



4 CROWDING

Crowding levels are gradually falling in New Zealand, as they are in most industrialised countries. However, this is not true for Auckland, where it is a persistent and increasing problem in deprived areas.

CROWDING increases when housing becomes less affordable for people on low incomes, and the research indicates that it will only decrease significantly when enough housing is provided to bring demand and prices down.

When is a house crowded?

There is no objective measure of crowding; standards usually reflect the assumptions of dominant rather than minority groups. For example, there has been no research into Maori or Pacific concepts of crowding. Using the lounge for sleeping was mentioned by Maori and Pacific people in several studies, but would count as crowding in most definitions (see *Beyond Monocultural Housing*). Some definitions use the number of usual residents divided by the number of rooms or bedrooms; others take into account the age, gender and composition of the household.

The Statistics NZ 2003 report uses the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS), which has not been validated in research with New Zealand parents but enables comparisons with Canada and Australia. It assumes that -

- There should be no more than two people per bedroom.
- Couples share a bedroom.
- Children under five years of either sex, and children under 18 years of the same gender, can share a bedroom.
- A child aged five to 17 should not share a bedroom with one under five of the opposite gender.
- Single adults 18 years and over and any unpaired children require a separate bedroom.

Over 70% of New Zealand houses have three bedrooms or less. Rented houses are likely to be smaller; for example, only 2% of rented Otara East houses in the 2001 census had five bedrooms compared to 11% of owned houses. The



“The small size of most lower-priced rental houses ensures that any large household will fit at least one official definition of crowding.”

majority of rented houses in three of the most crowded area units in South Auckland had three bedrooms. Houses with four or more bedrooms are usually in more affluent suburbs.

The small size of most lower-priced rental houses ensures that any large household will fit at least one official definition of crowding.

Crowding and health

People who live in housing defined as crowded have poorer physical and mental health than people in uncrowded housing. It is difficult to prove that crowding is the direct cause, due to the interrelated effects of poverty and poor quality housing, but the link is compelling. There are strong associations between housing defined as crowded and meningococcal disease, tuberculosis, acute rheumatic fever, respiratory illness and *Helicobacter pylori* (bacteria that causes stomach ulcers).⁸⁸

“My third daughter has asthma [from] the condition of this house.

The Housing know the total number of our family but they still not do anything about it like transferring us to a bigger house of four bedrooms. These rooms are too small and also the space inside of the whole house.”⁸⁹

Crowding was the most important risk factor for meningococcal disease in Baker’s study of Auckland children from 1997 to 1999.⁹⁰ Figure 1 illustrates the relationship from 2000 to 2004.

Baker found a four-fold increase in rates for children under five in the most crowded 20% of houses compared to the least crowded 20%, and a five-fold increase for those aged 5 to 14 (see Figure 2). Reducing overcrowding was the key preventive measure recommended.

“Overcrowding can be a health risk simply because people are cramped into spaces too small for them to be able to avoid illness or disease.”⁹¹ Having more than five people in a New Zealand house is associated with hepatitis B infection.⁹² Other crowding-related conditions are –

- Cellulitis, an infection of the skin surrounding a scratch or insect bite that is most common in children under five and adults over 60.⁹³
- Bronchiectasis, a permanent widening of the airways leading to regular serious lung infections.⁹⁴

There is consistent evidence that crowding is stressful for children and adults.^{95,96,97} According to Lynch’s 2000 *Healthful Housing* study: “After a period of time of living in overcrowded accom-

