

The Safe Communities model

What it is and how it works in New Zealand

The Safe Communities model is an internationally recognised model used in many countries throughout the world to bring organisations and communities together to enable injury and crime prevention to happen at a local community level.

In this article, you will find a short explanation of what the Safe Communities model is, how it works, and the benefits and challenges involved. The article also briefly describes the accreditation process and the role of the Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand, and highlights recent examples of alcohol-focused projects that are being undertaken as part of Safe Community initiatives.

About the Safe Communities model and how it works

Community safety impacts on the way people feel and interact in their community. Achieving community safety is not just about reducing and preventing injury and crime; it involves building strong, cohesive, vibrant and participating communities. A safe community is one in which all sectors of the community work together to promote safety. This means forming partnerships, managing risks, educating and informing, and increasing overall safety, especially for the most vulnerable.

The Safe Communities model can help to achieve this. It is not a programme that is replicated in different communities; nor is it a mechanism for assessing if a community is safe or if there are potential risks. Rather, it is a process that creates a local infrastructure to enable community members, community organisations, businesses, local government, government agencies and others with an interest in and concern about community safety issues to work together in a coordinated and collaborative way. This process helps communities to put in place joint activities and projects to address local concerns. These may be concerns about injuries, crashes, antisocial behaviour, violence and crime from multiple causes, including from alcohol use. Each Safe Community initiative is unique to, determined by, and locally owned and driven by a particular community.

Communities, districts or cities that are interested in becoming a Safe Community go through a robust accreditation process that equips the organisations and individuals involved to set up the process and infrastructure needed to succeed. It also usually involves employing a coordinator. The Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand (SCFNZ) provides support throughout the accreditation process as well as ongoing support once an initiative is accredited and up and running.

New Zealand currently has 24 Accredited Safe Communities across 30 territorial authority areas. Many have been running for several years, with the first one starting in 1999.

Below are the current New Zealand Accredited Safe Communities with their dates of accreditation or reaccreditation.

- Whangarei Safe Community (2005, 2011)
- Auckland Safer North (2007, 2013)
- Auckland Safer West (1999, 2006, 2013)
- Tauranga Moana Safe City: Tauranga City and Western Bay of Plenty District (2007, 2014)
- Treasure Rotorua (2010, 2014)
- Safer Taupo (2010, 2015)
- Safer Tairāwhiti Community Trust (2012)
- Te Wairoa He Hāpori Haumarū (2014)
- Safer Central Hawke's Bay (2012)
- Safer Napier (2010)
- Safer Hastings (2013)
- New Plymouth Injury Safe (2005, 2010)
- Safer Whanganui (2010)
- Palmerston North Safe City (2014)
- Safer Wairarapa: Masterton District, Carterton District, South Wairarapa District (2010)
- Safer Porirua City (2008, 2014)
- Safe Hutt Valley: Upper Hutt City and Lower Hutt City (2010, 2015)
- Wellington City Safe Community (2006, 2012)
- Nelson Tasman Safe at the Top (2011)
- Marlborough Safe & Sound @ the Top (2014)
- Waimakariri Safe Community (2008)
- Safer Christchurch (2008)
- Safer Waitaki (2013)
- Invercargill City & Southland District Safe in the South (2016)

There is no standard structure for Safe Communities. Some Safe Community coalitions are organised as a programme or section within a territorial authority, district health board or primary health organisation. Others opt to become part of a larger, not-for-profit umbrella organisation. The host agency then usually acts as the fund-holder, employs or contracts the services of the coordinator, and may provide office space and other support. Some Safe Communities have become independent legal entities, usually a charitable trust. This allows the programme to be completely autonomous rather than operating within a host agency.

An international dimension

The Safe Communities model was developed and established in Sweden in the 1990s following the First World Conference on Accident and Injury Prevention, in Stockholm, in 1989. Since then it has expanded worldwide to more than 270 designated Safe Countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) also recognises its value and provides some overarching support. New Zealand is part of the Pan Pacific Safe Communities Network (PPSCN), which also includes Australia, the United States of America and Canada. The Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand is one of the lead organisations for PPSCN and all New Zealand Safe Communities are members. PPSCN is currently in the process of developing formal relations with WHO.

