

# THE STATE OF OUR COMMUNITIES



## Rotorua 2020

Rotorua has a deprivation index of 9; the social issues that accompany communities with high deprivation and low socioeconomic status are evident in the state of Rotorua. The communities and key informants talk about homelessness, housing, drugs, gangs and crime. These issues preceded Covid-19 and now the impact of Covid-19 on employment, income and mental health will only exacerbate these issues. Despite the current compounded challenges, locals, local council and Te Arawa propose solutions moving forward to not only aid in the recovery, but to improve the wellbeing of the community.

### What do you like about Rotorua?

The key attributes for Rotorua were the **people and community**. Characteristics of the community included were **friendly, supportive, genuine, caring, easy-going and inclusive**. Inclusive was an important attribute for locals, given the high **Māori** population in the area. Locals talked about Māoritanga and Te Reo as common in their communities and that made many locals proud of their **heritage** and their community. Locals like the **landscape and environment**, such as the lakes, Whakarewarewa Forest and the Government Gardens. Locals appreciated the community's efforts to be environmentally friendly and conscious of the impacts on climate change.

### What are your concerns or fears for Rotorua?

The number one concern for the locals was **homelessness** in Rotorua. Locals talked about the need to address **housing** and **employment** issues in order to address homelessness. Some locals are concerned for the overall **safety** of the area, particularly in relation to the ongoing anti-social behaviours of some of the homeless population. **Drugs** was also a pertinent issue, with one key informant saying it was faster to get P

than pizza. Locals talked about drugs in association with **gang** activity, rangatahi (younger people) and **violence**. **Housing** is a key concern for locals; locals talked about the lack of **availability** and **affordability** of **quality** homes and how these shortages attribute the poverty levels in the community. One local echoed their frustration at the irony of people dying due to a lack of appropriate heating, despite living in a geothermal mecca of the world.

### How has Covid-19 impacted you?

The biggest impact to the locals of Rotorua was employment, with over 35 percent losing employment and/or income due to Covid-19. Although 52.2 percent of participants talked about employment being impacted, only 32.4 percent went on to explain how their employment was impacted. Almost half of the participants were not impacted by Covid-19 (18.1%), had minimal impacts (13.7%) or had positive impacts (14.8%). Participants talked about lockdown as an opportunity to slow down and appreciate their time with whānau. Other impacts that the Rotorua community identified were the impact on their mental health, being isolated, impact on their studies and financial hardship.

### What are Rotorua's key social issues for Election 2020?

Over 30 percent of the survey participants stated that **housing** is the key social issue for Rotorua in this upcoming election. Locals want to see more available and affordable housing in the region—for rental, social and ownership. Another key priority for locals was increasing transitional and emergency housing for the homeless population in Rotorua. Homelessness (10.4%) was the third highest social issue for locals.



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Over 25 percent of locals talked about losing employment, income or someone close to them losing employment as a result of Covid-19. Heading into the 2020 elections, creating employment opportunities and adequate wages was the second highest social issues for the Rotorua community. Other key social issues for Rotorua in light of election include accessible and adequate healthcare (9.3%); education (7.1%); the referendums [euthanasia and legalising cannabis] (7.1%); poverty (6%); tamariki wellbeing (6%) and drugs (5.5%).

### What changes would you like to see in Rotorua in 5 years' time?

The five key aspirations for the Rotorua in 2025 are:

- 1 available, affordable and quality homes for the community
- 2 a strong economy and more employment opportunities for rangatahi
- 3 homeless people in homes
- 4 less drugs, less crime and less gangs
- 5 a strong and unified community.

### Moving Forward

Despite these social issues, Māori play an integral role in the strong cultural undercurrents in the region. Solutions to support Māori communities, particularly around homelessness, drugs and gang interventions and accessibility to healthcare services, need to be targeted and specific. Te Arawa Vision 2050 provides innovative and exciting local and long-term solutions to many of the complex challenges Māori are facing.

**Homelessness** was the primary concern for the Rotorua community; the challenges with **housing** availability and affordability, coupled with social issues attribute to the challenges Rotorua is experiencing across the housing spectrum. Moving forward the Rotorua Lakes Council in partnership with Te Arawa plan *He Papakāinga, He Hāpori Taurikura—A Strategy for Homes and Thriving Community* aim to increase the housing capacity in the region and overall create a safe, healthy and connected community.

**What does local recovery look like in this Covid-19 environment?** The two biggest industries in Rotorua are tourism and forestry; both have been severely impacted by Covid-19. The repercussions of these impacts are evident with the numbers for income support, foodbank, financial hardship and mental health. How do you stimulate the local economy so this ripples into other social and economic benefits for whānau? In future planning and strategising, the local community voices sampled in this survey must not be lost or diluted in the major policy and planning activity happening in Rotorua.



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