

Pay As You Throw Focus Groups

A series of focus groups with community members
in Papakura and Manurewa

Report 2
September 2021 - March 2022

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Introduction

Rākau Tautoko was approached by The Auckland Council Waste Solutions Team to facilitate a focus group series throughout specific geographical areas, to seek feedback on the new Pay as You Throw system that was due to be rolled out. We have been plagued by COVID and lockdowns/ traffic light restrictions, and after our focus groups at the end of 2021, we were going to wait until the restrictions were lifted. However it was decided to run an online survey and second series of focus groups online at the beginning of 2022 to complete this project instead due to the spike in Omicron cases throughout Auckland. This is the second report detailing the outcome of those focus groups.

2022 Online Survey

We expanded the online survey to include questions for feedback about the waste systems. The survey itself did not produce the depth of information that we had intended it to. There were some inconsistencies in the information within some of the submissions.

2022 Online Focus Groups

The focus groups were again the most valuable to capture feedback. We also pivoted the focus of our data collection toward education initiatives and waste reduction incentives after the recommendation had been made that the PAYT system would not be rolled out Auckland wide.



Survey Questions

Topic	Information
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Name ● Address ● Number ● Manaake Host ● Age ● Gender ● Ethnicity ● Suburb
Household information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How many people live in your household? ● How many babies, pre-schoolers, primary school kids, teenagers, people with disabilities, elderly, cats and dogs are in your household? ● Do you work full or part time, volunteer full or part time, bike, play sport, have creative hobbies, drive a car, own your house, rent, live in a Kainga Ora house? ● What type of bin system do you have at home? ● What size is your landfill and recycling? ● Do you know how your rubbish is paid for? ● Play our waste sorting game - how many did you get right? ● Who in your household is taking responsibility for putting waste in the correct bin? ● What initiatives or additional education might help your household or community reduce waste?
Waste systems	<p>7 minute video presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3 x different coloured tags / for the 3 size bins ● Food waste bin (2023) ● Fortnightly pickups ● Roll out and where currently
Bin-tags	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you buy bin tags? What colour? Where from? ● What are the good and bad parts of paying for landfill through the PAYT system? ● What impact would/does paying for tags have on your household if any? ● What would/is it be like to purchase tags before putting your landfill out for collection? ● Do you think the Pay As You Throw system will /does encourage your household to reduce waste?
Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the good and bad parts of paying for landfill through rates? ● Would you prefer to pay for your landfill bin collection through rates or tags?



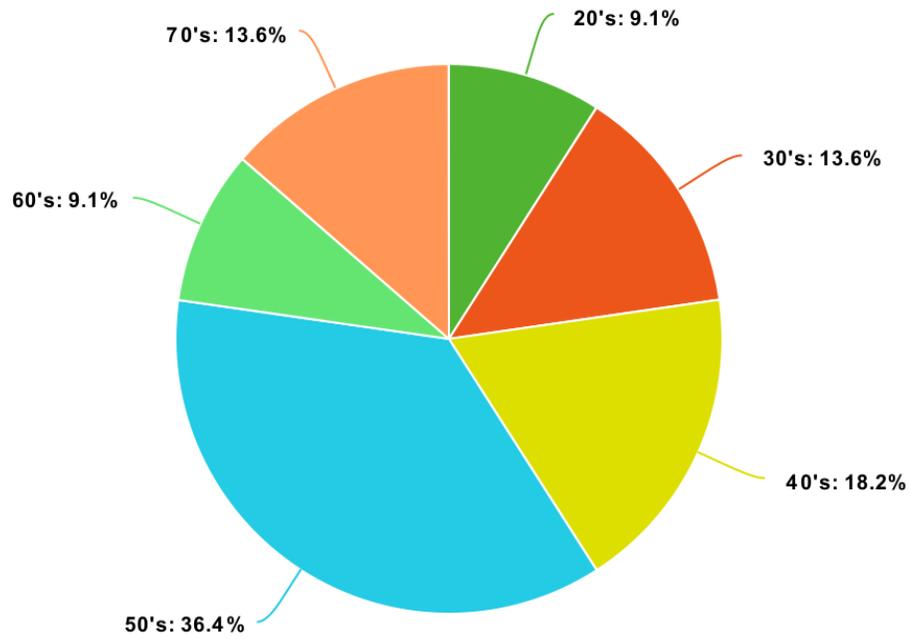
Fortnightly collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might fortnightly landfill collection impact your household? • How often do you currently put out your landfill bin for collection and how full is it? • Are there any different things that your household does to reduce the waste you put out for Council? • Can you think of anything that could help your household reduce your waste? • Do you have two or more children / people in the household that use infant nappies or adult incontinence products? • If yes, how much of your rubbish bin would be infant or adult nappies each week? • If yes, how full is your rubbish bin each week including all of the household's rubbish?
Food scraps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of the food scraps bin? • Would/do you use the food scraps bin? Why? • If you already have a council food scraps bin, does it help you reduce the amount of waste in your landfill bin? • If you already have a council food scraps bin, how often do you put it out for collection?
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What education, resources or programmes would help your household understand how you can reduce your waste? • What incentives could the council introduce that would encourage you to reduce your waste? • How should educational resources be delivered to your community? • What waste minimisation strategies do you know of that everyone should be using?
Extra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any other thoughts or feedback?

