 2023, the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office has engaged with mana whenua and the community and voluntary sector, as well as commissioned a series of place-based needs assessments.

Our engagement and research highlights significant ongoing needs in the community, linked to issues that have either not been resolved from the immediate aftermath of the weather events, or have developed since this time. **We heard that whānau are struggling mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Many whānau are not having their basic housing needs met and for some, the financial toll will be difficult to recover from.**

Many communities impacted by recent extreme weather events were already facing socio-economic challenges, compounded by the lingering impacts of COVID-19 and resulting inflationary pressures. Recent extreme weather events have placed additional stresses on disadvantaged communities which are likely to exacerbate social and economic inequalities, compounding the impact of rising debt levels, interest rates and increases in the cost of living, and increasing demand for financial and mental health support. The nature and extent of needs may not yet be fully known.

Mana whenua told us:

(...) need to ensure essential needs are met (this the minimum) and the focus needs to be on addressing poverty, deprivation, and inequality, education, medical, housing etc.

Key recovery needs identified included:

- **Health and wellbeing:** The storm events have had significant impacts on individuals and whānau physically, spiritually and emotionally. Identified needs were linked to a range of issues including ongoing trauma from the events, anxiety about future adverse weather events, stress in addressing the impacts of the events, isolation and loneliness, grief, unsuitable accommodation options and family and relationship stressors.
- **Housing and accommodation:** Impacts are being felt across the housing system. Many whānau are not having their basic housing needs met. Needs stem from families being forced to leave their properties which has resulted in some living in accommodation which is not fit for purpose, a loss of familial ties, cultural connections and other support networks, overcrowding, and psychological impacts as a result of housing instability. Some families are still living in damaged and unhealthy properties that they cannot afford to repair.
- **Meeting basic household needs:** For some whānau, the financial toll of the weather events will be significant, ongoing and difficult to recover from. Financial impacts stem from loss of income, loss of vehicles and home contents, costly repairs, accommodation and travel costs related to temporary accommodation, additional insurance costs in the future and reductions in values of homes. For those who were already struggling the financial impacts will be worse.

Other recovery needs identified include:

- **Access to information and support** is still a challenge for some whānau due to a lack of awareness of support options, confusing or complex pathways to help, language barriers, a lack of documentation, and a reluctance amongst some residents to ask for help.
- **Insurance issues** are adding to an already stressful situation, with language barriers and a lack of evidence to support claims creating additional challenges.
- **Infrastructure and planning** concerns relate to a lack of community preparedness for adverse weather events, the capacity of infrastructure to withstand future events, the potential negative impact of housing redevelopments and intensification, and threats to the natural environment.

The findings from our engagement and research underscore the need for a long-term, coordinated strategy that responds to the diverse and persistent recovery needs of Tamaki Makaurau's communities.

Introduction

Five extreme weather events affected Tāmaki Makaurau within a four-month period in 2023, with compounding effects on communities, and the natural and built environments.

The extreme rainfall, river flooding, wind damage and storm surges brought significant hardship, suffering and challenges for individuals and communities. Six people tragically lost their lives, over 4,500 households needed assistance and around 3,000 households were unable to return to their homes due to damage or land stability issues.

Our priority communities

While the weather events affected communities across Tāmaki Makaurau, the impacts will not be felt the same. The weather events have placed additional stresses on disadvantaged communities and the challenging recovery journey is likely to further entrench the experience of disadvantage for these communities, leading to further social vulnerability. In these areas, more effort and investment will be required to enable communities to recover well.

We have identified areas where more intensive community and social wellbeing support will be required. This recognises that the pre-existing condition of these communities means they will more effort and investment to recover well. Our priority areas are **Henderson/Rānui, Mt Roskill/Wesley, and Māngere/Favona** and they have been determined through analysis of:

- reported impacts (Requests for Service + Rapid Building Assessments)
- history of previous weather events and the likelihood of future events
- the number and value of Ministry of Social Development Civil Defence payments
- the number of whānau registered with Temporary Accommodation Service immediately following the events
- existing levels of deprivation
- the proportions of communities that are made up of Māori, Pacific people, youth, disabled people, and ethnic community populations.

