

# **Public housing & urban regeneration research programme: Maximising wellbeing**

Te kaupapa rangahau whare  
tūmatanui me te whakahou tāone:  
Te whakapiki ake i te oranga

## **Key interim findings and recommendations**

Ngā kitenga hukihuki me ngā tūtohunga

June 2025



The NEW ZEALAND CENTRE for

**Sustainable Cities**

Te pokapū rōnaki tāone-nui



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# Karakia Timatanga

Amohia ake te pou nui, te pou hīhiri,  
te pou rārama, kia hurihia iho ki rua i te tipua ki rua i te tawhito.

Kia ū kia tina kia whena, haere mai te toki haumi e hui e taiki e!

Patua te pou, tukitukia te pou, whakarahia ngā pekerangi ngā tūkupu  
ngā tokowaru o tenei pā, o tenei rangahau, o tenei roopu.

Kia uea winiwini kia uea wanawana, haere atu te hau kino,  
te hau huna, te hau kaitaua.

He toka tūmoana, Haere mai te toki, haumi e hui e Taiki e!

Shoulder the great post, the energised post, the glimmering post,  
turn it down into the sacred supernatural and ancient hole.

Imbue it with the united strength of all who are related to it and descend  
from it bring the adze and strike the post together as one!

Hit the post, pound upon it, and increase all the outermost palisades,  
that completely cover all sides, with the eight high-standing sentinels  
watching over this fortification, this research, and this subject.

Clear away your trembling of fear, your quivering, ward off the evil  
winds, the hidden winds, the warring winds.

Stand as a solid rock of the ocean, bring the adze draw in together  
as one and strike the post!





COMMUNITY &  
NEIGHBOURHOOD



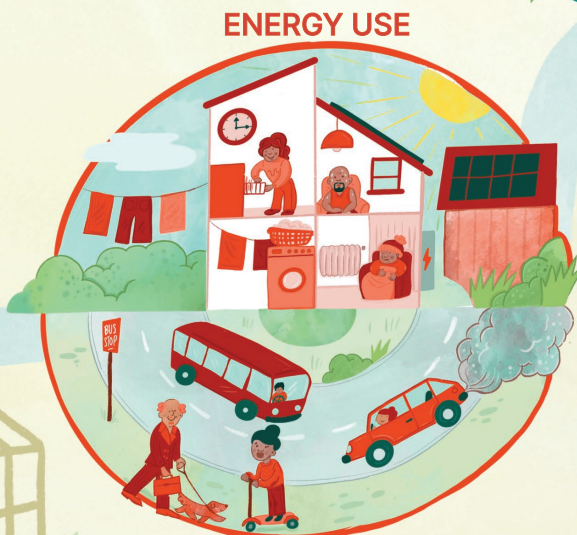
GOVERNANCE  
& LEADERSHIP



HOUSING &  
LIVING



TE AO  
MĀORI



ENERGY USE

TRANSPORT



# Rārangi upoko

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# Ō mātou hoa pātui

## Our partners



Tāmaki Regeneration  
Programme



Te Rā Nui, Eastern Porirua  
Development (Kāinga Ora)



WCC City Housing/  
Te Toi Mahana



Ōtautahi Community Housing Trust



Wainuiōmata Marae Trust



The Salvation Army



Dwell Housing Trust



Community Housing Aotearoa



# Kupu whakataki

## Introduction

**The Public Housing & Urban Regeneration Research Programme (PHUR), funded by the MBIE Endeavour Fund, is coming to the end of its five-year journey in September 2025. Guided by a vision to improve the wellbeing and stability for people living in public and community housing, their whānau, and communities, the programme has provided evidence to support healthier, more socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable housing developments.**

The research for the programme was conducted in partnership with six public and community housing providers, as well as the Wainuiomata Marae (see page opposite). We are grateful for their time and their contribution.

This booklet explores some of the findings from five interconnected themes: community and neighbourhood, governance and leadership, housing and living, Te Ao Māori, and transport and energy. Researchers analysed data from multiple sources, including surveys, interviews and information from larger datasets.

A strong relationship emerged between perceptions of neighbourhood quality and life satisfaction. Placemaking efforts – including safe shared spaces, community events, and natural environments – were linked to improved wellbeing. Low-cost design features and accessible services and facilities can significantly enhance social connection and quality of life, particularly for tenants with mobility challenges.

Governance structures varied across providers, but all aimed to improve tenant wellbeing. Long-term planning, stable funding, clear regulatory roles, and strong recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are critical for effective, community-centred housing systems. Engaging Pacific communities and measuring wellbeing impacts will further strengthen outcomes.

Living in affordable public and community housing brings substantial wellbeing benefits, especially through tenure security. Compared to private renters, public housing tenants reported better wellbeing, with notable improvements in health and wellbeing, especially for tamariki Māori.

Transport and energy access are also essential. Collaboration and coordination between housing providers, councils and transport operators, as well as more targeted research, can ensure better transport options that meet tenant needs. In terms of home energy use, tenants were energy conscious but often constrained. Affordable, efficient appliances, well-designed homes, and low-carbon construction are key to lowering emissions and supporting wellbeing.

Finally, the research highlights Te Ao Māori perspectives, recognising that Māori wellbeing is deeply connected to place, relationships, and cultural identity. The Whakawhanaungatanga Māori Wellbeing Model and accompanying guide offer practical tools for housing providers to build culturally grounded, sustainable, and inclusive communities. Māori leadership and values must be central to housing design, service delivery, and environmental stewardship.