Focus Groups Schedule			
Date	Type of Focus Group	Participants	Manaaki Host
December '21	Survey	14 - Manurewa and Papakura	English Language Partners + Talking Trash
11th Feb '22	Online	4 - Papakura	Talking Trash
2nd March '22	Online + survey	6 - Otahuhu, Manurewa, Pukekohe, Papatoetoe, Beach Haven, Mount Wellington	English Language Partners

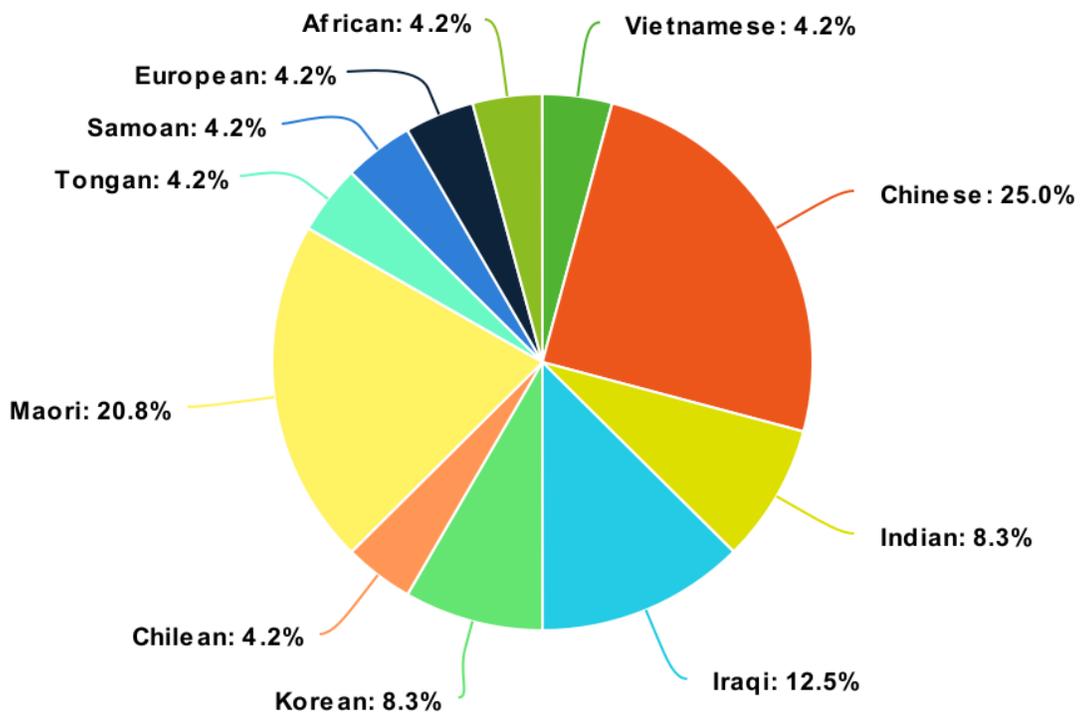


Participant Demographics

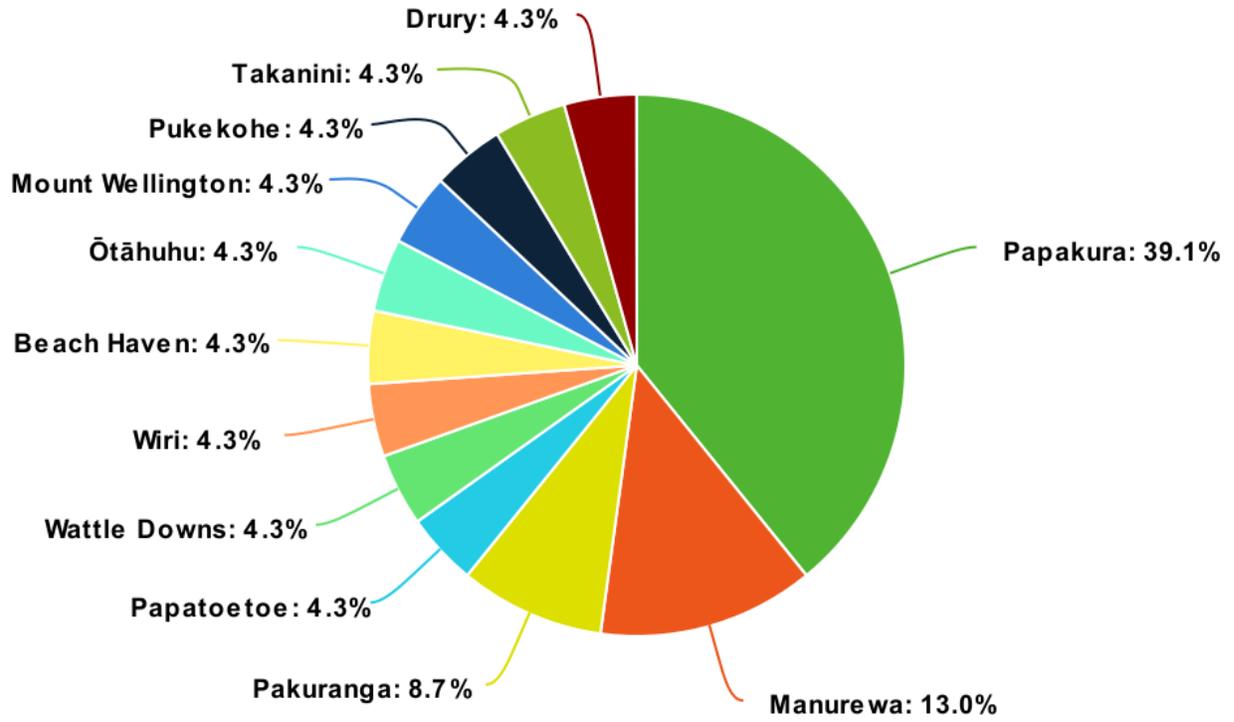
Age groups



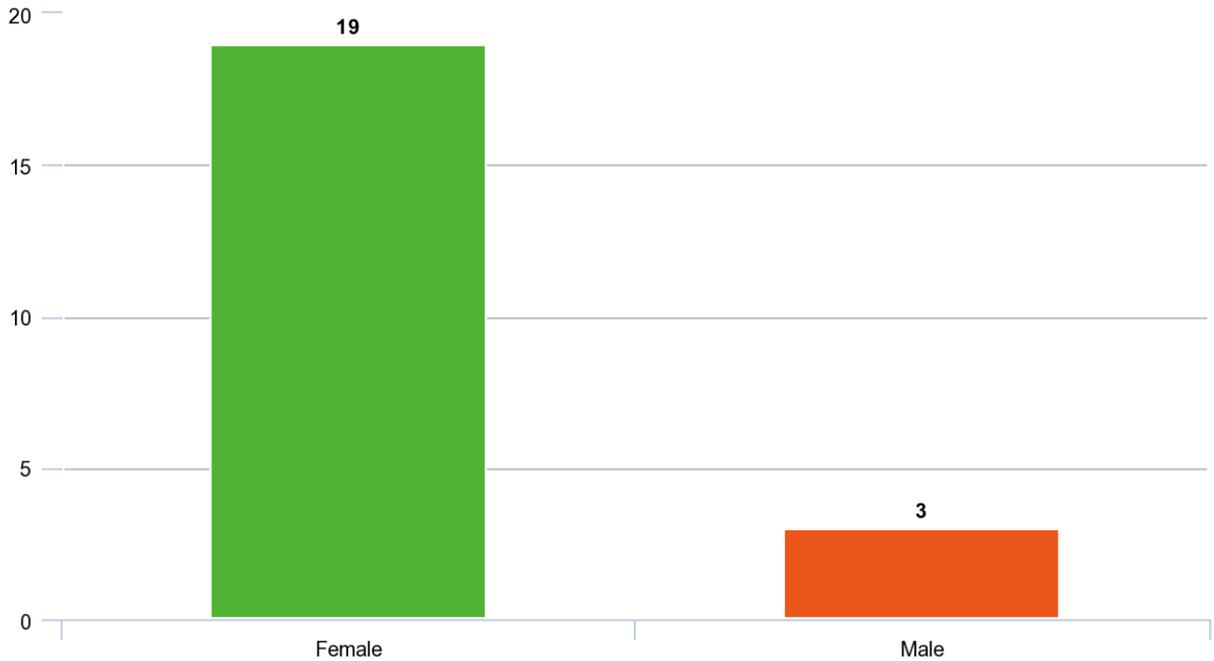
Ethnicities



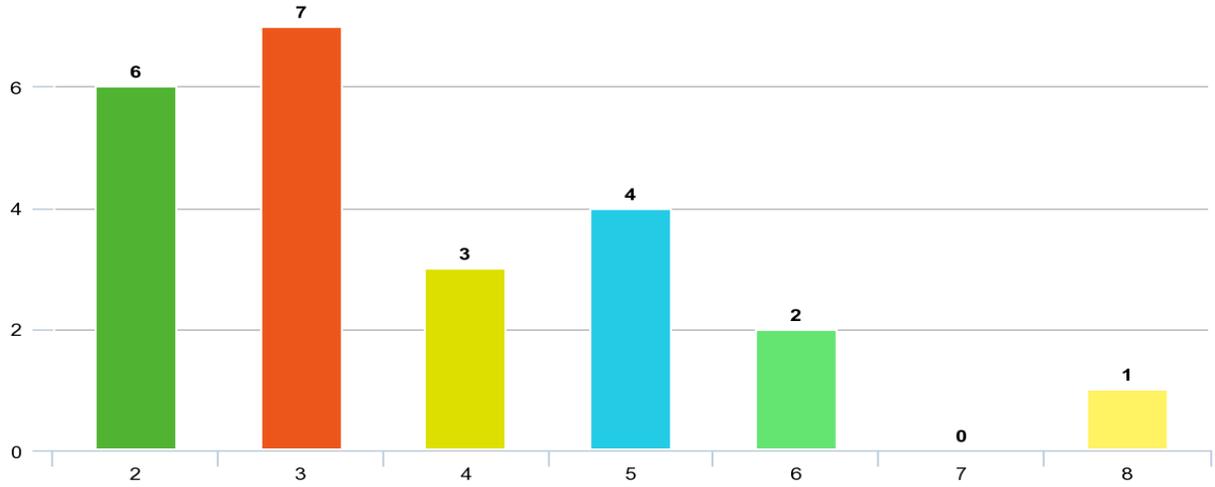
Suburbs