This report

This document summarises findings related to unmet recovery needs in Tāmaki Makaurau and draws on:

1. **Our engagement with mana whenua** on the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan
2. **Our engagement with with the community and social sector:** via seven hui with government and the community and social sector across the region between October and November 2023. This document specifically reflects what we heard about the highest priority community and social recovery challenges for storm impacted whānau and communities in the short, medium and long term.
3. **Research in our priority communities:** community needs assessments (via semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and service providers) were undertaken in three geographic areas – Henderson/Rānui, Mt Roskill/Wesley, and Māngere/Favona. This document specifically reflects what we heard about the scale and nature of unmet needs as a result of the weather events in Mt Roskill/Wesley (Puketāpapa), and Māngere/Favona. The Henderson/Rānui needs assessment interviews and initial analysis suggest alignment with the key needs identified in Mt Roskill/Wesley (Puketāpapa), and Māngere/Favona.

Key recovery needs

1. Health and wellbeing

International literature tells us that natural disasters like we have experienced will have a major impact on people's mental wellbeing and suggests that psychosocial recovery after a disaster can take up to ten years.

A key reason for this is that there's often a double blow – the shock and effects of the disaster itself, and then secondary, recovery-related issues such as dealing with broken homes, insurance claims, poor roading and the loss of community facilities.

The wellbeing impacts of the extreme weather events were raised as a key need by all stakeholders we engaged with, and through the place-based needs assessment research.

We heard:

For some individuals, **the trauma of the event(s) themselves** have had lasting impacts on their wellbeing. In some cases, this was seen to be retriggering of previous trauma, for example, for refugee families.

It's the compounding things that just won't go away and this person in particular with the PTSD, unfortunately her hubby has lost his job too. So, it was just another layer, but this is what we're seeing with a lot of those families, it is a layer on layer. It's coming off COVID, which they kind of feel like we haven't really fully recovered [sic] already – to this. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Mana whenua are concerned about the health and wellbeing of **Māori communities** who are still experiencing stress and anxiety following the traumatic weather events.

There are many reports of **anxiety relating to the potential for future weather events** and what might happen should these occur. This is often triggered by heavy rain in the community, and evident amongst both adults and children.

I was at a community meeting where parents were describing the fear that tamariki have when it rains, wanting to be upstairs not downstairs. And so, there's a big need around wellbeing. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Just rain is enough to trigger them (...) one time we were training at a rugby field and it started pouring, people got up and just ran straight to their cars. Like this is unreal. I haven't even seen this before... you're talking about guys who, big, strong ... they just ran, gone, just apologising as they go. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

Addressing the impacts of the events, including settling insurance claims, arranging repairs to properties, and meeting additional financial commitments has been a major cause of **stress and fatigue** for some whānau. The upheaval of having to move home, including to a different area, was also seen to be adding to the emotional strain experienced by families.

Some individuals and families, particularly those who have had to relocate to areas away from their usual supports are experiencing **isolation and loneliness**.

There will be a lot of psychological impacts (...) After the flood they moved to the hotel. It was so much loneliness and it affected her a lot. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

There are also people having to live in emergency housing or transitional housing for a period before they could move back and that was quite hard as well... Just this general sense of hopelessness really, I

don't know if people really understand what that does to people and their spirit. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

There were frequent reports of feelings of **grief**, particularly related to the loss of treasured and irreplaceable possessions (e.g., family photos).

They're still going through the grief, all their family memories, photos are gone, everything just gone in the flood and the only thing that was left was... the clothes that she was wearing. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

We heard that there have been **breakdowns in relationships** and that there is concern over the impact of stressed and overworked parents struggling to make ends meet, with this affecting their parenting style and overall capacity to meet their children's needs.

These children probably see another side of their parents which may affect them now too. I think that's scary to see that happening where parents don't realise how much it's seen by the children – that you're sad, you can't think, you're probably a bit angry quicker because you can't make sense out of things. I suppose that will fall into some of the kids' lives. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

Community stakeholders spoke about these issues exacerbating existing **mental health conditions**, with people in this situation even more susceptible to negative outcomes. Others highlighted that the impacts had built over time for some individuals, with those affected increasingly vulnerable due to ongoing stress, challenges in addressing issues presented by the weather events, and the associated exhaustion from these efforts.

Physical health needs were also identified, with reports that the weather events had exacerbated underlying health issues that families were still contending with.