# COMMUNITY & NEIGHBOURHOOD



Prioritise safe, sustainable, affordable, and connected homes



Partner with lwi and local government for place-based placemaking



Use low-cost design features to foster connection



Use the Accessibility Index



Balance co-benefits and trade-offs in "more-than-dwelling" investments



Facilitate social activities to build community



Integrate natural environments to support wellbeing

Te oranga: Te hāpori me te takiwā i  
ngā whare tūmatanui, hāpori hoki

## Wellbeing: Community and neighbourhood in public & community housing

### Summary

**We set out to understand how public and community housing providers make placemaking decisions to support and enhance tenant wellbeing and sense of place. These could include investing in community infrastructure, development design, and/or community events.**

Alongside provider decision-making, we explored tenants' perceptions of their neighbourhood, their experiences, and how placemaking initiatives impact on individual and community wellbeing, with particular attention given to Māori wellbeing.

A striking finding from surveying public and community housing tenants was a positive association between perceptions of neighbourhood quality and life satisfaction. Since public and community housing developments are in neighbourhoods with variable access to community infrastructure, our research has mapped accessibility to facilities, amenities and services in relation to case study housing developments and across Aotearoa New Zealand's urban areas.

By identifying how different providers support tenants' connections to both people and place, through placemaking initiatives, investment and alignment, we can create a set of strategies that can be shared across the public and community housing sector. These insights can help providers design, implement and manage residential environments to support and enhance tenant wellbeing.

### What we did and what we found

#### Characterising Neighbourhoods

In partnership with Auckland University of Technology research programme, Te Hotonga Hāpori, we created an Accessibility Index by mapping access to a range of resources across all urban areas. Using national destination location data for 44 different services and facilities, the Index allows comparisons between neighbourhoods and public and community housing developments across key domains, including transport, education, employment, health, recreation, retail, social and cultural facilities, and Māori culture as well as potentially harmful outlets such as alcohol and gambling venues.

The Index will be available on the Stats NZ website, enabling public and community housing providers (housing providers) and developers to assess the driving and walking accessibility of existing and potential sites. It will also support researchers to better understand the links between accessibility and wellbeing by connecting the Index to large-scale community surveys and national administrative datasets.

## Placemaking: Decisions and outcomes

Connections to people and place are important for wellbeing. Many housing providers aim to foster tenants' sense of place or belonging through placemaking—designing spaces that encourage engagement and community connections.<sup>1,2</sup>

While housing providers identify many benefits of placemaking initiatives, funding constraints can also mean investment trade-offs hamper their provision. We explored how housing providers navigate these trade-offs, and how the decisions made impact the experiences and lives of the tenants.

Interviews were conducted with 24 staff from six housing providers and 55 tenants living in homes provided by four of these providers.

From the housing providers we learnt:

- Housing providers face high demand and tight financial constraints.
- Investment in 'more-than dwelling' amenities requires Ministry of Housing and Urban Development approval and independent funding (e.g., philanthropic or business sponsorship).
- Funding constraints mean housing providers make trade-offs in their provision of more-than dwelling amenities. For example, construction of additional dwellings might be balanced against the provision of more sustainable homes, community infrastructure, mentoring support, or other placemaking initiatives.
- Housing providers prioritise locations with good access to public transport, retail, education, community and health services when purchasing new development sites or upgrading existing sites. In contrast, they divest in sites with poor access to services or small site sizes, as these factors limit service provision and community-building.
- Shared 'bump spaces' or 'soft touch points' (e.g., seating, landscaping, common foyers) are designed into housing complexes to encourage neighbourly encounters and build familiarity, tolerance and connection between tenants.
- Many housing providers see on-site amenities, such as community gardens, playgrounds, outdoor gathering areas and community rooms, as desirable, and sometimes essential, but cost is a major barrier. Providers with sufficient resources or philanthropic support invest in these spaces, while others focus on connecting tenants with existing neighbourhood support or local community services.
- Some housing providers use scarce financial and staff resources on individually targeted investment and upskilling, while others support shared spaces and community placemaking to support tenant wellbeing.
- Iwi and government partnerships can lift social, cultural and infrastructure investment in urban regeneration. Urban regeneration projects have longer development horizons and higher levels of investment than community housing provider-only developments. This enables greater integration of Māori tikanga, landscapes, histories and memories into development designs. All providers aspire to increase their engagement with Te Ao Māori to enhance Māori tenant wellbeing.
- Efforts to foster a sense of community through increasing the stability and diversity of households—especially by increasing the number of families—were hindered by a prevalence of single-person units in older housing developments, as well as funding and regulatory constraints.



From the tenants we learnt: Public housing provides a strong sense of home.

- Participants felt grateful for the security and affordability of their home, especially those who had previously been homeless.
- In their home, they could take care of themselves and others, and set up routines that supported their health, including in common spaces in their housing complex and through activities organised by their housing provider.
- Homemaking activities, like gardening,<sup>3</sup> arranging and decorating, supported their wellbeing.
- For many tenants, other places in the neighbourhood, such as park benches, libraries, shops, community centres, and cafés, also supported their sense of home. This could be undermined by feeling stigmatised, observed, or unsafe.
- Our interviews with neighbouring homeowners showed they did not oppose living alongside public housing, contrary to the prevailing media narrative.

Social connections between neighbours were important in supporting wellbeing.

- The design of the built environment, as well as activities organised by the housing provider, supported interactions between neighbours that, for some tenants, grew into strongly supportive relationships. Examples highlighted include participants sharing food, providing rides, and providing language and informational support to new New Zealanders.
- Factors limiting social connections between neighbours included disposition, the existence of strong relationships outside their housing complex, a lack of a sense of belonging, and occasionally feeling unsafe.

Engagement in natural spaces (green and blue space) is a key facilitator of mental health.