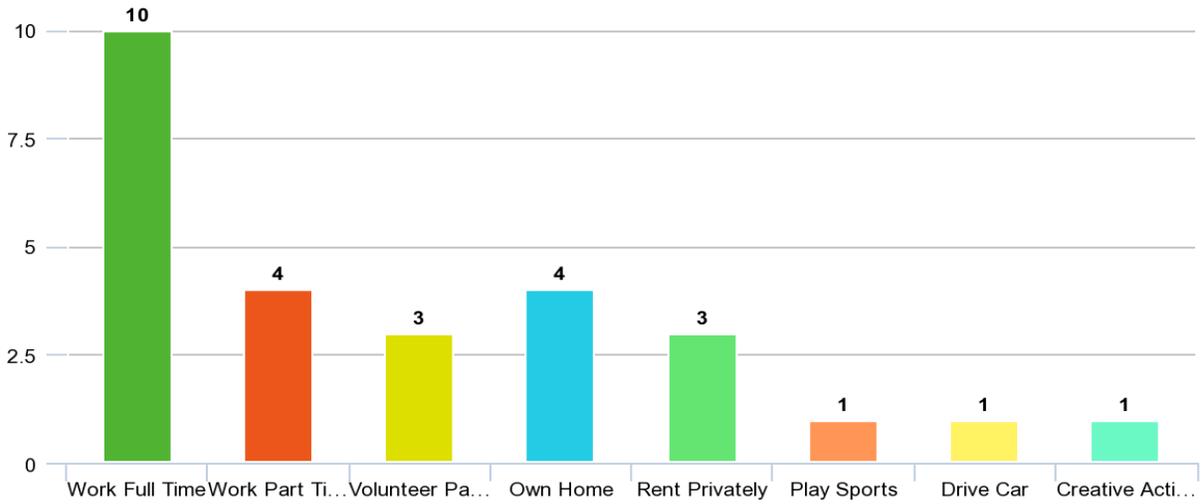
Gender Identity



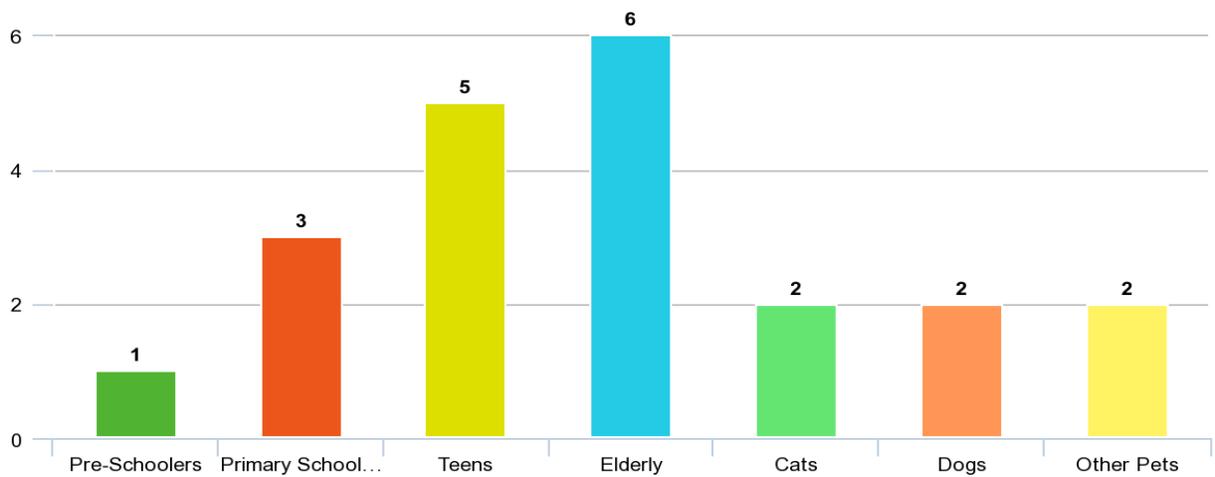
Number of People Living in Household



Household Activities



Different Types of Households



Findings

Our findings based on the waste systems have been separated between the experience of those that are currently living in a community with a PAYT waste system, and those that are not.

Communities that have a PAYT system

The PAYT System

Half of the participants from Papakura said that they prefer paying for their landfill within the PAYT system over rates and more than half reported that the PAYT system has encouraged their household to reduce their waste. However, the PAYT system does not work for some households and many of the same issues highlighted in our first report were raised again. It was also clear that there is a need for information about the PAYT system to be more widely distributed.

- ❖ The participants who support the PAYT system came from both small and large households. They favor the PAYT system because of the waste reduction incentive it creates by correlating cost to the amount of waste, being more mindful of waste practices and purchasing items.

"It's good...I think it's better... encourages people [to] reduce."

*"Not much of a bother real simple you buy a bag they take your rubbish if no bag no rubbish."
(Household of 6)*

"People think more before they buy."

"Does encourage everyone [in the] household to reduce waste."

- ❖ People now pay more attention to recycling separation due to PAYT, but the result of this is that the recycling bins are overflowing for households of all sizes. Several participants felt strongly that recycling should be picked up weekly.

