

Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

Housing and Health in Auckland fact sheet

Housing and Health: Overview of the Issues

- Internationally, housing is widely recognised as a key determinant of health. The location, physical quality, level of crowding and the cost of housing all impact directly on health.
- Unaffordable housing is a significant problem within the Auckland region.¹ Unaffordable housing contributes to crowding and people living in substandard housing.
- The high cost of housing leaves less money for other items essential to good health including a nutritious diet, primary health services, winter heating, education and transport.
- Poor housing conditions are associated with a wide range of health conditions including respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries, and mental health.² Secure and affordable housing improves the ability of households in greatest need to provide a stable environment for their children with consequent improvements in health, employment and educational outcomes.³
- Crowding is a persistent and increasing problem in the Auckland region. Crowding is strongly associated with a range of infectious diseases (including meningococcal disease, tuberculosis, acute rheumatic fever) respiratory infections and stress.⁴ Crowding was identified as the most important risk factor for meningococcal disease in a study of Auckland children from 1997 to 1999.⁵ Reducing crowding was the key preventive measure recommended.
- New Zealand houses are cold by international standards with one third of New Zealand homes below the World Health Organisation recommended minimum of 18°C. Damp, cold and mouldy houses are the most common health hazards of poor housing and people living in them are more likely to have respiratory conditions, depression and mental health problems.⁶
- Evidence shows that insulation retrofitting of old houses in New Zealand has resulted in significantly improved health for both children and adults including reduced GP visits and reduced absenteeism from school and work. A cost benefit analysis shows that insulation retrofitting saves more in health costs than the cost of installing insulation.⁷

Scope of the Housing Problem in the Auckland Region

Housing Affordability

In the recent New Zealand Housing Strategy Discussion Document⁸, the Auckland region is identified as “a housing market under stress”. Auckland is facing significant housing affordability problems along with a high population growth and limited land supply. If current patterns continue, Auckland city will need to accommodate 141,000 more people within 20 years, while the Auckland region’s population is predicted to reach two million by 2050.⁹ Key issues relating to the affordability of housing include:

- In 1996 it was estimated that 23,000 households or 6% of all households in the Auckland region were paying unaffordable rents (paying more than 30% of gross income). The Auckland Regional Growth Forum estimates that the number of households experiencing affordability problems could increase by 50% by 2016.¹⁰
- In 2001 23% of Auckland households spent 40% or more of their net income on housing related costs (Household Economic Survey).¹¹ Tenant households were paying a higher proportion than owner

occupiers.

- Housing New Zealand waiting lists in the Auckland Region are the highest in the country, house prices and rents are higher and rising at a higher rate than the rest of the country; Aucklanders spend more of their income on housing; and home ownership levels are lower.¹²
- Although 43% of Housing New Zealand Corporation's total housing stock is in the Auckland region, it represents only 7% of the total dwellings in the region.¹³
- More than half of the households on Housing New Zealand waiting lists are in the Auckland region with 6375 in February this year. Of these households 2529 had either "severe" or "significant" housing needs, 832 North & West, 774 Central, 923 in South (Housing New Zealand regions).¹⁴
- There is growing demand in the Auckland region for emergency accommodation to meet the immediate needs of people in housing crisis. There is also a shortage of appropriate and affordable long term housing for people moving out of emergency accommodation.¹⁵

Crowding

Crowding is a persistent and increasing problem in deprived areas of the Auckland region. Crowding is an indicator of housing affordability. People having difficulty affording accommodation may share with others as a way to reduce overall housing costs. It is also an indicator of housing need with the dwelling suitable for the people occupying it. The Auckland region has a greater ethnic diversity and Maori and Pacific peoples are over represented in housing need statistics. Some ethnic groups have particular housing needs, for example, housing for extended family living.¹⁶

- Households in Waitakere, Auckland and Manukau Cities all show rates of crowding in excess of the national average (crowded households were defined as those that are short by two or more bedrooms). In 2001, Manukau City had the highest proportion of crowding, with 10.1% of all people in private dwellings living in crowded homes, with 5.3% in Auckland City, 4.3 % in Waitakere city and 1.4% in North Shore City.¹⁷
- Household crowding is more common for Pacific peoples and to a lesser extent for Maori. This is evident in cities where there are higher concentrations of these populations. In Manukau City 25.3% of Pacific people and 14.7% of Maori residents experience household crowding and in Auckland City 22.5% of Pacific peoples and 8.7% of Maori are living in crowded households.¹⁸

Substandard Housing

There is a lack of research into the numbers of households living in substandard housing and at present there is no set of agreed criteria which housing quality can be assessed. While legislation provides minimum standards that houses must reach for people to be allowed to live in them they do not provide a clear definition of what constitutes an acceptable quality home.

The poorest people are more likely to be forced into substandard housing.