- Participants tended to use different types of natural space in different ways.
  - o Formal green spaces, particularly those with seating and close to home, were associated with positive social relationships, while informal natural spaces (green and blue spaces) were strongly associated with emotional regulation, and were used to improve negative emotions, create positive emotions and manage the symptoms of mental illness.
  - o Informal natural spaces, experienced as ‘another world’, helped participants disconnect from present stresses and fostered a sense of wellbeing and connection. Several of the Māori participant group spoke of blue space as a connection to identity and homeland with powerful healing effects.
  - o Birds, particularly native species, enriched the experience of natural spaces and were strongly associated with positive thoughts and emotions.
  - o For people who identify as Takatāpui, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Intersex, Queer, and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Takatāpui and LGBTIQ+), inclusive spaces were often spaces that were visibly queer, diverse and were relatively progressive. Exclusive spaces were spaces that featured alcohol-related issues, were rooted in heteronormativity or reflective of Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial history.

**“Many housing providers see on-site amenities, such as community gardens, playgrounds, outdoor gathering areas and community rooms, as desirable, and sometimes essential, but cost is a major barrier.”**

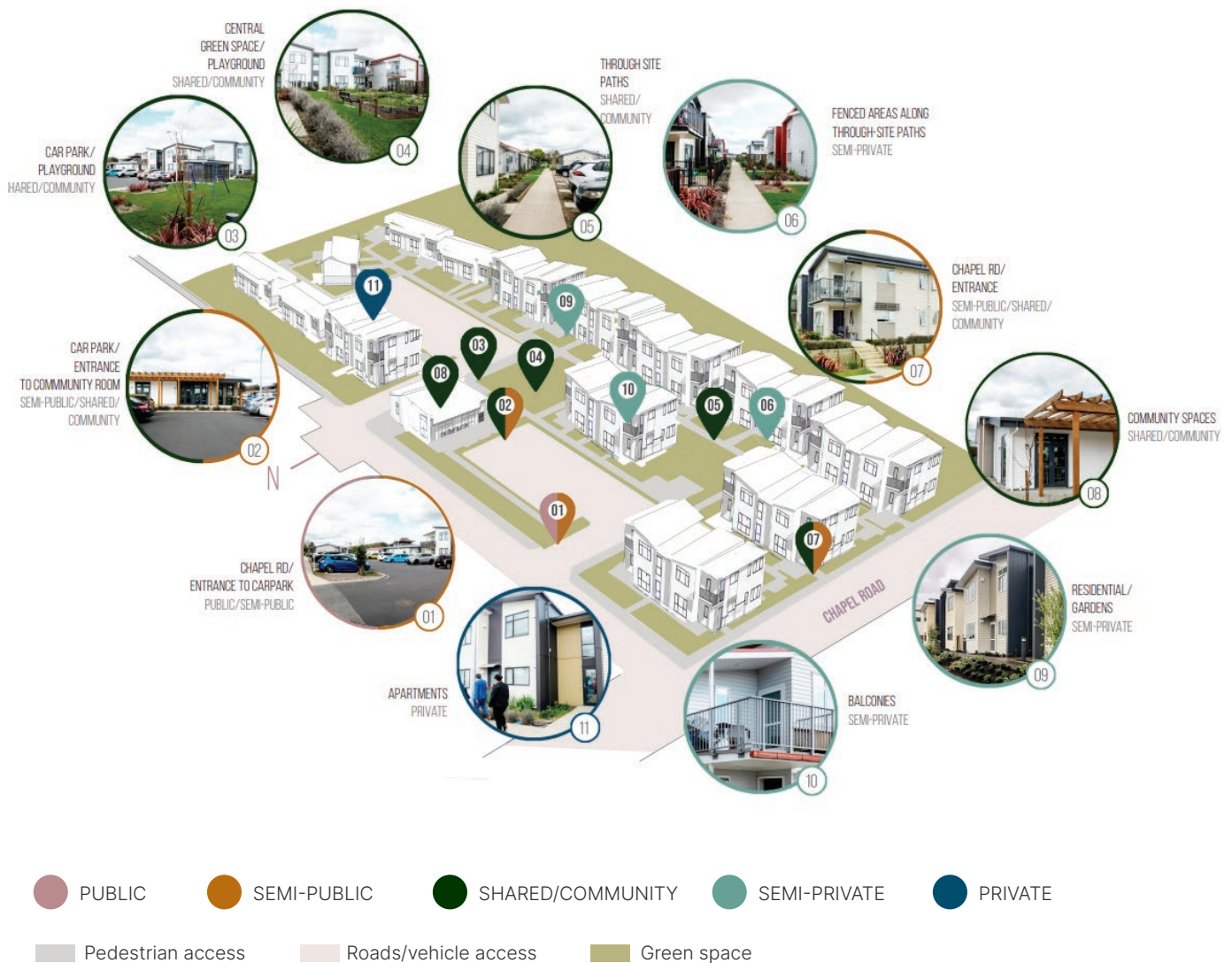
## Recommendations

1. **Prioritise safe, sustainable, affordable, and connected homes.** Tenant wellbeing depends not only on secure and affordable housing but also on opportunities to engage in homemaking activities, build relationships, and develop a sense of place.
2. **Use low-cost design features to foster connection.** Simple, low-cost features like seating and shared outdoor spaces near homes are crucial for tenants with limited mobility and for encouraging social opportunities. These features complement, rather than replace, wider access to green spaces and recreational facilities.
3. **Balance co-benefits and trade-offs in “more-than-dwelling” investments.** Despite financial and regulatory constraints, housing providers’ strategies align with international best practices: ensuring access to safe, well-maintained shared spaces, nearby amenities, and opportunities for community engagement.
4. **Use the Accessibility Index** to help make investment and divestment decisions by identifying sites with strong access to public amenities and community resources.
5. **Integrate natural environments to support wellbeing.** Access to green and blue spaces can reduce stress, enhance wellbeing, and help alleviate mental health symptoms, particularly for Māori tenants.
6. **Facilitate social activities to build community.** Housing provider- and tenant-led initiatives create opportunities for tenants to connect, forming relationships that can offer mutual support, but both need local champions and ongoing organisational support to thrive.
7. **Partner with iwi and local government for place-based placemaking.** Collaborations with iwi and local government can strengthen engagement with Te Ao Māori and ensure culturally informed, place-specific placemaking initiatives.

