



Housing and health related issues

Housing is widely acknowledged as a determinant of health.

Cold and damp housing, housing affordability, substandard housing and crowding all contribute to the health of our communities.

Some quick facts

- Substandard housing and in particular crowded, cold, damp and mouldy homes, have been linked to poorer mental health and psychological distress for dwelling occupants.
- Lack of safety devices are the leading hazards associated with falls resulting in injury for both children and older adults.
- Crowding is strongly associated with a range of communicable diseases including meningococcal disease, tuberculosis and acute rheumatic fever.
- Cold, damp homes and indoor pollutants play a role in the development of asthma and a host of other respiratory health problems including cancer.
- Housing type has also been known to influence the quality and quantity of interactions within neighbourhoods, affecting social cohesion, trust and a collective sense of community.
- Unaffordable housing is a significant issue for many New Zealand families and contributes to families living in substandard housing and overcrowding.

Key reasons for unhealthy homes

- Low indoor temperatures
- High moisture content
- Mould and fungal growth
- Indoor pollutants

- Mites and cockroaches
- Unflued gas heaters
- Lack of basic chattels such as carpet and curtains
- Lack of fireguards
- Structural deficiencies
- Inadequate outside areas for children to play
- Unsafe driveways
- Overcrowding
- Housing affordability

Guidelines for healthier homes

- The World Health Organisation recommends that homes be heated to a minimum of 18°C and states that the risk of ill health increases once the temperature drops below 16°C.
- Adequate insulation acts to increase thermal resistance within a dwelling, thus slowing the rate of heat loss.
- Mould will not grow in homes if moisture is not present. Read our “Mould in homes” fact sheet for advice on how to clean up and reduce the affects of mould in the home.
- Poor ventilation and indoor air quality is often caused by the releases of gases or contaminants from gas heaters and tobacco smoke. Read our “Ventilation – improving the air quality in your home” fact sheet.

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Important statistics

- The Public Health Advisory Committee identified in 2002 that much of New Zealand's housing stock is not insulated or inadequately insulated and central heating systems are rare.
- One third of the 900,000 homes built in New Zealand prior to 1978 are either inadequately heated or not heated at all.
- In New Zealand a third of households have unflued gas heaters and studies have found that rooms with such heaters have higher concentrations of nitrogen dioxide than rooms with electric or flued gas heaters.
- Many people on low incomes heat their homes with unvented heaters that use gas bottles because this helps to ration the household spending on heating.
- Between 9000 and 11000 households in the Bay of Plenty region live in housing stress (households paying more than 30% of their gross household income on mortgage or rental costs). Housing stress is greatest in the Eastern Bay of Plenty and Tauranga.
- Rising prices can push up housing costs to unaffordable levels, making it difficult for people to sustain good quality accommodation.
- In 2006, 10% of the New Zealand resident population lived in households requiring one or more additional bedrooms. The largest group were identified as European (32%), followed by Maori (30%), Pacific peoples (27%) and Asian (17%). Of those living in more severe crowding situations (households requiring two or more bedrooms), Pacific peoples and Maori made up the largest group (37% and 32% respectively).
- Whilst Manukau City has the highest proportion of people living in households requiring one or more extra bedrooms in 2006 (25%), the next highest levels were found in Opotiki District (19%) and Kawerau District (18%).

Toi Te Ora's housing and health initiatives

- Development of a housing and homes health promotion framework.
- Development of a housing and homes database for the Bay of Plenty and Lakes Districts.
- Review of housing and health literature for the Bay of Plenty and Lakes Districts. This is available at http://www.toiteorapublichealth.govt.nz/healthy_homes
- Home Safety Project – an intersectoral collaboration between Safe Kawerau Kids Injury Prevention Project, the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society and Te Manu Toroa. This project won Highly Commended at the New Zealand Community Safety and Injury Prevention Awards 2008. Evaluation reports are available at http://toiteorapublichealth.govt.nz/healthy_homes
- Supported the inaugural National Healthy Homes Hui in 2007 and the Healthy Homes Heats Up Hui in 2008, and provided evaluative services for both events. Evaluation reports are available at http://toiteorapublichealth.govt.nz/healthy_homes

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