- In national house condition surveys (1993/4 and 1999/2000) by the Building Research Association of New Zealand one in four buildings were in poor condition with one in five with serious defects. Auckland houses were generally in the worst condition in both surveys.
- The 2001 census reported the number of people living in tents, caravans, sheds and boats in Manukau City as 204, 198 in Auckland city, 168 in Waitakere City and 33 in North Shore City.¹⁹ This is likely to be underreported.

Cold and Damp Housing

- One third of New Zealand homes are below the World Health Organisation recommended minimum of 18°C. The mean temperature in Auckland houses was 16.5°C.²⁰ Uninsulated houses are on average 1.4°C colder.
- In 2001 an estimated one in four New Zealand houses had no insulation (approximately 300,000 homes nationally and 3% of households use no heating (Energy Efficiency Conservation Department). There is no specific data available on the number of uninsulated homes in the Auckland region.

- Research has linked unflued gas heating with exposure to nitrogen dioxide which is associated with increased respiratory symptoms and disease. Asthmatics are more susceptible.²¹

Overview of Auckland Regional Public Health Services (ARPHS) Housing-Related Activities

While other sectors are responsible for leading work on housing it is essential for health organisations to work collaboratively with other agencies and to develop intersectoral linkages to improve housing conditions.

Some key ARPHS activities include:

- The Healthy Housing Programme – an intersectoral collaboration between Housing New Zealand Corporation (HNZC), ARPHS (Auckland District Health Board) and Counties Manukau District Health Board. This programme won both the Organisation and Supreme Awards of the Health Innovation Awards 2005.
- Review of housing and health literature - a summary report is available
- Policy analysis and advice including submissions on: The Draft New Zealand Housing Strategy, review of the Residential Tenancies Act, review of regulations Under the Building Act, review of the Unit Titles Act.
- Promote insulation retrofitting initiatives and work with PHOs, Energy Efficiency Conservation Authority and community retrofit groups
- Provide public health input into community renewal and design and new building codes
- Representation on the Waitakere Housing Call to Action Collaboration and the Auckland Sustainable Development Committees
- ARPHS is a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol
- ARPHS has input into the national Users Reference Group for the development of the national housing conditions survey
- Promoting implementation of the Auckland Regional Affordable Housing Strategy
- Health Impact Assessment of Avondale's Liveable Communities Plan

Useful Websites

- **Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand**
<http://www.hnzc.co.nz/chr/index.html>
- **He Kainga Housing and Health Research Programme, Wellington School of Medicine**
<http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/academic/dph/research/housing/>
- **Housing New Zealand Corporation**
- <http://www.hnzc.co.nz/>
- **Energy Efficiency Conservation Authority**
<http://www.eeca.govt.nz/programmes/residential.asp>
- **Contact Energy: healthier homes website**
<http://www.positive-energy.co.nz/healthy-homes/>

Key documents

- **Building the Future : the New Zealand Housing Strategy**
<http://www.hnzc.co.nz/nzhousingstrat/strategy.htm>
- **Auckland Regional Affordable Housing Strategy**
<http://www.arc.govt.nz/auckland-region/growth/reference-section/growth-forum-publications/housing-reports.cfm>
- **Housing and Health: Summary of Literature in the Auckland Region**
http://www.arphs.govt.nz/publications/HealthyHousing/Healthy_Housing.asp
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- ⁸ Housing New Zealand Corporation (2004). **Building the Future: Towards a New Zealand Housing Strategy: a discussion document**, Wellington
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Business and Economic Research Ltd (1999). **Affordable Housing in the Auckland Region: Issues, Mechanisms and Strategies**, Wellington
- ¹¹ Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand Kainga Tipu (2004). **Housing Costs and Affordability in New Zealand**, Wellington
- ¹² Regional Growth Forum (2003). **Auckland Regional Affordable Housing Strategy**, Auckland Regional Council
- ¹³ Ibid
- ¹⁴ Housing New Zealand Waiting lists as at 28 February 2005
<http://www.hnzc.co.nz/rental/waitinglistnumap/index.htm> viewed on 8/4/05.
- ¹⁵ Housing New Zealand Corporation (2004). **Building the Future: Towards a New Zealand Housing Strategy: a discussion document**. Wellington
- ¹⁶ **Quality of Life in New Zealand's Eight Largest Cities** (2003). Auckland City Council, Christchurch City Council, Dunedin City Council, Hamilton City Council, Manukau City Council, North Shore City Council, Waitakere City Council
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁹ Ibid
- ²⁰ Staley, H., Howden Chapman, P. **A Healthy Return from Investing in Insulation**, presentation to Government officials, Wellington 25 February 2004
- ²¹ Pilotto L, Nitschke M, et al. (2004) **Randomised Controlled Trial of Unflued Gas Heater Replacement on Respiratory Health of Asthmatic School Children**. International Journal of Epidemiology **33**(1): 208-214.