## Recommendations for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development

8. **Support housing stability to strengthen community ties.** Housing stability and length of residency significantly enhance tenant wellbeing and social connections. Policies should promote housing mixes, including by increasing the number of family households and catering for people with disabilities, to improve stability, length of residency, and overall wellbeing. A comparative study on tenant mix and wellbeing should guide evidence-based policy decisions.
9. **Align funding formulae with wellbeing outcomes.** Public and community housing funding models should enable providers to incorporate seating and shared green spaces into developments, improving tenant wellbeing across diverse communities.

# Designing for communities and neighbourhoods



This analytical drawing illustrates the relationships between public and private spaces at Kaitiakitanga Village, a community housing development in Flatbush, Auckland, by Salvation Army Social Housing. It maps out a progression of spatial types and relationships—from public and semi-public areas at the street edge and carpark, through shared community resources like the central green space and community room, to semi-private and private residential areas. The diagram highlights how the site's design enables movement, visibility and connection across these spaces, supporting everyday access, casual interaction, and a sense of inclusion for residents.



# GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP



Long-term, holistic, community-centred approach to housing



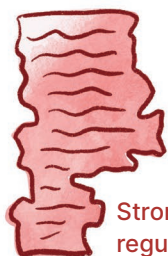
Clear goals for public and community housing



Toolkit for measuring outcomes and impact



Transparent funding model



Stronger regulatory guidance on Te Tiriti o Waitangi



Greater engagement with Pacific communities



Cross-party consensus on foundational policies

Revise the regulations for Community Housing Providers



Te oranga: Te Kāwanatanga me te ārahitanga  
i ngā whare tūmatanui, hāpori hoki

## Wellbeing: Governance and leadership in public & community housing

### Summary

**Governance is how an organisation is directed, controlled, and held to account. We wanted to know how the governance of public and community housing affected tenant and community wellbeing.**

We found that despite different governance models, all housing providers aimed to improve the wellbeing of their tenants and, to varying degrees, the communities they live in.

However, governance in this sector is shaped by both the internal structures of each housing provider and external factors. The broader political and regulatory priorities of central and local government, particularly through funding and policy frameworks, greatly influence how housing providers operate. We found that political, ideological, and policy shifts often destabilise housing providers, while short-term government decisions hinder long-term investment. Capacity constraints limit large-scale development, and wellbeing initiatives remain underfunded.

To address these issues, we recommend a holistic, community-centred, long-term approach, stable multi-year funding, revised regulatory frameworks that distinguish provider roles, and strategies to effectively honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the wellbeing of Pacific communities.

### What we did and what we found

We set out to understand the effect of public and community housing governance on tenant and community wellbeing. We analysed both the internal governance structures and external influences on the way each housing provider was able to contribute to their stated wellbeing goals for Māori, Pasifika, and the wider community. We interviewed people in key roles and analysed publicly available documents, as well as material from our research partners, such as board meeting minutes, business cases, and strategic plans.

We explored several aspects of public housing governance in relation to tenant and community wellbeing, including factors influencing governance, models of co-governance, comparative studies of public housing in Aotearoa New Zealand and international contexts, engagement with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the challenges and successes of urban regeneration.

## Our findings

- Political, ideological and policy shifts hamper the ability of public and community housing providers to support the wellbeing of tenants and their communities. These frequent changes destabilise the priorities of providers. Housing providers with sufficient land or capital holdings are, to some extent, buffered from these influences.
- Central government decision-making to address the shortage of public and community housing has often been short-term and reactive rather than providing much-needed commitment to longer-term capital investment. International experience shows longer-term investment is more cost-effective over time.
- While community housing providers (CHPs) are increasing housing supply, most are unable to develop housing at scale. There are 88 registered CHPs and only five or six were considered to have the capacity to work on property development in partnership with government. The ability to meet government expectations to increase supply was constrained by funding and capacity.
- The ability to address wellbeing through public and community housing is underappreciated and underfunded by government. Many providers seek to build a sense of community and do more than provide shelter, but this opportunity remains unfunded.
- The current regulatory system licenses CHPs as class one social landlords under the *Housing Restructuring and Tenancy Matters (Community Housing Provider) Regulation 2014*. However, a second class of registration is needed to license providers involved in property development. This would help to clarify expertise within the sector and provide clearer risk management information for funders and investors.
- All providers were on a journey to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which was compatible with their core value systems. This was organisationally driven and not required by regulation, except for Kāinga Ora and, to some extent, Tamaki Regeneration Company, which is required to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi under the *Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Act 2019*.
- None of the providers had a particular strategy or policy on working with or for Pacific peoples. There is a need to extend the attention that is given to Pacific communities and their worldviews.<sup>4</sup>
- Housing development and governance were rarely addressed by organisations in isolation. Most collaborated with other parties, sharing ideas, expertise and practices, which benefited the function of their organisation and wellbeing outcomes for tenants. This showed that housing providers were delivering more than just housing.

**“The ability to address wellbeing through public and community housing is underappreciated and underfunded by government.”**



## Recommendations

To create a stable, effective public and community housing system, we recommend:

1. **A long-term, holistic, community-centred approach to housing.** Public and community-led housing development and regeneration should prioritise wellbeing outcomes and effective governance.
2. **A cross-party consensus on foundational policies.** Stable and long-term commitment to core capital funding will insulate housing providers from the impacts of rapid political, ideological, and policy shifts. This could include multi-year funding commitments and regulatory safeguards that ensure continuity, even during government changes.
3. **A transparent funding model with a broader remit than housing.** This should reflect the infrastructure deficit that can constrain housing development.
4. **Clear goals for public and community housing.** Decision-making should be guided by evidence on the broad co-benefits of investing in housing for wellbeing.
5. **Revise the regulations for Community Housing Providers.** The regulatory system should be revised to distinguish between landlords with the capacity and expectations of public and community housing management and those who seek to undertake property development.
6. **Stronger regulatory guidance on Te Tiriti o Waitangi.** Clear expectations should be set for all housing providers to ensure they give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
7. **Greater engagement with Pacific communities.** Policies should reflect Pacific worldviews and wellbeing needs.<sup>4</sup>
8. **A toolkit for measuring outcomes and impact.** We need measures that capture the co-benefits of investment in public and community housing to evaluate and enhance tenant and community wellbeing.



