

# Placemaking for Wellbeing in Public & Community Housing

Karen Witten, Crystal Victoria Olin, Amber Logan, Elinor Chisholm, Edward Randal, Philippa Howden-Chapman, Lori Leigh (2025), Placemaking for tenant wellbeing: exploring the decision-making of public and community housing providers in Aotearoa New Zealand (2025) Wellbeing Space and Society. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2025.100258>

## RANGAHAU/RESEARCH

How do housing providers make placemaking decisions to support tenant wellbeing and foster a sense of place?

Findings are based on interviews with 24 public and community housing representatives from six organisations.

## NGĀ HUA MATUA/KEY FINDINGS

- Public and community housing providers face high demand and tight financial constraints.
- Trade-offs are constant – dwellings are prioritised over community infrastructure and other placemaking or mentoring initiatives.
- Site investment priorities include good access to public transport, retail, education, community and health services.
- Shared ‘bump spaces’ (e.g., seating, landscaping, common foyers) are designed into housing complexes to encourage neighbourly encounters and tenant connections.
- On-site amenities (e.g., playgrounds or community rooms) are often desired but unaffordable without organisational, business or philanthropic resources.
- In lieu of on-site amenities, providers often connect tenants with existing community amenities and services.
- Iwi and government partnerships can lift social, cultural and infrastructure investment in urban regeneration.
- Urban regeneration programmes more commonly integrate Māori tikanga, landscapes, histories and memories into design, and engage tenants in placemaking, than community housing providers.
- Efforts to foster a sense of community, by increasing the number of families, are hindered by a prevalence of single-person units in older housing developments, as well as funding and regulatory constraints.

## WHAIKUPU/RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Use low-cost design features, like seating and shared outdoor spaces, to foster connections between tenants.** These features complement, rather than replace, wider access to green spaces, recreational facilities and other community amenities and services.
- **Facilitate social activities to build community.** Provider-led initiatives create opportunities for tenants to connect, forming relationships that encourage shared routines that support wellbeing. Tenant-led initiatives (such as community gardens and events) need local champions and sustained organisational support.
- **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 initiatives.



*Community garden at Kaitiakitanga Village, housing provided by Salvation Army Social Housing (photo by Karen Witten)*