

MEMORANDUM TO THE BOARD

AGENDA ITEM

THE WAIKATO DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD'S - HOUSING POSITION STATEMENT

Date: December 2013

Review date: December 2016

Introduction

The following is a position statement on the health and wellbeing implications of housing prepared by Population Health for the Waikato District Health Board.

The Waikato District Health Board's Position

The Waikato District Health Board (Waikato DHB) recognises that housing is a key determinant of health and an important mediating factor in health inequalities and poverty.

The Waikato DHB is concerned that many people in its region do not have access to adequate, safe, warm, dry, affordable housing which is essential for health and wellbeing.

The Waikato DHB recognises that greater investments in better housing is needed and supports the government's initiative to trial a Warrant of Fitness scheme of Housing New Zealand homes.

The Waikato DHB recognises that vulnerable population groups such as Maori, Pacific, older people, children and those with pre-existing medical conditions are the most vulnerable to the health impacts of poor quality housing.

The Waikato DHB supports initiatives and intervention programmes that improve housing quality and heating as well as access to affordable housing.

The Waikato DHB recognises these initiatives as cost-effective measures to improve population health and reduce avoidable hospital admissions.

The Waikato DHB recognises that

Housing is a key determinant of health. Where we live is at the very core of how we live our daily lives. The quarter-acre dream of the '70s is almost a thing of the past. Home ownership rates are declining; 64.8% in 2013 down from 66.9% in 2006. More than a third of New Zealanders are renting and the number of financially stressed renter households is increasing particularly amongst non European ethnic groups and low-income earners.

Issues of overcrowding are consistent with housing affordability and tenure insecurity. An increasing number of families are living in crowded substandard housing exposed to damp, mouldy and cold conditions. Overcrowding is strongly associated with a range of infectious diseases such as meningococcal disease, tuberculosis, acute rheumatic fever, and respiratory infections.

Poorly constructed and older houses are difficult and expensive to heat. Fuel poverty contributes to families living in houses considerably colder than the World Health Organisation recommendation of a minimum indoor winter temperature of 18°C. Exposure to

damp, cold and mouldy housing can significantly increase the risk of a number of respiratory symptoms including the common cold and asthma and other non-respiratory problems such as fatigue and poor concentration. Cross-sectional epidemiology studies link recurrent headaches, fever, sore throats, nausea and vomiting, with damp mouldy housing. Anxiety and depression are also linked. In her 2004 research, Howden-Chapman found that more than 1600 deaths in winter in New Zealand occurred from respiratory and circulatory problems associated with cold housing i.e. 16°C or below.

A disproportionate number of people on low incomes including Maori and Pacific peoples live in areas with poor quality housing stock and choice. In New Zealand, over 70% of all children in poverty live in rental accommodation; 20% in Housing New Zealand Corporation state housing and 50% in private rental accommodation.

New Zealand ranks near the bottom of the OECD in its health and safety rating for its children. On average, one child is hospitalised every two weeks due to a runover in a driveway. A disproportionate number of runovers occurred in Housing New Zealand houses.

The Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group Report on Solutions to Child Poverty identified that poor quality and inadequately insulated housing is endangering the health of children and recommended a Warrant of Fitness scheme be implemented. NZH makes up 15% of total rental stock in New Zealand and houses the most vulnerable tenants.

The Government is trialing a Warrant of Fitness scheme with a number of its Housing New Zealand (NZH) properties. The Warrant of Fitness scheme sets minimum acceptable health and safety standards that will ensure homes are insulated and dry, safe and secure and include essential amenities such as functioning power points, food preparation facilities and functioning bath/shower and toilet.

The evidence of housing interventions like Warm-Up New Zealand and Healthy Housing Programmes on health and wellbeing is compelling. These programmes have been demonstrated to improve population health, reduce inequalities in health, and avoidable hospital admissions. Improved health outcomes have included fewer exacerbations of respiratory illness, improved self-rated health, and less time off work and school.

An economic evaluation of the Warm-Up New Zealand Heat Smart Programme demonstrated a benefit-cost ratio of 3.9; which means the benefits were 3.9 times higher than the costs. The Healthy Housing Programme has also demonstrated that housing interventions can reduce potential avoidable hospital admissions.

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