

## **Pania Elliot's Accessibility Planning**

At the end of May, physical activity and nutrition experts from all over the country, as well as overseas experts, gathered at the Agencies for Nutrition Action conference in Wellington.

The focus of the conference was on promoting nutrition and physical activity in sustainable ways. It also highlighted that many sectors – such as conservation, education, transport, recreation, social development and local government – are well placed to influence nutrition and physical activity.

New Zealand Transport Authority's Pania Elliot demonstrated how healthy and happy communities can be created by improved accessibility planning.

"Accessibility planning is all about ease of reach and actually getting people to where they want to go. We need to identify, target and remove barriers. This will help us create more sustainable communities, increase connections between people and reduce social exclusion.

"For example, people in rural areas might have limited access to healthcare services due to their geographical location. To make these services more accessible we might look at improving the availability of transport and the location and scheduling of services, to better suit their needs."

Ms Elliot believes that a partnered approach between different sectors is an essential part of effective accessibility planning.

"There are so many different sectors that we can tap into, and look at providing shared services. The transport sector would benefit from working alongside social services and health services, to name only two. If we worked on accessibility issues collaboratively, we could provide significantly better all-round services."

Active transport, such as walking and cycling, is another area Ms Elliot highlighted as crucial to creating sustainable communities.

"At the moment there are numerous reasons why active transport isn't used as much as it could be. Walking is actually a part of every public transport journey – although it's easy to forget about that! We are trying to assist local authorities to improve walking and cycling routes, particularly in terms of safety and security issues."

Ms Elliot is currently leading a project in Gisborne to implement accessibility planning in New Zealand.

"One issue we've found is that people don't regard walking and cycling as effective modes of transport. We will then look at local access policies, identify how local agencies can become involved and then decide how to target interventions there. We want to inform not only transport planning processes but also other processes such as health.

"The benefits of the approach are that agencies can better plan the location and delivery of their services and ensure that they better reflect the transport needs of the people who need to use them. It will also ensure better value for money and maximise the efficiency of current networks."