# HOUSING & LIVING



Improve indoor temperature



Build more houses



Infectious disease prevention



Improve tenure security

Support families with children

Te oranga: Ngā whare me te noho i  
ngā whare tūmatanui, hāpori hoki

## Wellbeing: Housing and living in public & community housing

### Summary

**Housing is important to wellbeing because it's where we spend most of our time—70% on average—but more for people who are not in work or education.**

In our study, we wanted to understand how living in public and community housing affects tenant wellbeing, including for children/tamariki.

We found that public and community housing significantly enhances tenant wellbeing, particularly through greater tenure security. Comparing housing types, public housing tenants reported wellbeing levels similar to owner-occupiers and better than private renters.

Transitions from emergency to public housing led to notable health improvements, including reduced hospitalisation and mental health visits. Children in public housing saw faster behavioural improvements, and tamariki Māori reported stronger cultural connections.

However, challenges remain, including inadequate indoor temperature regulation and pandemic resilience.

Recommendations include increasing housing supply, improving tenure security across all renters, enhancing thermal comfort, and ensuring new housing designs are pandemic-ready and meet the needs of Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse cultural and accessibility needs.

### What we did and what we found

Our goal was to better understand how community and public housing providers can create spaces that support tenants to live full, happy and healthy lives within their homes.

#### Comparing wellbeing: Public vs private housing

We found that public and community housing both deliver a range of good outcomes for tenants. The extra tenure security tenants felt in public and community housing was a key factor.

We compared the wellbeing of public housing tenants with private sector renters and owner occupiers. Public housing tenants' wellbeing was similar to owner-occupiers and better than private sector tenants. When tenants had been in their homes for a longer period, there was less difference between public and private sector tenants. This suggests that the overall difference is largely due to the greater tenure security in public housing.<sup>5</sup>

**“On certain days I just couldn't even like, breathe properly... It felt like being trapped in a hot car with like a tiny bit of window open.”** (Tenant)

### **Transitions from emergency to public housing**

We wanted to learn more about tenants moving from emergency housing to public and community housing, and how the transition affected their wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Those making the move were more likely to be female, Māori, children or young adults, and/or to have children. Most (80%) waited over two months to get public housing, and 87% needed more than one Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant.

After moving from transitional housing to public or community housing, tenants' hospitalisation rates dropped by 42%, and their mental health outpatient visits fell by 36%. Even tenants who had not been living in transitional housing experienced better health after moving into public or community housing.

### **Outcomes for children**

We were particularly interested in outcomes for children moving into public and community housing. We looked at children in the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study. We found that children who started life in public housing came from some of the most disadvantaged families in the study and had the most need for this direct support. However, by 12 years old, their wellbeing was similar to those who started life in other housing.

Public and community housing also provided benefits for tamariki Māori. At 12 years old, tamariki Māori who started their life in public and community housing reported stronger cultural connection than children who started life in other housing.

### **Indoor temperatures and tenant wellbeing**

We also looked at tenant wellbeing in relation to their indoor environment.<sup>7</sup> We found that there is still more work needed to make sure tenants are able to keep their indoor temperatures comfortable, both warm enough and cool enough.

In summer, tenants had limited affordable cooling options. Using passive options like opening windows or closing curtains wasn't enough to stay cool for some tenants. Households that didn't have portable air conditioning experienced a lot of overheating, especially during sleeping hours. Overheating disrupted tenants' daily activities and caused discomfort, excess sweating, sleeping difficulties, fatigue, and mental health issues such as anxiety and stress. Overheating also put strain on the relationship between tenants and their homes, making it hard for tenants to feel at home.

In winter, we found the average (July/August) temperature in public housing was 17.4°C. Just over half (57%) of tenants spent more than half their time at less than the WHO-recommended minimum of 18°C. The coldest homes averaged below 13°C.

### **Planning for pandemics**

We wanted to hear from tenants about living in public and community housing during Covid-19 lockdowns. Tenant challenges included issues with housing quality, lack of space (indoors and outdoors), and lack of flexibility in spaces. Tenants also had some confusion about public housing providers' responsibility for providing support.<sup>8</sup>

### **Designing for people with disabilities**

We developed a set of guidelines for designing autism-friendly housing. We based these guidelines on existing literature, case studies, and participatory photo studies with follow-up interviews with autistic adults.<sup>9</sup>



## Recommendations

1. **Build more houses.** More affordable, accessible, culturally inclusive, good quality public and community housing needs to be funded and built so that the wellbeing benefits of this housing are available to more of the people who need it.
2. **Support families with children.** Continue to assist families living in public and community housing during their children's early years, giving those children the best chance for healthy psychological and cultural development.
3. **Improve tenure security.** Government should improve tenure security for all tenants, so that tenants in the private sector can achieve the same wellbeing benefits of tenure security as public and community sector tenants.
4. **Improve indoor temperature.** Housing standards, building design guidelines and regulations should include measures to prevent summer overheating. It is necessary to fund programmes (upgrades, interventions, renovations, retrofits) to ensure year-round thermal comfort.
5. **Pandemic planning.** New public and community housing should be suitable for a range of activities, including working or studying from home, and with access to outdoor space. These are desirable at all times, but particularly when social distancing is required during pandemics.
6. **Infectious disease prevention.** Public and community housing should be adaptable to allow household members to isolate while contagious.

