

Māori Housing Experiences: Emerging Trends and Issues

Despite low and declining homeownership rates of less than 50%, most Māori have a strong desire to own their own homes. The main barriers to homeownership (especially for larger and younger Māori families) are low incomes, high debt levels, poor access to finance, high property prices and lack of information about homeownership. Māori householders and renters are generally positive about their housing experiences but face particular challenges in rural and urban areas, including housing supply, quality, pricing and variation in landlord practices.

Based on research by The Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit (Charles Waldegrave, Peter King and Tangihaere Walker) and Research Centre for Māori Health and Development – Massey University (Eljon Fitzgerald). The project was jointly funded by CHRANZ and Te Puni Kōkiri.

Māori housing preferences and experiences must be understood in terms of Māori cultural practices, the importance of proximity to whānau, and whānau land and lineage-based shared property rights. The impact of housing policy responses has been mixed. Consequently, the gap between Māori housing realities and aspirations continues to widen. In response, new policy initiatives are recommended to overcome barriers to improving Māori housing circumstances.

Key Points

- Although Māori homeownership rates are low and declining, most Māori have a strong desire for homeownership. In 2001, ownership rates for the total population were 67.8%, with 48.1% for Māori.
- Conversely, Māori rental rates are much higher than other households. In 2001, the rental rates for the total population were 28.0%, with 48.5% for Māori.
- Major barriers to Māori owning their own homes are low incomes, high debt levels, poor access to finance, high property prices and the inability to get and use information about homeowning. The inability to raise housing finance against multiple-title owned land further restricts Māori homeownership aspirations.
- Māori homeowners were generally positive about homeownership. Satisfaction was higher when living close to whānau, or on whānau land.

KEY POINTS CONTINUED

- Māori renters were generally happy with their housing experience, but rural renters experienced more properties in poor condition with low levels of maintenance. They had less choice and higher rents.
- Māori experiences of housing must be understood in terms of Māori cultural practices, including lineage-based shared property rights.
- Proximity to whānau is crucial in preferred house location, with Māori households often accepting substandard housing as a result.
- Housing policy responses have been inconsistent and uncoordinated between delivery agencies. Some current policies have been positive for Māori, others are still being assessed. The aspirations of many Māori are getting further and further out of their reach.
- The authors recommend building on existing housing policies to develop new initiatives to overcome barriers to improving Māori housing circumstances.

Methodology

The research aimed to chronicle Māori housing experiences and aspirations to identify emerging trends and issues. It is a baseline study that assembles information and data from available literature, three censuses (1991, 1996 and 2001) and the longitudinal study of Māori households and individuals, *Best Outcomes for Māori: Te Hoe Nuku Roa*, as well as qualitative fieldwork specifically undertaken for this project.

The qualitative research is the core of this project. Māori householders and key informants were interviewed in six territorial localities: Far North, Manukau, East Coast, Palmerston North, Lower Hutt

and Invercargill. The sites selected had all been included in the *Te Hoe Nuku Roa* study, as they were representative of cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, Māori population density and rural and urban variations. The sample comprised 70 people; 18 were interviewed individually and 52 participated in eight focus groups.

The fieldwork investigated:

- whānau happiness/unhappiness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their housing, and their hopes and aspirations
- housing conditions now compared with five years ago.

Findings

Housing Tenure – Aspirations, Barriers and Experiences

Although homeownership rates for Māori are comparatively low and declining, Māori in the six regions studied had a strong desire for homeownership that was essentially the same as other New Zealanders.

In 2001, homeownership rates for the total population were 67.8%, with 48.1% for Māori. Generally, homeownership among rural Māori has tended to be higher than Māori living in urban environments. Conversely, Māori rental rates are much higher than other households. In 2001, the rental rates for the total population were 28.0%, with 48.5% for Māori.

The main barrier to homeownership stated in interviews

and focus groups was low incomes – a fact confirmed in census data. Other barriers were high debt levels, poor access to finance, high property prices and Māori ability to access and apply information about homeowning. In rural areas, the large amount of Māori land with multiple-title ownership restricted Māori ability to purchase housing, as private sector lenders did not recognise multiple ownership of land for leveraging finance. The literature and fieldwork also found discrimination continued to be a barrier for Māori, both in the rental and ownership markets.

Homeowners generally had positive experiences of their ownership. Satisfaction was higher when living close to whānau, or on whānau land. For the urban

householders, homeownership provided a sense of security for the present, in the form of secure tenure, and for the future, in the forms of capital gain and the ability to move to more desired locations. Renters were generally happy with their housing experience, but rural renters were more exposed to poor property condition, lower levels of maintenance and less choice.