While we have been unable to access data relating to uptake of social services as a result of the adverse weather events, there were anecdotal reports of increased family violence and engagement with Oranga Tamariki.

2. Housing and accommodation

Thousands of households were forced to leave their homes due to the weather events and many hundreds remain in temporary accommodation, uncertain about when or whether they will be able to return home. We know some whānau are back living in homes that may not be healthy and that others are in insecure or overcrowded accommodation. In the future, some whānau may be faced with the prospect of not being able to remain in the communities they love due to supply or financial constraints.

Auckland already struggles with a shortage of housing and our housing market is now one of the least affordable in the OECD. The growing number of people on the public housing register, even prior to this year, speaks of a housing system that is failing many Aucklanders. It is clear that the events of this year will compound existing pressures, which will hit the most disadvantaged the hardest.

The challenges associated with housing and accommodation were raised as a priority by mana whenua and all stakeholders we engaged with, including through the place-based needs assessment research.

We heard:

Many families have relocated to other Auckland suburbs following the weather events. This includes Kāinga Ora residents, homeowners, and private renters. Some had also been placed in temporary or emergency accommodation (e.g., motels).

Many stakeholders reported concern regarding the **suitability of temporary accommodation**, including it not meeting the requirements of those with a disability, being too small for the number of family members, and unsafe environments. It was also reported that some families are not allowed to cook in motel units, restricting what they are able to eat and introducing additional costs related to the purchase of takeaway meals.

While it was reported that some families are starting to move back into the area and more permanent housing as rebuilding has commenced, others remain living in different communities, either temporarily or permanently. This means they are **dislocated from their familial ties, cultural connections and usual support networks** and need to rebuild them. This also includes children having to move to different schools and people not being able to visit relatives, and loss relating to places where residents would normally gather or purchase familiar food items.

They live now somewhere in Botany Downs or somewhere which is different [in terms of] cultural makeup. It won't be the shops where they buy their food, it won't be their fresh markets where they buy taro. Taro might not be available in Botany Downs. All those little things are actually making people displaced. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

We heard frequent reports of **overcrowding** due to families being forced to move in together in properties that are not designed to meet the number of occupants.

She's still living in a really badly flood damaged house, it has not been stickered, so that she can't live in it. But it's not good for her and her family, and is overcrowded... They can't afford to move out, they can't find anything else they can afford, and they're trapped in there. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

Significant concern was raised about the **psychological impacts** of overcrowding, inappropriate emergency or temporary accommodation, and families living areas outside of their usual sources of support, comfort and community. This was also linked to people sleeping in living rooms or garages, and uncertainty regarding the likelihood of properties flooding in the future.

You can imagine the mental health state of people who have had to squash up in one room or a one bedroom [property]. And we're not talking small families, we're talking our Pacific Island families with five or more people. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Stakeholders noted the **increased financial costs** linked to having to travel back to their 'home' community to meet family commitments. This included attending health appointments and transporting children to their usual school to maintain a sense of normalcy and minimise disruption to their education.

She has a kid who needs kidney dialysis every other day. She's got herself into a routine from Māngere to hospital and then having to hike from Mt Eden to Middlemore for the dialysis, no one took that into account. It cost her more. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Other housing related issues include **ongoing insurance claims**, and families not being able to move back to their 'home' community due to a **lack of affordable and/or appropriately sized housing** in the area.

There were also reports of **people living in sub-standard, flood damaged homes** that have been poorly repaired, and **anti-social behaviour** linked to empty properties.

There are some landlords that are just putting a coat of paint over just to pretend that it's all good. But actually, it's not, that whole gib board needs to come out and the tenant knows that, but they've got nowhere else to go and live. So, they're kind of putting up with it. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Because there have been vacant houses for months, there's looting and that kind of behaviour going on. The Kāinga Ora homes, there's nothing done about them, there's a whole block of them that are just all caged up... (sic)... I've seen a lot more groups of intimidating young men around the place. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

3. Meeting basic household needs

For some whānau, the financial toll of the weather events will be significant, ongoing and difficult to recover from. The weather events have compounded existing challenges for whānau, especially those who were already struggling.

A number of people continue to be in significant financial hardship, particularly as a result of damage to housing. For some people, the indirect costs of recovering from the weather events, such as temporary accommodation co-payments, exacerbate both current hardship and future financial wellbeing.