**“After moving from transitional housing to public or community housing, tenants’ hospitalisation rates dropped by 42%, and their mental health outpatient visits fell by 36%.”**

# TE AO MĀORI

Tikanga

Cultural  
Landscape

Whakatautika

Te Ūkaipō

Wairuatanga

Whakawhanaungatanga Pathways to Māori Wellbeing  
for Housing and Urban Environments

Te oranga: Te Ao Māori i ngā whare  
tūmatanui, hāpori hoki

## Wellbeing: Te Ao Māori in public & community housing

### Summary

Our research focussed on how public and community housing and urban design processes and outcomes impact Māori wellbeing. This reflects that Māori feature prominently in the public and community housing system in Aotearoa, making up around 39% of public housing tenants with 47% of those on the public housing waiting list. It also reflects the limited understanding of how housing providers support the wellbeing of their Māori tenants, or how these efforts, or the absence of them, affect the wellbeing of Māori tenants, their whānau, and communities.

Exploring how public and community housing and urban planning processes impact and interact with Māori wellbeing beliefs, practices and outcomes will inform attitudes, policy and management leading to better housing outcomes.

We also explored sustainability through a Te Ao Māori lens, creating a framework for applying Māori sustainability concepts to housing and community design.

A case study focussed on an eco-papakāinga project at Wainuiomata Marae highlights many of these themes. This research shows how urban marae face a range of planning, funding and partnership challenges when developing housing on their whenua.

### What we did and what we found

#### A Model and Guide to Māori Wellbeing

Our *Whakawhanaungatanga Māori Wellbeing Model for Housing and Urban Environments*<sup>10</sup> emphasises relationship building and creating opportunities for connectedness (i.e. whakawhanaungatanga), which are central to Māori wellbeing. The model is intended to inform housing providers, researchers, developers, designers, managers, and regulators, and anyone interested in Māori wellbeing.

For Māori, the concept of home goes beyond the physical, social and cultural settings to include the surrounding natural and built environment. The many and varied relationships that individuals, their whānau and communities experience with other places and people are important. Home environments can support health and wellbeing by reinforcing identity, belonging and a sense of place, and the intergenerational continuity of important relationships. Our model reflects the ecological-spiritual basis of wellbeing inherent in Māori wellbeing and the importance of adopting a culturally-led approach when developing wellbeing strategies.

To help housing providers build or strengthen their organisational capability to support the wellbeing of Māori tenants, we designed *Māori Wellbeing: A Guide for Housing Providers*.<sup>11</sup> Users of the Guide work through a set of assessment and reflection tasks before considering activities and resources that form the basis of an action plan for building Māori wellbeing capability.

## Māori Sustainability Perspectives and Framework

We also examined the concept of sustainability from a Te Ao Māori perspective and how that translates into goals. We have produced a two-part discussion document.

- A Māori Perspective on Sustainability
- Māori Sustainability Goals

## Māori Wellbeing

### Culturally-led approaches to wellbeing are most effective

There is widespread recognition and evidence within public health systems globally that culturally-led approaches to wellbeing are the most effective. Culturally-led or culturally appropriate housing and neighbourhoods are the most effective way to support and maximise the wellbeing of those being housed.

### Centrality of relationships and relationship-building to Te Ao Māori

For Māori, connections and relationships are at the core of a culturally-led approach to wellbeing. The interplay between culture and connections and relationships inform wellbeing, shaping who we are, what we think, how we feel, what we do, why and how we do things, how we are perceived and treated, and our rights and obligations.

### Relationships are multi-dimensional and can be with abstract phenomenon and non-human entities

Māori exist in an ecosystem of relationships in Te Ao Māori—a change in one relationship alters others. For Māori relationships are not just with other living people but with Atua (gods), Tipuna (ancestors), taniwha, the moana, the whenua, Te Taiao (the natural world), and with the economy. Māori have relationships across time spanning past and future, and with concepts, thoughts and values.

Relationships involve the flow of matter, energy, information, value, effects or cues between entities which shape the wellbeing of both entities, not always evenly. The flows that make up relationships can be in a physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual form and are mediated by the spaces and places we occupy.

Six important pathways for building relationships that support and enable the wellbeing of Māori, identified through our research, are explained in a table on page 32.

**Wainuiomata Marae Case Study** – *The Pūrākau of He Tipu Manahau* details the halting progress of a papakāinga project at Wainuiomata Marae, whose trustees have been navigating red tape for the past 15 years. The report investigates barriers the marae has faced over that time, including economic disparity due to the long-term effects of colonisation, an inability to get loans and a scarcity of funding opportunities, the need to resolve complex issues around land ownership and outdated land status designations, as well as restrictions around leasing Māori Reservation Land. Included in this research is a close study of several complicated partnerships, for example between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the crown entity Kāinga Ora. These interactions occur in a larger context of Crown relations involving this whenua dating back to 1839 when the land was first sold into the tenths' reserve scheme.



