



‘Housing for All’ SOLUTION

WHO Housing and Health Guidelines applied in Aotearoa, New Zealand

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Due to the poor quality of existing housing in New Zealand, the country has experienced high rates of hospitalisations for children and older people with respiratory conditions and excess winter mortality. In order to respond to the challenge, new healthy homes standards for both private and public rental housing have been issued, mandated by the Healthy Homes Guarantee Act, 2019 and based on the WHO Housing and Health Guidelines prepared by the International Guidelines Group.

The housing guidelines were informed by community trials carried out in the Māori communities by Kāinga Oranga, the Housing and Health Research Programme at the University of Otago, Wellington, funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, the Hutt Mana Charitable Trust and a number of power companies for over 20 years. Cheryl Davies, Kōkiri Marae and Tu Kōtahi Māori at the Asthma and Research Trust explained: ‘As Māori Health providers, providing our programmes and support directly into the home settings, we could see the devastating effects poor housing was having on our Māori whanau (families). We have participated in some amazing studies over the years that have benefited our whanau and seen our whanau homes being insulated, receiving heat pumps or pellet fires, providing power subsidies and understanding the impact of eviction to name but a few studies.’

The first community trial was partly funded by the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority (EECA), which is responsible for developing the standards for retrofitting existing houses. EECA has used the results of the Insulation Study as part of the evidence that informed the housing guidelines and its home retrofit programme. ‘The findings of Kainga Oranga and other local studies into the links between healthy housing and health have had a direct impact on the design of one of EECA’s flagship energy efficiency programmes: ‘Warmer Kiwi Homes’. This programme targets subsidised insulation and heating to low-income homes with the specific objective of supporting health and wellbeing in those households, as one of the multiple benefits of improving residential energy efficiency. This experience has set a precedent for strongly evidence-based programmes and we are pursuing continuous improvement by drawing on latest evidence from WHO and other sources, as well as commissioning regular outcome evaluations of our programmes’ explained Nina Campbell, Senior Policy Advisor, Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority.

Kāinga Oranga has also conducted other trials of effective home heating, electricity vouchers to address winter fuel poverty and remediation of home hazards to stop trips and falls, which have led to changes in national policies such as the Healthy Homes Guarantee Act and internationally have supported other housing guidelines on crowding, home injury hazards and accessibility. ‘The introduction of the Healthy Homes Standards in New Zealand has brought about some tremendous results for low-income tenants in cold homes. From an environment where we were trying to convince landlords do the right thing for their tenants by installing insulation and heating, we now have a science-based regulation. The work rate for our insulation and heating teams has gone through the roof – it’s a win-win-win with jobs, health outcomes, and recognition that we all deserve a warm, dry and safe home’ said Phil Squire, Fair Energy Manager, Sustainability Trust.

The largest Crown Entity in New Zealand, Kāinga Ora - homes and communities has been charged by the current government to build 8,000 new public houses, as well as maintaining existing post-war houses to a high standard. The Board of Kāinga Ora has effectively adopted most of the WHO housing and health guidelines to improve the health and wellbeing of their tenants and the public community spaces around them. 'Having science-based international standards has given the Board extra confidence to raise the standards of maintenance and remediation in existing houses, as well as raising the standards in new builds. Houses have built-in effective, non-polluting heaters, good ventilation and there is a target for accessible homes for those with disabilities. Key decisions points are about the distance from public transport and the embodied carbon in construction materials to address climate change' said Vui Mark Gosche, Chair, Board of Kainga Ora - homes and communities.