Figure 1 - Childhood crowding and meningococcal B cases 2000-04

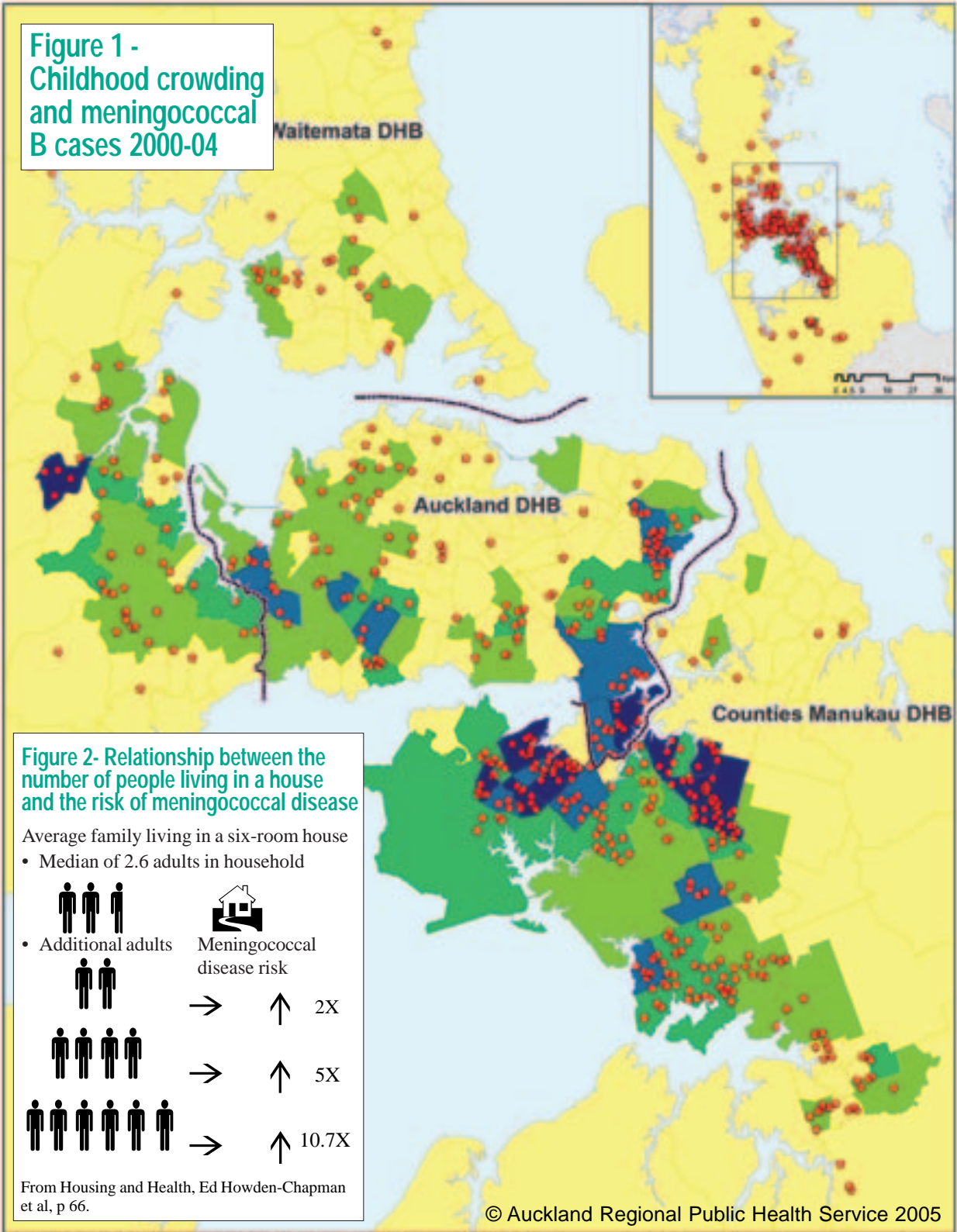
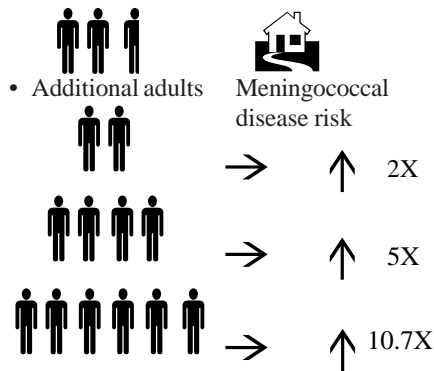


Figure 2- Relationship between the number of people living in a house and the risk of meningococcal disease

Average family living in a six-room house
 • Median of 2.6 adults in household



From Housing and Health, Ed Howden-Chapman et al, p 66.

© Auckland Regional Public Health Service 2005

Childhood Crowding and Meningococcal B Cases (2000-04)

Number of children under 8 by CAU in crowded households

- 0 - 15 85 - 138 Meningococcal B Cases
- 16 - 45 139 - 219 DHB Boundaries
- 46 - 84



Sources: Statistics New Zealand
 ESR



modation the stress of overcrowding becomes so overwhelming that people no longer have the emotional strength to move out of the situation.”⁹⁸

One couple who moved to Auckland found housing in a two-bedroom state unit already occupied by two of their older daughters, a granddaughter and five others. Moving in with their three teenage children increased the number of people living in the house to 13.