Many of the communities most impacted were financially insecure before the severe weather events. Māngere/Favona, Mt Roskill/Wesley and Henderson/Rānui all had high pre-existing levels of socioeconomic deprivation, reducing their resilience and capability to absorb the shock of the severe weather.

The impact of the severe weather events on people's financial wellbeing and their ability to meet the costs of basic household needs was raised as a priority by mana whenua and all stakeholders we engaged with, and through the place-based needs assessment research.

We heard:

Residents are struggling to meet the costs of basic household needs, including housing, food, and petrol. While the impacts of inflation and overall increase in the cost of living in Aotearoa was acknowledged by stakeholders, they reported that some families were facing **increased financial commitments** due to the weather events. This included costs related to private rentals they have been forced to move into, fuel associated with transporting children to school from a different area, the purchase of uniforms for children attending new schools, and replacing items damaged in the floods.

It's continued to escalate the amount of people who come for support for food. It is continued, it's ongoing. Our pātaka kai is just wiped out all the time. We could fill it 10 times a day and other people are filling it for us as well, but it's just so ongoing. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

I think the renters, they probably need to find a place, another place to rent and they have got families, children, schools, they've lost their motor vehicles. I think those probably we don't hear from much more now, but their needs haven't gone away. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

A **drop in income** is also contributing to financial constraints. For example, one stakeholder spoke about this in relation to families who had lost earnings during this time because of changes to their housing situation and were still struggling to recover:

Some had little side hustles and their backyards had a little single room, like a beauty [salon], do their eyelashes, that sort of stuff. So there's quite a few families that had side hustles at home and now they've lost that income. (Community stakeholder)

The impacts of this are wide-ranging with reports that **young people are leaving school to work**, to contribute to family finances, or missing out on extra-curricular activities due to a lack of funds.

There's a couple of stories where the kids are going to be the sole breadwinners because they're intelligent, they're aimed for university. That dream just took a back seat when they had to go 'I need to think about my family first and mum needs help with paying the rent because three quarters of her pay goes to pay the rent'. We've still got the power and we've still got to put the food on the table, and still got to pay for school stuff for the younger siblings who still go to school. So, you'll find that the little kids went to school, but the older kids were then thinking about shall I go to work? (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Some residents have moved in with other family members to reduce household costs which, in some cases, is adding additional pressures to an already stressful situation. There were also reports of **increased debt** – including with Work and Income New Zealand or loan companies – amongst families struggling to meet household costs.

The flood kind of exacerbated the effects of poverty that we see here, and so there is regular food scarcity, there's regular issues around that. It seems like a lot of people are hurting. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

Mana whenua told us that we need to focus on more than just addressing immediate impacts and consider how to create lasting economic resilience for Mana Whenua and Māori communities.

Other recovery needs

1. Access to information and support

We heard about the importance of information and help to support residents' recovery needs. Examples included help with insurance claims and accessing funding, support for parents of children traumatised by the flooding, information regarding the status of properties and in relation to preparation for future events. Several potential barriers to accessing information and support were identified, including:

- A lack of awareness of support options
- Confusing or complex pathways to help
- Language barriers among those for whom English is not their first language
- A reluctance to ask for help, or a belief that they do not require help
- A lack of documentation required to access support or process applications, due to this being lost during the weather events.

They [Indian and Chinese communities] are communities that generally don't ask for support because they come from cultures where you help yourself, do or die. There's no such thing as government welfare. So, they sometimes don't know that you can get support. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Community Needs Assessment Research)

Access to information and support was considered particularly important given the barriers that some residents faced in accessing help and previous difficulties they have experienced in securing financial or other support. Several interviewees, for example, spoke about challenges in accessing previous flooding-related funding (e.g., MSD Civil Defence payments) with many residents at this time unsure what they were entitled to, finding the process difficult to navigate and/or were unsuccessful in their applications.

Who do I talk to (...) or how do I write an application or something? A lot of people don't know the information, plus not having the ability to kind of articulate what situation you are in. So many times, you have to write down saying this all has happened, so you require someone to assist in that kind of way. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

The Ministry of Social Development says if anyone comes to us, to refer to them to this number if they have accommodation needs. But then those people can't speak English. So, do you give them a telephone number where there's no language support? (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Community Needs Assessment Research)

Mana whenua noted that Māori will not always ask for help. This might be out of embarrassment, or thinking there will be someone else who is worse off who should receive the help instead.