Clear differences were identified between rural and urban housing situations. The rural sector faces particular problems in terms of the quality and availability of housing for purchase and rent, higher rental rates, the cost and lack of services for maintenance and development and the reported lack of responsiveness and coordination on the parts of many local and regional councils and central government agencies. In urban areas, prospective homeowners faced escalating property prices, and the satisfaction with income-related rents for state houses was tempered by supply not matching demand both in terms of numbers of houses and the size and number of bedrooms required.

Conceptions of Housing

Māori conceptions of housing are pivotal. The conceptions of land and housing held by individual Māori whānau range widely from traditional views that associate them strongly with whakapapa (genealogy), to those viewing housing as a resource that meets certain security, status and economic needs, without being linked to ancestry. However, the literature and fieldwork confirm that the prevailing commercial housing model – grounded in a market system of individual property rights – is often in conflict with land development models premised on lineage-based shared property rights. Models that do not take this and other social and spiritual aspects of Māori housing into account are likely to be inadequate.

Household Composition

Māori households are larger, with a younger average age. Māori have a higher representation in multi-family households, multi-person households and one family households in which there are children. The most common living arrangements for Māori households are one family households with children led by a couple

or a single parent, reflecting the younger demographic of the Māori population. However, Māori sole parent households were more than double the rate of other households. The need to house visitors and a whānau member(s) permanently is shared by both rural and urban respondents. The needs associated with accommodating larger households required housing designs that provided flexible living arrangements.

Household Location

The literature and qualitative research shows that proximity to whānau is extremely important for both rural and urban dwellers. Māori often accepted substandard housing and living as a result. Māori with traditional roots in coastal areas felt they were disadvantaged by the high cost of coastal properties and many were forced inland, away from traditional areas of residence. In cities, participants often accepted lower grade housing to be close to their families rather than living in better houses further away. The inverse relationship between Māori cultural identity scores and housing outcomes within the *Te Hoe Nuku Roa* study suggests that involvement in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) might come at a cost and may influence factors related to housing outcomes.

Housing Policy

The literature shows the lack of long-term consistent policy and effective co-ordination between agencies responsible for implementation are a major difficulty with policies aimed at improving Māori housing circumstances. A history of discrimination and power imbalances are also shown.

In recent times, there have been several initiatives instigated to improve Māori housing circumstances. These include Papakainga housing, the Low Deposit Rural Lending programme, the Rural Housing programme and the Healthy Housing programme. The authors conclude that certain policies, like Papakainga housing, Low Deposit Rural Lending and income-related rents on state houses, have been positive for Māori, but overall disparities between Māori and non-Māori housing persist. The remaining initiatives are still being assessed by government.

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Policy Implications

The authors recommend building on existing policies to develop new initiatives to overcome barriers to improving Māori housing circumstances.

Home Ownership

New initiatives recommended to support homeownership for Māori include: further development of established savings incentives and schemes for households on low to middle incomes; developing affordable loans, such as suspensory and low interest loans; building pathways from state housing to low cost homeownership; developing equity sharing schemes; developing innovative schemes that allow jointly owned land to be used as leverage for raising housing finance; and the development of partnership housing with Māori Trusts and other organisations.

Renting

Policies that address the standards of landlord behaviour, especially in rural areas, are required. Lack of supply of suitable rental accommodation is a major issue that needs addressing, especially in rural areas.

Affordability

Policies that enhance secure employment, higher levels of educational achievement and higher incomes

will enable greater housing choice for Māori.

The planned increase in the number of state houses, review of the Accommodation Supplement and expansion of social housing are also endorsed.

Location

Planning authorities in urban and rural areas are encouraged to take bolder steps to enable innovative housing developments that respond to Māori consumer choices. More opportunities might be provided for Māori to participate in housing planning, strategies and development. Māori capability in the housing sector should be better resourced so as to support the development of Māori collective housing initiatives.

Further Research

Further research is also recommended in a number of areas including:

- updating analysis of census data with 2006 census results
- assessing the particular difficulties with obtaining and maintaining rural housing, especially ways in which the housing needs of rural Māori homeowners and renters can be better met
- identifying and responding to housing discrimination.

Further Information

This bulletin is based on the report *Māori Housing Experiences: Developing Trends and Issues*. A copy of the report and this bulletin can be found on the CHRANZ website under "Our Publications".

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