“It was terrible actually. ... It was really stressful then, cos there were a lot of them, and they were all young. ... And they would come over during the day and the house was full. ... Oh it was terrible.”⁹⁹

Crowding is also related to disturbed sleep and poorer results at school for students.

Official statistics underestimate crowding

In 2001, according to the Canadian National Occupancy Standard (CNOS), 8% of Auckland households (29,211) were crowded compared to 5% nationally. Almost 9% of the region’s children lived in households defined as crowded. However, all sources acknowledge that the census and other official data underestimate the amount of crowding in New Zealand. The most crowded households are often the most reluctant to tell officials about their living arrangements, especially if they include overstayers or illegal immigrants.

Johnson’s CPAG report cites an estimate of 50,000 overstayers between 1995 and 2003, mostly living in Auckland. Crowded households may also fear cuts to their benefits or removal of their children because of unhygienic conditions. Pakeha are most likely to be counted in official statistics about crowding and Pacific people most likely to be undercounted.¹⁰⁰

The NGO submission, and qualitative studies using visitors who gained the trust of crowded households, suggest that the census probably severely underestimates crowding in Auckland.

For example, in 2001 Housing NZ Corporation staff used rental data about crowding and estimated that 8% of households selected for the Healthy Housing Programme would be overcrowded. The *End of Pilot Report* found the actual rate was 54%.

Populations facing the most crowding

Pacific peoples are far more likely to be living in households defined as crowded than other ethnic groups.¹⁰¹ Several researchers stressed that overcrowding is forced on Pacific people and is not a choice.¹⁰² In 2001, 43% of Pacific people lived in households defined as needing extra bedrooms (23% needing one and 20% at least two). Of those living in households defined as needing at least two extra bedrooms, 41% were Pacific people.

Pacific people were the most likely of all ethnic groups (37%) to live in extended families. Pacific people whose living conditions were defined as crowded were twice as likely (74%) to live in an extended family. Around 28% of Pacific people lived in households with seven or more usual residents in 2001.

‘Alatini’s 2004 survey of 103 Tongan households in Otara found that approximately 16%, mostly state house tenants, regularly had occupants sleeping in the living room because there were not enough bedrooms. One resident said:

“New Zealand houses and New Zealand society does not accommodate for Tongan way of living. Instead, it causes large families to live in overcrowded homes.”¹⁰³

The correlation between “an unaffordable housing market and the overcrowding of households” was a dominant theme in the study.¹⁰⁴

One in four households in what Statistics NZ calls the ‘Other’ ethnic category - mostly recent African and Middle East migrants - were defined as needing at least one extra bedroom, 23% of Maori and 20% of Asian people. Five percent of Europeans lived in houses labelled crowded. Maori (38%) were the second biggest group among those defined as needing at least two extra bedrooms.

Official statistics of crowding in Auckland are improving for Maori children, but worsening for Pacific children.¹⁰⁵ Up to one in three Pacific children in Auckland lives in a house defined as crowded; “..the number of Pacific children living in overcrowded conditions increased by nearly 8% from 1996 to 2001, while the number of Maori children ... dropped by 7%, and Pakeha children ... fell by 15%”.¹⁰⁶ The small ‘Other’ ethnic group has had the sharpest increase in crowding according to the census.

“Official statistics of crowding in Auckland are improving for Maori children, but worsening for Pacific children.”



Table 3 - The 20 most crowded area units in New Zealand

Area unit (all except one are in Manukau City)	Households needing one or more extra bedrooms	
	Number	Percent
1 Harania North	273	43.5
2 Otara West	231	41.8
3 Flat Bush	306	41.3
4 Viscount	303	41.2
5 Ferguson	294	40.8
6 Otara East	324	38.6
7 Otara North	114	38.4
8 Otara South	246	38.1
9 Clover Park	300	37.9
10 Arahanga	135	37.5
11 Mangere Central	210	36.8
12 Harania East	339	36.2
13 Harania West	297	34.7
14 Mascot	222	31.6
15 Wiri	261	30.3
16 Walmsley	255	29
17 (Rotorua)		
18 Grange	111	28.5
19 Aorere	273	27.9
20 Favona	312	27.4

Statistics
New
Zealand,
2003

Other characteristics related to crowding

Households defined as crowded paid a higher proportion of weekly rent in relation to income in 2001, and were more likely to receive government benefits than non-crowded households.¹⁰⁷ Six percent of houses in the bottom 20% of household income were defined as needing at least one extra bedroom compared to 2% of those in the top 20 percent.¹⁰⁸ Private landlords owned 60% of housing defined as crowded and the state owned 34%.¹⁰⁹

Households labelled as crowded were more likely to include two or more families (42%), solo parent families sharing with others (35%), and households of a couple and children and others (28%). Over half of one-parent Pacific families living with others were defined as crowded, and over 43% of Maori solo parent families living with others.