2. Insurance

We heard that when the severe weather events occurred, many people lacked sufficient insurance to cover the costs of the damage to their property, including vehicles and contents. Following the weather events many people now face prohibitively high insurance premiums for their homes or the prospect of being unable to access insurance. This is having a significantly negative effect on some whānau and will reduce their resilience to severe financial hardship in the future.

At the time of our research and engagement it was reported that many residents were still waiting for their insurance claims to be resolved, with the ongoing impact of this a key theme identified by needs assessment interviewees. They highlighted that this had added to an already stressful situation and resulted in some homeowners remaining in damaged homes that they could not afford to fix themselves. Further, some had suffered additional financial hardship as a result of covering the cost of lost or damaged items, with reports that some businesses had remained closed due to unresolved or incomplete insurance claims.

Challenges faced by residents which were seen to be contributing to the reported claim settlement delays included language barriers, a lack of familiarity with the claims process, and difficulties in finding suppliers to undertake remediation work.

*You need to sit with them, their English might be the barrier. People don't know what questions to ask... You're going to have to help them find builders... they're getting asked what kind of wood do you need? They don't know what they need, they just know they've got to have their house fixed.
(Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)*

A lack of evidence or documentation to support claims was highlighted as an issue, with one stakeholder noting that uncertainty regarding rebuild costs was also playing a role.

*They're too scared to say yes to \$50,000 because actually their rebuild from the builder is going to be \$100,000. So, they're holding off because they don't know... So we still have got a lot of homes that have not started rebuilds yet because they haven't even finalised it with their insurance companies.
(Community stakeholder, Mangere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)*

[If] every single proof is gone, what can you give? I know they said to take photos but... then everything that holds your household information about your insurance - your laptop's probably gone and you haven't got the information you need to give. So a lot of people are still trying to find all the stuff that they need to get insurance. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

3. Infrastructure and planning

A range of concerns were raised by mana whenua and all stakeholders relating to a lack of community preparedness for adverse weather events, the capacity of infrastructure to withstand future events, the potential negative impact of housing redevelopments and intensification, and threats to the natural environment.

Frustrations regarding the slow speed at which Auckland Council is dealing with infrastructure issues was seen to be exacerbating stress and tension within communities and undermining trust.

I have definitely got concerns for Māngere West still and part of Māngere East ... and their homes are going to be flooded again and again, until the infrastructure [is ready] which we got told won't be happening within at least another ten years. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Interviewees wanted to see Auckland Council take a more **proactive approach to infrastructure assessment, repair, and maintenance**, to mitigate for future damage in impacted communities. Stormwater systems were a particular focus. Stakeholders also sought greater responsiveness when issues regarding public infrastructure and spaces (such as rubbish remaining in waterways) are logged, with resolution of these issues seen as important for restoring normalcy.

Drains not being maintained and being blocked up. I mean that's what we've been told anyway in Auckland, that infrastructure breakdown is our biggest risk. (Community stakeholder, Puketāpapa Needs Assessment Research)

I think our water [is a priority] ... I just don't know where to start with water quality. It's a whole of community, it's Council, it's Auckland Transport. We all need to come together to fix those issues, because the streams and stormwater, is what's going to cause the issues. The overpopulation, our infrastructure is not designed to cope with all of this housing. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

Mana whenua and stakeholders also highlighted issues linked to **water quality, the health of waterways, and the potential for pollution** either as a result of future housing developments or adverse weather events.

Mana Whenua reminded us that they have **kaitiakitanga obligations** to support the environment and the community. They told us that we need to place more emphasis on the wellbeing of the environment and specify how Auckland Council could support Mana Whenua in meeting these obligations.

Interviewees also wished to see the Council undertake **more active engagement with communities regarding the identification of natural hazards and preparedness planning**. They were concerned about a lack of preparedness amongst residents, service providers and Auckland Council. Interviewees spoke of residents needing to know how to access resources during adverse events and a requirement for Council to have effective working relationships with both local service providers and internal stakeholders, to mitigate these risks.

It's how Council works with local providers on an ongoing basis, building that relationship so they know who we are, and they know what our capability is to support them, and the work they've got to do. I think is a big thing. (Community stakeholder, Māngere-Favona Needs Assessment Research)