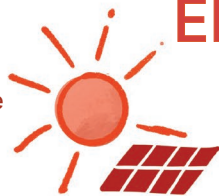
## Recommendations

- 1. Adopt a culturally-led approach to housing.** To improve wellbeing, housing providers should develop a culturally-led approach. This means authentically incorporating cultural beliefs, practices and values into everyday structures, initiatives and interactions at both neighbourhood and household levels. This includes language, traditions, rituals, art, music, design, religion, cuisine, social habits and exchange practices.
- 2. Prioritise relationship building in service delivery.** While service delivery is often transactional, Māori view all interactions, whether sensory, mental or spiritual, as opportunities to build and maintain relationships. This means prioritising connections and support in all interactions.
- 3. Understanding the impact of decisions on tenant wellbeing.** Housing providers should raise their awareness about how their initiatives or decisions affect Māori tenants' existing and potential relationships and wellbeing pathways. While they may not control or influence all aspects of housing and neighbourhood design, housing providers can help facilitate social connections and community support.
- 4. Map and strengthen support for Māori wellbeing.** Housing providers should map out which pathways they can support and how. Many already have the capabilities necessary to support Māori wellbeing. Using the *Māori Wellbeing: A Guide for Housing Providers* can help providers to assess existing capabilities and identify areas for growth to support Māori wellbeing in their homes and neighbourhoods.
- 5. Sustainability through a te ao Māori lens.** Housing providers actively support and enable Māori leadership and participation in the design and development of Māori housing, ensuring housing is created *for, by, and with* Māori. This includes fostering meaningful partnerships that embed tikanga and te reo Māori in all interactions, processes, and initiatives.
- 6. Minimise environmental impact.** Providers must also uphold environmental stewardship by minimising the impact of their operations and housing portfolios on land, water, air, and biodiversity. Supporting sustainable systems, policies, and practices is essential to protecting the mauri of the environment (i.e. an objective of kaitiakitanga).
- 7. Place emphasis on relationships.** Providers should recognise connections between iwi, hapū, and whānau, as well as Māori social institutions (*ūkaipō*) and cultural landscapes. By valuing these relationships, and recognising the pathways to wellbeing, providers can contribute to holistic, place-based wellbeing for Māori communities.

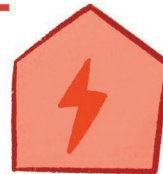
**“For Māori, the concept of home goes beyond the physical, social and cultural settings to include the surrounding natural and built environment.”**

## ENERGY USE

Effective utilisation of local renewable energy



Energy efficient homes that maintain a healthy temperature range



Building design supports off peak energy use



Central laundry in complexes



Timber use in low density houses. Reduced use of concrete and steel in med-high density housing



Collaboration between Council, housing providers and public transport



More research is needed on the specific needs of tenants

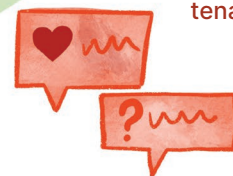


Ensuring housing is close to public and active transport facilities



## TRANSPORT

Better engagement for better decisions



Te oranga me te toitūtanga: Te tūnuku,  
te pūngao, me te tuku waro i ngā whare  
tūmatanui, hāpori hoki

## Wellbeing & sustainability: Transport, energy and carbon emissions in public & community housing

### Summary

Transport and household energy are essential for wellbeing, enabling people to lead meaningful and productive lives. For low-income households, transport and home energy costs can be a significant part of their budgets, so they must be efficient and affordable. Understanding how transport and energy contribute to carbon emissions is important for reducing climate change and impact on wellbeing.

Our **transport research** looked at how public and community housing location and design, urban planning, and transport options influence tenants' travel choices, access to services, wellbeing, and carbon emissions. Improving collaboration between housing providers, councils, and transport operators, along with prioritising research on tenants' transport needs and actively involving Māori and Pacific tenants in transport decision-making, could lead to better outcomes in this area.

Exploring **energy** in public housing and community housing, we examined appliance use, electricity billing data and building plans to show how energy is used and where carbon emissions come from. Housing providers can help tenants reduce energy costs by offering energy efficient appliances, providing central laundry areas with covered drying spaces, and designing homes that need less cooling and heating.

### Transport use – what we did and what we found

Creating highly accessible public and community housing developments with diverse travel options is important for tenant wellbeing. Our literature review found that understanding the specific needs and preferences of tenants, ensuring tenants have agency over how they travel, and engaging with tenants during transport decision-making are important and often under-recognised for people in public and community housing.

We identified substantial knowledge gaps around understanding transport needs and experiences from Māori and Pacific perspectives, emphasising the importance of including indigenous and ethnic minority views in future research.<sup>12</sup>

#### What the tenants reported

- Around 35% of tenants are not able to walk or walk far, 68% said they walked frequently, while 20% walked occasionally.
- Tenants, while often using cars, especially as passengers, are more likely than other people to use public transport and active transport.
- Car parking near their home was important for 55% of public housing tenants, although 39% do not have or use a car.
- A large majority agreed that better public transport, footpaths and cycle paths in their neighbourhood would make it easier to travel without using a car.
- Improved bus or train infrastructure, lower fares and increased service reliability were the most preferred ways to increase public transport use.
- On actions to reduce transport carbon emissions, a large minority indicated they would “switch to walking, cycling or public transport whenever I can”. The most popular option was to “try to use shops or facilities that are closer to where I live...”.
- A study of travel survey data found that, on average, car travel by public housing tenants emitted about half as much as other people’s travel.
- Their emissions were particularly low for purposes such as shopping and personal appointments.

#### Provider strategies and transport sustainability

- Analysis of providers’ strategic documents generally showed a limited focus on transport-related sustainability. Interviews with senior people indicated the location of their housing in relation to amenities and public transport is considered important by providers. However, less focus is placed on practical steps to facilitate tenants to use more sustainable transport and reduce emissions.
- Kāinga Ora was the only organisation actively quantifying emission reductions, setting targets, and publishing emission reduction plans.
- Mitigating transport emissions played second fiddle to building more public housing and improving tenant wellbeing. More active attention to housing location, access and amenity can help tenants reduce their transport emissions and is vital if Aotearoa New Zealand is to tackle the climate emergency and meet the country’s 2050 net-zero commitment.

### Transport recommendations

1. **Collaboration is key.** Housing providers, council planners and public transport operators should collaborate to make public housing as close to public and active transport facilities and shops as possible. Tenants overwhelmingly state better public transport, footpaths and cycle paths in their neighbourhood make it easier to travel without using a car.
2. **More research is needed.** Government research funders should give higher priority to research on the specific transport experiences, needs and preferences of public housing tenants, and how these needs can be better met.
3. **Better engagement for better decisions.** Housing providers and transport authorities should better engage with public housing tenants with specific needs and preferences, particularly Māori and Pacific people, during transport-related decision-making.