In 2001, over 31% of households defined as crowded contained extended families, compared with only 3% of non-crowded households. One in five Pacific households consisted of extended families; 13% of Asian; 11% of Maori; 9% of 'Other' and 3% of Pakeha households.

“Housing NZ estimated that 8% of households in the Healthy Housing Programme would be overcrowded. The actual rate was 54%.”

Locations most affected

Fifteen percent of houses in Manukau City were defined as crowded compared with around 2% in North Shore City. However, as crowding is concentrated in small areas, these averages are misleading. At the level of council wards, crowding ranged from 0.8% in North Shore City to 30% in Mangere.

Since 1986, the census has identified Manukau City households as consistently the most crowded. Nineteen of the 20 census area units (containing approximately 90 households) in the country defined as the most crowded are in Manukau City (see Table 3). Between 1986 and 2001, the number of households defined as crowded in Manukau City increased by 37% compared with a national decline of 11%. The number of households labelled as crowded also increased in Waitakere City by 22% and Auckland City by 12%.

“In 2001, nearly 13,000 children living in [Otara, Mangere, Papatoetoe and Manurewa] were living in overcrowded conditions ... one-fifth of all the children living in overcrowded houses nationally. Furthermore, the problem of overcrowding appears to have worsened in these suburbs .. while it remained stable or improved” in the rest of the Auckland region and the country.¹¹⁰

In 2001, Manukau City had the highest proportion of Maori and Pacific households defined as crowded. Auckland City had the highest proportion of Asian households that were defined as crowded.

Mobility

High housing costs, the stresses of crowding, and evictions mean that Auckland people on low incomes and those with a mental illness are much more likely to move house frequently.¹¹¹

Tenants are more mobile than owner-occupier households, and private renters more mobile than state tenants.¹¹² Johnson reports that a 2002 CPAG survey of 31 South Auckland primary schools found that nearly one in three children in the poorest (decile one) schools are likely to change schools in any given year. This is twice the transience rate of schools rated decile three or higher.

The average length of all tenancies in 2002 was less than 15 months, with more than half ending within ten months.¹¹³ The introduction of income-related rents in 2000 contributed to a drop in the mobility of state housing tenants, from a national average of 33% in 2000 to 15% in 2003, and by 70% in some areas of Auckland.



One study found that many young Maori people move from one household to another and have no permanent address. “They stay with family until relationships become strained or overcrowding is at its limit and move on to the next house where the cycle is repeated.”¹¹⁴

New Zealand initiatives about crowding

→ The Healthy Housing Programme pilot supplied health information, insulation, ventilation and in some cases extra rooms to houses in Mangere, Otara and Onehunga from 2001 to 2002. It aimed to reduce crowding by building larger homes, extending houses and rehousing families in more suitably-sized accommodation. Hospital admissions dropped, while outpatient visits, use of the emergency department and GPs increased as a result of programme referrals.

This successful intervention is being applied in Glen Innes, Point England, Otara, Mangere and Wiri.

→ The five-year Housing, Crowding and Health Study began in 2003, involving all HNZA tenants and applicants, about 85,000 households. He Kainga Oranga, the Housing and Health Research Programme in Wellington, will match tenant information with NHIS information about overnight hospital visits.¹¹⁵

POSSIBLE ACTIONS

- Establish nationally validated standards for crowding, with input from tangata whenua, Pacific people, and other key stakeholders.¹¹⁶
- Ensure that new state housing and private developments include sufficient large houses to cater for the proportion of larger families in the Auckland region.
- Ensure that housing planning in Auckland takes into account the needs of changing population demographics.
- Introduce five-yearly monitoring by health sector staff of census data about the pockets of greatest crowding impact, followed by distribution to local bodies for discussion with community committees to encourage a targeted focus.¹¹⁷
- Establish three-yearly reporting on the status of regional housing and health by district health boards (DHBs) and HNZA.
- Re-establish channels for public health staff to recommend priority for housing assistance on health grounds.¹¹⁸
- Introduce programmes which address the economic pressures driving informal immigration from the Pacific, to help relieve housing pressure on Pacific families.¹¹⁹