

How proportion of public housing affects wellbeing

Chisholm, E., Robertson, O., Howden-Chapman, P., & Pierse, N. (2022). Does the proportion of public housing tenants in a community affect their wellbeing? Results from New Zealand: A retrospective cohort study using linked administrative data. *Cities*, 131(103916), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103916>

RANGAHAU / RESEARCH

- The belief that tenure or socio-economic mix leads to societal and individual benefits has a long history in Aotearoa New Zealand. Early colonialists proposed that a mix of settlers would increase community efficiency; the post-war suburbs of Otago and Porirua were planned to be limited to one-third public housing, and since the 1970s, governments have focussed on building small clusters of public housing among private housing.
- More recently, it has been argued that for the wellbeing of the tenants, amount of public housing in an area should be limited to 20-30%.
- To investigate whether the evidence support this belief, we drew on de-identified linked government administrative data to explore how the proportion of public housing in different sized the areas where people lived related to their health outcomes five years later.

NGĀ HUA MATUA / KEY FINDINGS

- Very few public housing tenants live in areas that predominantly housed other public housing tenants.
- We found that as the proportion of public housing tenants in the population increases, the hospitalisation rate generally decreases slightly, with our model results implying there is a minimum at 49%.
- Those living in areas with less than 15% public housing tenants have 20% more hospitalisations on average than those living in areas with 15% to 70% public housing tenants.
- While statistically significant, the effect size is modest, with our model predicting that those living in meshblocks with 49% public housing tenants would have on average 0.05 fewer hospitalisations than those living in meshblocks with 10% public housing tenants.
- We conducted the same analysis at the Census Area Unit level and found broadly the same pattern. We found similar results for mental health outpatient visits and pharmaceutical dispensing.
- Living in a community where more public housing tenants were resident had a minor, but positive impact on health outcomes for public housing tenants.

WHAIKUPU / RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Housing providers:** Plan for larger proportions of public housing in streets and neighbourhoods. This would benefit public housing tenants and result in more public housing overall, in a time where public housing is in great demand.
- **Local government:** Design guidelines and design panels should encourage greater proportions of public housing in mixed tenure communities.
- **Central government:** Ensure the public and community housing providers and developers are aware of the benefits of higher proportions of public housing.