How to become an Accredited Safe Community

Many communities already have agencies, networks and collectives working in the fields of violence and injury prevention, and safety promotion. The Safe Communities model does not reinvent the wheel or duplicate these existing networks but provides a mechanism to bring organisations and individuals together to share information, establish priorities and plans, and work more effectively.

The starting point is recognising and identifying the people and organisations that are already active, and seeking their buy-in to the Safe Communities process. The next step is to undertake a scan or survey of crime and injury data and build a living inventory of the needs and issues in the local community, and the services that are currently being delivered. If there is sufficient interest and momentum, the next step is contacting SCFZN, who can visit and provide support through the various stages of the accreditation process.

Communities seeking accreditation are asked to demonstrate how they meet the six criteria of the Safe Communities model, but accreditation is a flexible process. It involves a review and validation of the collaborative governance, planning and research/ data analysis processes in place, and recognition of the programmes and activities, communications and evaluation that are undertaken. Responsibility for setting and evaluating performance measures and outcomes sits with a Safe Community governance group or committee which is established as part of the process. Ideally a coordinator is also employed.

The six criteria of the Safe Communities model are:

1. **Leadership and collaboration** – demonstration of leadership by the coalition or group focused on improving community safety.
2. **Programme reach** – the range and reach of community safety programmes operating throughout the community/region, including an indication of the extent to which they are based on proven or promising intervention strategies.
3. **Priority setting** – demonstration of programmes that target and promote safety for high-risk/ vulnerable groups and environments.
4. **Data analysis and strategic alignment** – analysis of available safety (injury, violence, crime and perception) data for the community/region and how proposed strategies align with established national/state/ regional priorities and action plans.
5. **Evaluation** – outline of expected impacts and how they are being measured or evaluated.
6. **Communication and networking** – demonstration of community engagement with relevant sectors of a community/region and ongoing participation in local, national and international Safe Communities networks.

Accreditation also includes a site visit by SCFNZ.

Next steps and ongoing support

Once accreditation and reaccreditation are confirmed, action begins in earnest. Projects and activities undertaken are many and varied. The diagram below illustrates the scope of issues and partnership activities.



An annual report of activities and an annual survey of coalition partners are completed. A reaccreditation process is undertaken every 5–6 years. Often Safe Community programmes choose to hold an accreditation ceremony to formally celebrate successes and partnerships created. An example is the Safer Napier programme, which has been accredited since 2010 and is currently applying for reaccreditation. On 6 November 2015, 43 agencies signed a five-year Memorandum of Commitment to signal their ongoing participation in the Safe Community programme.

SCFNZ provides ongoing support and advice to Safe Community programmes, including hosting regular webinars, an annual national hui, and regional forums and workshops on a range of topics. Information is also provided via SCFNZ's website safecommunities.org.nz. SCFNZ is a non-government organisation with charitable trust status and receives funding from a number of government agencies to carry out its national support role.

Safe Communities alcohol-focused projects

Alcohol harm reduction is a good example of a focus area for a Safe Community initiative. Because alcohol impacts on society in multiple ways and across various sectors, many agencies and groups have an interest, and play a role, in reducing alcohol-related harm. As a result, no single agency has the mandate to manage or deliver everything and a combined approach is needed. Government agencies in the health and social services sector, the justice and education sectors, local government, the hospitality sector and alcohol industry, and a myriad of non-government organisations and community groups all have a role to play.

The following pages have short summaries of three examples of recent, alcohol-focused Safe Community projects.

Useful web links and resources

Safe Communities Foundation New Zealand's website – safecommunities.org.nz – has contact details, links, information and resources on Safe Communities in New Zealand.

The Pan Pacific Safe Communities Network (PPSCN) website – ppscn.org – has useful international information including links to Safe Communities initiatives in other countries.