*"We recycle and its full by the 1st week."
(Household of 8)*

*"Once recyclings full it goes into the red bin."
(Household of 2)*

*"Having the recycling bin collected every week would reduce landfill bins."
(Household of 3)*



Buying Bin Tags

The burden of buying bin tags continued to be a core issue for some families, and there are multiple problems happening in the PAYT communities around purchasing the tags. Several people are buying the wrong tag for their bin size and therefore are paying more than necessary and some mentioned that they would prefer to return to bags instead of the bins.

- ❖ Users of PAYT highlighted a need for multiple payment options for PAYT, allowing people to pay online would enhance convenience while still maintaining the tag system for those who aren't confident using technology.

*"I go out and forget and end up rushing when the truck comes."
(House of 5 adults, the burden of responsibility still falls onto 1 person)*

"Sometimes you don't remember to purchase the tag which leads to sometimes missing the collect all together."

"It would be better to have an electronic system so that the bin tags don't get stolen. I'd like to pay online, it saves having to run to the store when I forget."

- ❖ Cost is an issue for households of all sizes and in one focus group, it was mentioned that some businesses (dairies) are inflating tag prices.

*"The price is high."
(House of 3, medium size bins)*

*"It's not cheap."
(House of 6 with medium sized landfill and good knowledge of waste practices)*

"Are the dairies allowed to put up the price 'cause it's \$5.60 at Countdown but like \$7 at the dairy."

- ❖ Stolen tags have come up again as a disadvantage of the system.

"Easy to steal, people have stolen my tag multiple times."

- ❖ The issue of dumping was raised again.

"People to throw away anywhere without payment."



- ❖ Users of the PAYT system requested “*more publicity*” about the system's requirements and education about recycling.

“I’ve never had a notification from council about how to dispose my milk bottle correctly, they’ll take my recycling no matter if I wash them or not.”
(Someone in their 60’s)

“More education and media advertisements.”

The Rates System

Majority of the participants in the focus groups were in agreement that the downside of paying through rates is that people are not encouraged or incentivized to be mindful about waste and recognized that waste reduction is a genuine issue. Slightly less than half of the PAYT community members preferred paying through rates. There was no clear correlation between this preference and household size or bin size.

Fortnightly Landfill Pickups

One third of the participants in PAYT communities put their landfill out for collection weekly and just under half put it out for collection fortnightly. Most of the participants put their bins out when they were full, some overflowing, and most had large or medium sized bins. No clear patterns emerged between the size of a household, or the size of the bin, and how often the bin was put out for collection.

- ❖ People from both small and large households are concerned about their capacity for fortnightly landfill pickups, many will need larger (or multiple) bins and they are unsure how they will find space for these.

“Currently have 240L. If it’s overfull, I stand in it and squash it out. May need two red bins.”
(Household of 5)

“All the rubbish will be overflowing. It’s already like that in the weekly pick ups”.
(Household of 2 people and 2 pets)

Food Scraps Bin

When asked if the council food scraps bin helps to reduce the amount of waste in their landfill bin, slightly less than half said yes. The remainder were split between ‘no’ and ‘maybe’. There were mixed reviews about the food scraps bin.

- ❖ There was some support for the food scraps bin.

“Yes I use it as it’s very useful.”
(Household of 6)

- ❖ However, some issues were raised, specifically around the smell, hygiene and using their own compost bins. There was a suggestion that people are given size options.



*"The council should give people a choice to have a larger bin. When it's full we throw it into the red bin."
(Household of 2 people and 2 pets)*

"Need to [collect] more in summer."

"I don't use it, I compost."

"No [I don't use it], it is a lot to maintain the cleanliness of the food scrap bin. It's messy."

"Stopped using mine because of maggots."

Communities that were introduced to the PAYT system

The PAYT System

Slightly less than half of the participants favored paying for household landfill disposal through the PAYT system over rates. Many of these people were renters, all had 6 people or less in their household. A small number of people had no preference for either system.

- ❖ Slightly less than half of the participants believe that the cost of bin tags will incentivise people to reduce waste.

"Hopefully it will get people to think about reducing waste because it will hit them in the pocket."

*"I think it's reasonable and doable...it will encourage people to plan their lives without waste."
(Household of 5 including elderly)*

- ❖ However, there were concerns about how effective and convenient the system would be realistically.

