

Children's Housing Futures

Housing plays a critical role in the overall wellbeing of New Zealand's children. Many children already live in unaffordable, crowded housing with insecure tenure in dwellings that are unsafe, cold, damp and expensive to heat. The burden of poor housing falls unevenly, affecting children rather than adults and children who are already the most vulnerable. In the future, unless New Zealand takes action, a greater proportion of children are likely to live in housing that compromises their life chances. This has profound and long-term effects on today's children, tomorrow's adults, society's overall welfare and the country's economic future as children transition into adulthood.

Based on research by Public Policy & Research (Bev James) and CRESA – Centre for Evaluation and Social Research (Kay Saville-Smith). The research identifies housing trends that affect children; assesses their impact; reviews domestic and international research, evaluation and policy; and identifies options to improve unmet need. The research was funded by the Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ).

Key Issues

Children's housing in New Zealand is compromised on several fronts:

- A poorly performing housing stock (both owner-occupied and rental).
- Increasing concentrations of children in rental accommodation, which is more likely to be cold, damp and expensive to heat.
- A housing stock that is not affordable for families with children.
- A housing stock that is not designed flexibly to meet children's needs.
- Settlement planning, neighbourhood design and neighbourhood management that largely ignores the developmental and safety needs of children.
- Inadequate housing assistance that is not delivering affordable and adequate housing.
- Fragmented and limited housing services.

Children lack power and control over their living conditions. Many are already exposed to unsatisfactory housing and are reliant on others to improve those conditions. Children need action right now to ensure that their life chances are not compromised. By 2051, proportionally more children are expected to be socio-economically vulnerable. So, if New Zealand carries on as usual, we can expect the number of children exposed to inadequate housing and the associated negative impacts of poor housing to increase.

Findings

Experiential, expert and research-based evidence all show housing conditions have a profound impact on children's health and wellbeing and on their transition to adulthood.

The research identifies five priorities for children's housing and identifies the knowledge and research required if New Zealand is going to meet children's housing needs effectively into the future.

New Zealand's Children

New Zealand currently has about 800,000 children aged 0–14 years. By 2061, the number is likely to be 920,000. Proportionally more of these children will be socio-economically vulnerable. They will be more ethnically diverse. Over half of children (0–14 years) will identify with at least one non-European ethnic group.

Children's Housing in New Zealand

- In 2006, proportionally more children 14 years or younger (39.1 percent, n=318,330) lived in rented accommodation compared to any other age group.
- Four areas have half or more of their children in rental accommodation (Ōpōtiki District, Manukau City, Ruapehu District and Papakura District).
- Almost 78 percent of children in rental accommodation are in the private rental market.
- A national survey shows that rental housing tends to be older than owner-occupied housing and landlords have been reluctant to take up subsidies to retrofit their rental stock.
- By 2016, between 120,000 and 200,000 children are estimated to be in families with parents who are employed but are unable to enter home ownership.
- Less than half of landlords prefer families with children as tenants.
- In 2004, it was estimated that around 375,000 New Zealand children were living in dwellings that were likely to be cold, damp and expensive to heat and that exposure to poor housing performance was likely to continue.
- Children are more likely than any other age group to live in crowded housing. In 2006, 17.2 percent of children aged 0–9 years and 15.3 percent of children aged 10–14 years were in crowded households. Ethnic minorities are even more vulnerable – 46.3 percent of Pacific children aged 0–14 years, 27.8 percent of Māori children and 22.3 percent of Asian children lived in crowded conditions.
- In 2006, around 80,000 children aged 14 years or less were living in temporary dwellings.
- Inappropriately designed sites and neighbourhoods mean that, compared to Britain and Europe, New Zealand has a high incidence of children being injured or killed on driveways. Two children were hospitalised monthly, and there was one driveway death per month nationally in the seven months to March 2009.
- Driveway deaths and injuries are associated particularly with rental dwellings, lack of fencing and high reliance on private vehicles in low-density areas.

Change for Children and their Housing

New Zealand's future child population will have proportionally more children who are socio-economically vulnerable, whose life chances are limited and who may struggle to make effective transitions to productive and independent adulthood.

Vulnerable children already confront significant difficulties with unaffordable housing, crowding and dwellings with poor energy and thermal performance. Unless private rental housing stock is improved significantly, the exposure to poorly performing housing will increase.

Children with specialised housing needs are particularly affected. They have a limited range of providers. Their needs are not assessed independently from the housing needs of the adults in their household. They may not receive the 'trickle-down' benefits of housing assistance given to adults. These issues cannot be addressed without significant changes to policy, assistance regimes and practice.

Priorities for Meeting the Housing Needs of Children

The report identifies five key priorities if New Zealand is to effectively promote the wellbeing of children through meeting their housing needs:

1. Developing housing policy that treats children's housing needs as seriously as adult housing needs and that does not assume children's housing needs are automatically met by housing assistance and services directed to adults.
2. Delivering child-centred housing services that integrate with housing-aware child services through cross-sectoral co-ordination and systematic assessment processes.
3. Improving the quality and security of the rental market and improving the value from the \$1.3 billion forecast to be annually expended in the Accommodation Supplement by 2014.

4. Transforming the housing stock by actively pursuing child wellbeing outcomes in retrofit programmes and ensuring that built neighbourhood environments are safe for children and connect them to the services, education and recreation they need.
5. Diversifying tenure and housing provision and recruiting a range of different providers into the housing market to ensure that children and their families can get affordable, safe, healthy housing with secure tenure.

Knowledge Required for Future Action

Our research knowledge of children's housing experience is thin. There is a lack of administrative, assessment and monitoring data specifically about children and their housing.

Information is needed in the following areas:

- Children's housing situations and co-ordinated child-centred remedial housing interventions. Key research areas are:
 - the efficacy, development and implementation of housing needs assessment tools, particularly for cross-sectoral use
 - effective processes for cross-sectoral responses to children whose housing security and safety is at risk.
- Optimising dwelling performance and functionality for children and their families, with research into:
 - how to improve the current housing stock to meet the needs of New Zealand's diverse children
 - the contribution to child wellbeing of housing design and performance in relation to educational achievement, social integration, safety and physical and mental health.

RESEARCH BULLETIN

- Optimising the capacity of housing markets and housing providers to provide children and their families with decent, affordable housing. Key research areas are:
 - adequacy of housing supply for children and their families in the rental sector
 - comparative impacts of different housing assistance, eligibility and entitlement regimes
 - opportunities to improve the performance of the rental sector
 - optimal configurations of housing services for children with special needs.
- Optimising neighbourhood design and connectivity with research into:
 - the particular neighbourhood design and amenities that would improve the quality of life and outcomes for children
 - effective neighbourhood programmes, activities and management to ensure children are safe in their neighbourhoods and in public spaces, can develop pro-social behaviours and are able to have positive intergenerational relationships within their neighbourhoods.

Further Information

This bulletin is based on the report *Children's Housing Futures*. A copy of the report and this bulletin can be found on the CHRANZ website under "Our Publications".

Other useful reports include:

- *Children's and Young People's Housing Experiences: Issues and Scoping Paper* (August 2007) Public Policy & Research
- *Housing and Disability: Future Proofing New Zealand's Housing Stock for an Inclusive Society* (May 2007) Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Assessment/Public Policy & Research/Auckland Disability Resource Centre
- *Access to Safe and Secure Housing for At Risk and Vulnerable Young People* (November 2008) Centre for Research Evaluation and Social Assessment/Public Policy & Research
- *The Intermediate Housing Market in New Zealand* (December 2008) DTZ New Zealand

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