## Energy use - what we did and what we found

Using surveys, we looked at appliance and electricity use. Overall, we found that public and community housing tenants are energy conscious.

- Over a quarter of tenants reported using appliances at specific times “because electricity was cheaper then,” particularly by those who reported having “not enough” money. ‘Load-shifting’ like this may have helped households to manage their expenses.
- Almost all households had a washing machine in their home, owned it themselves, and mostly washed on cold cycle. In summer, most households dried their washing on outdoor racks or lines. Households altered the ways they dried laundry depending on the weather, and in winter, both outdoor and indoor racks were used often.
- Winter heating experiences varied greatly. Some tenants reported their dwellings were easy to heat and others found it very difficult. More than half of the homes were heated often while just under a quarter rarely or never used heating either because it was usually warm without being heated, or because they could not afford to heat.
- About half of tenants had electricity metering in their home which allowed them to pay a lower rate to the lines company because the lines company could prevent hot water cylinders from heating water during peak demand (e.g. at dinner time). This is a win-win arrangement, but it needs the dwellings to be correctly wired for it to happen.
- Three-quarters of the tenants were classified as low electricity users. These tenants will experience increased electricity costs as the low user tariff is phased out by April 2027.

We also investigated the viability of energy resources like solar panels, which potentially reduce the tenant's energy bills, provide low-carbon electricity, and contribute to a more resilient grid.<sup>13</sup> We are publishing a book titled *“Sharing the Sun”* which explores this further.

- It was hard for solar panel housing projects to get interlocking grants with compatible timelines. For example, finance for part of a project could be withdrawn if finance or consent for a different part had not been approved in time.

To understand the carbon emissions from constructing the buildings (‘embodied’ carbon), we looked at building plans for new complexes.

- The two new medium-density public and community housing buildings studied compared well to other new dwellings in similar climates, particularly when compared on a per-person basis.
- The primary reason why these designs are so efficient is because of simple (box-shaped) designs and modest size, both of which minimise construction materials.
- The need for steel in one design increased its carbon footprint.

**“...understanding the specific needs and preferences of tenants, ensuring tenants have agency over how they travel, and engaging with tenants during transport decision-making are important and often under-recognised...”**

## Energy recommendations

1. **Covered outdoor drying facilities for laundry.** These would lower indoor moisture and reduce energy requirements.
2. **Central laundry in complexes.** These would allow higher energy efficiency appliances and save space in homes.
3. **Energy-efficient appliances.** Support tenants' ability to choose energy efficient appliances, especially fridge/freezers and washing machines.
4. **Public and community housing layout.** Where possible, design new housing that enables tenants to use electricity at outside of peak times. Good acoustic design allows tenants to use washing machines without disturbing their neighbours.
5. **Energy efficient homes.** Housing should be designed to be as healthy as possible, including supporting a healthy temperature range with minimal electricity use. This kind of design is win-win as it will reduce tenants' energy costs and reduce operational carbon emissions.
6. **Timber use in low-density.** Low-density developments should predominantly use timber, providing low embodied carbon emissions and high carbon storage.
7. **Reduce concrete and steel in medium and high density.** Medium and high-density developments, where feasible, should be designed to minimise the amount of concrete and steel used, to reduce embodied carbon. Where concrete and steel are essential, low carbon options should be used.

“Overall, we found that public housing tenants are energy conscious.”





Image: Te Toi Mahana - Regent Park Apartments. Boffa Miskell Architecture and Jason Mann Photography



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# Rārangi pukapuka

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# The six whakawhanaungatanga pathways and associated wellbeing goals

Māori Wellbeing Guide: Based on the Whakawhanaungatanga Māori Wellbeing Model

Wellbeing Pathways	Description	Wellbeing Goals Indicators of Success
<b>Wairuatanga</b>	<b>Māori Spirituality</b> Connection with, representation of, and expression of Māori existential beliefs and practices. Through: individual and collective: Contemplation, Reflection, Awareness, Expression, Ritual, Routine, alignment with Te Taiao/Cycles	Māori spiritual beliefs and practices are enabled and supported
<b>Tikanga</b>	<b>Māori Law and Practices for Oranga and Sustainability</b> Enactment and expression of specific Māori/ Iwi/Hāpu cultural practices and ways of being and thinking that align with Te Ao Māori (values, beliefs)	Māori customs and cultural activities are enabled and supported
<b>Whakatautika</b>	<b>Māori Practice of Balance and Stability</b> Restoration of mana, mauri and stable mutually beneficial relationships when systems are unbalanced	Factors negatively impacting tenant wellbeing are resolved (avoided, mitigated or eliminated)
<b>Whānau and Kāinga</b>	<b>Central Group/Entity of Value for Māori:</b> The primacy of families, home and community in Māori culture (beliefs and practices)	Wellbeing relationships and networks of whānau and kāinga are facilitated and supported
<b>Cultural Landscape</b>	<b>Māori Identity and Belonging through Connection with Landscape(s):</b> Place-specific bonds between Māori and Te Whenua (Te Taiao/Te Turoa – maunga, awa, tupuna) and Te Moana that are intrinsic to Māori identity and belonging	Connections with culturally important landscape features are facilitated
<b>Te Ūkaipō</b>	<b>Home-Base or Māori Sanctuary</b> Culturally safe and restorative places and spaces for Māori	Connections with ūkaipō and ūkaipō - like amenities (e.g. te āhuru mōwai) are facilitated





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The New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities is an interdisciplinary research centre dedicated to providing the research base for innovative solutions to the economic, social, environmental and cultural development of our urban centres.

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