"Not sure if it would be accessible / convenient in practice."

- ❖ Some participants shared that cost would be an issue. Others said that they would be able to manage the extra payment, but acknowledged that the PAYT system may create financial strain for some families.

*"Thankfully, not much impact - just an inconvenience of having to buy the tags. It may be bad for those not well off with a limited budget."
(Home owner)*



The Rates System

Slightly less than half of the participants favored paying for household landfill disposal through rates. This group of people included homeowners, people who rent privately and one family living in Kainga Ora housing. Participants were again in agreement that the downside of paying through rates is that people are not incentivized to be mindful about waste.

- ❖ Participants acknowledged that the cost of waste disposal through rates is not proportional to the amount of waste created.

"Bin collection is not good by [paying through] rates, because the rates is average level, but different family may have different amount of rubbish."

"Good part is easy for management... bad part it's not fair [for] some family, they don't have a lot of rubbish, but still pay a lot."

- ❖ The preference for the rates system over PAYT was due to convenience.

"It's good through the rates. It's more convenient. Don't need to think about it."

Fortnightly Landfill Pickups

Almost two thirds of the participants put their landfill bin out for collection weekly. Of these people, one third have full bins weekly. For those who had household members who used nappies, this took up between one quarter and one half of the bin. Again, there was no clear correlation between household size and frequency of landfill pickup. Overall, more people from communities that don't have PAYT put their bins out weekly than in the Papakura group.

- ❖ Several people believed that storing landfill on their property for an extra week would "create risks", create smells and attract pests.

"It will affect our health."

"The storage of waste over a longer period can lead to health and hygiene issues particularly in over-crowded and poorly ventilated housing, which is only exacerbated by viruses in the community."

- ❖ Participants highlighted that it may be difficult to find the extra space within their household to store an additional week's worth of waste, particularly for people living in units or apartments. Some whanāu, including small households, will need to upsize their bin.

"The change would need to be compensated for somehow, e.g. switch back to the larger sized bin."



- ❖ Over 10 participants did not know what size bins they have at home and told us that theirs are not labeled. Many were also unaware that multiple sizes were available, or the process for obtaining a different sized bin.

"Not sure if people know that there are multiple bin sizes, they didn't label it."

- ❖ One participant asked that the fortnightly rollout is done slowly, and supported by sufficient notice to households.

"Have seen the fortnightly system in action in other regions... I hope the Council considers a slow transition period for families to get acclimated to waste reduction."

Food Scraps Bin

Many people believed the food scraps bin would help them to reduce the amount of waste in their landfill bin. A majority of the participants said they would use it.

- ❖ Almost everyone supports the food scraps bin.

*"Yes I would use [the] food scrap bin, could be convenient."
(Household of 7 people and dog/s)*

"It is going to be very useful."

- ❖ However, one third of the participants said they wouldn't use the food scraps bin themselves. Some because they have home composting already, some because of cleanliness.

"It is good idea but I already have my compost bin."

"Good idea. I DON'T want to use it... it will smell bad after a long time."

- ❖ Those who wouldn't use the food scraps bin don't want to have to pay the extra cost.

"How much is the food scraps bin adding to rates? It's important to know the cost upfront. There needs to be transparency, [council] changes things and don't tell us."



Alternative approaches to waste management

The summaries below are from participants in both Papakura and non-PAYT communities.

Composting

Many participants had already implemented composting systems within their households. It was suggested that the council could allocate land for public composting and worm farm systems for people who can't do this at home, like people in apartments.

Packaging

Several participants asked for soft plastics recycling to become more accessible.

"Hope the council can collect soft plastic too rather than throwing it to rubbish bin in the supermarket, which is inconvenient."

"Try to encourage companies to think about their packaging - reduce the amount to styrofoam/polystyrene."

Packaging was identified by many as a key contributor to high waste levels and many participants recognised that companies have a large influence on the amount of waste going into their landfill bins.

Many participants believed companies have a responsibility to reduce or eliminate packaging and reduce waste.

"Companies have to study and reduce waste."

People also wanted to see companies using recycled materials, implementing systems where materials can be reused and utilizing reusable container and coffee cup systems.

"[Transition] from punishment and enforcement to willingness, participation and collaboration."

Waste reduction incentives

We asked what incentives could be implemented to encourage people to reduce their waste.

Many people suggested that vouchers for necessities such as petrol and food could be used. A fine or penalty was suggested, particularly for businesses, but others were very opposed to this. It was suggested that people would feel more encouraged to reduce waste if they can "visibly see the difference" in some way, and if they felt empowered to "choose" which actions they take, rather than having it imposed on them.

Education

It was clear that there is both a need and a desire for more education about waste reduction strategies and transparent information about Auckland's waste systems. There is a correlation between waste knowledge and lower waste production.

Many participants told us that they would like to see waste education programmes implemented into schools for all age levels, as well as workplaces and within WINZ services. The Auckland Council website was acknowledged as a great resource for information about waste, however it



was mentioned that it can be difficult to navigate and that it would be easier to use if it was clearer and more streamlined.

Participants wanted to see waste systems information more widely advertised to allow them to understand how to use the systems correctly and why they are in place, and asked for any changes to be widely advertised.

"Things change and we are not informed properly."

Different age groups and cultures have different ways of communicating and connecting with content. Participants suggested that the council utilizes methods of sharing information which are targeted specifically at each different group to maximize their reach among different communities and that information is available in multiple languages.

Participants suggested that audio and visual materials are the easiest way for them to absorb information. Some of their suggestions and recommendations are:

- Simple visuals.
- Infographics.
- Short videos.
- Functional/practical items such as calendars and fridge magnets.
- Email.
- Text message.
- Post/snail mail.
- Television announcements.
- Utilize social media platforms which are commonly used such as YouTube.
- Utilize frequented public spaces such as bus stops and libraries.

Participants told us they would like to learn more about waste solutions.

- Several people wanted to learn more about composting and worm farming, and how to use the by-product for home gardening.
- Many also identified that much of their waste is food waste, or packaging from food, and that they would benefit from learning about meal planning and how to make more mindful purchasing decisions at the supermarket.



Recommendations

Within this series of focus groups, more than half of those within PAYT communities have seen a reduction in their landfill waste and half favor this waste system over rates. Yet there are still flaws within this system that they experience, many of which are related to the bin tags itself. A positive outcome of the PAYT system is that households that did not previously separate recyclable waste from landfill are now doing so. However, their current recycling capacity is not sufficient enough, therefore for some, recyclable items are still being placed into landfill bins or disposed of using alternative methods. There is a need for recycling capacity to be increased to maintain correct waste separation. Households within the PAYT community generally put their bins out less frequently than in non-PAYT communities.

Across all communities there were some whānau who will require a larger bin size, or an additional bin when landfill pickup becomes fortnightly. These participants are concerned about their ability to physically store a larger amount of waste within their household for a longer period of time and the health implications that may arise. The non-PAYT participants highlighted that there is a lack of awareness within the community about the different bin size options available, the process of obtaining a bin and the absence of size labeling on the bins they currently have. Guidance from council is needed to enable people to make changes to their bins before the fortnightly pickups begin.

Although most people within all communities were supportive of the food scraps bin, and many people in non-PAYT communities thought it would help to reduce the amount of waste in their landfill bin, less than half of the PAYT households experienced this in reality. There are a number of people within all communities who don't or won't use the food scraps bin. These people do not believe that a compulsory food scraps bin system and an increase to household rates is fair.

Participants from all communities expressed the need for complete transparency regarding cost. They also highlighted gaps in education and the circulation of information about how to use the waste systems correctly. This is evident in the participants who have been purchasing the incorrect bin tag.

Emphasis was placed on managing packaging waste and the need for more accessible soft plastic recycling services. Many participants hope to see waste education programmes implemented into schools and made available to the public in ways tailored to appeal to different communities. Openness to learning was evident among most participants.

The participants of these focus group series were all in support of reducing waste. They all understood that we needed to change our waste management systems, and reduce the amount of landfill that is being created. People acknowledged that enabling households to see the difference they are making and feel empowered to make informed decisions about waste reduction would be influential to Auckland's waste reduction journey.

Thank you for the opportunity to lead this project and gather thoughts around the current waste system. We hope that these findings provide clear information and guidance for Auckland Council's next steps in waste reduction.

