

Spotlight on homelessness and emergency housing



> *Imagine if your emergency housing service had to deal with two to three walk-ins for housing every working day and your houses were already full. What would you do? Angie Cairncross, David Zussman and Chris Glauadel from Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) look at the alarming reality of homelessness and emergency housing in New Zealand.*

Emergency housing providers are having to deal with these situations, every day, all over New Zealand but particularly in Auckland. There's more demand for emergency housing than ever before and providers are distressed. While local communities are coming together to find solutions, we still haven't seen any leadership from Government.

In this article, written in May 2016, we explore the scale and issue of homelessness by looking at what some communities and emergency housing providers are experiencing. We look at a number of practical responses from the community housing sector, as well as the leadership local authorities and communities are showing in response to this issue. We see that homelessness is no longer isolated to the large cities like Auckland. Communities from Kaitiāia to Invercargill, Waiheke Island to Wellington, have high demands on their emergency housing. And we see that the demographic of who we would expect to be homeless has changed.

In 2007 the Coalition to End Homelessness (In 2007; p.4) wrote:

*"If homelessness is to be eradicated in our society it will require more than emergency accommodation, night shelters and soup kitchens. It will need a strategy to combat the social exclusion which can lead to homelessness, and programmes which support people to maintain housing in the long-term. It will also need the commitment and leadership of central and local government in partnership with specialist service providers to implement local homelessness strategies. It will include solutions for Māori that will reconnect them spiritually, physically and culturally with their whānau, hapu and iwi."*¹

The scale of the issue in New Zealand

We were all shocked last year to learn of the Citizen's Advice Bureau's (CAB) figures² on clients' need for emergency accommodation. The CAB's November 2015 in-depth analysis of over 2,000 clients enquiring about emergency accommodation showed vulnerable families, pregnant women and children living in cars and garages, even after seeking assistance from the Ministry of Social Development and Housing New Zealand. Many of these families had the highest priority on the social housing register.

The CAB research showed Māori and younger people under 30 years were disproportionately represented in these figures. Their

research also indicated, in the five years to the end of June 2015, emergency housing was the CAB's fastest growing area of enquiry, with the number of enquiries in this area doubling since 2010. CAB will be carrying out further analysis of enquiry data later this year.

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In a survey over three months³ in 2014-2015 of Salvation Army centres at Manukau, New Lynn, North Shore, Royal Oak and Waitakere – in addition to data collected from the Salvation Army's Epsom Lodge and from De Paul House based on the North Shore – 1,202 people were seeking emergency housing assistance. Forty-seven percent (568) of these homeless people were children. The research found, for families without housing, it is common to be homeless for up to six months before the situation can be resolved. More than 49 percent of the respondents had not been in contact with the Ministry of Social Development.

Amore et al (2013)⁴ used 2006 census data to estimate that up to 34,000 people nationally were experiencing severe housing deprivation – including approximately 5,000 people living on the street or in improvised mobile dwellings and approximately 700 people in emergency accommodation – with 44 percent of this group based in Auckland. This was an increase of nine percent from the 2001 figures and we are still waiting for the analysis of the 2013 figures.

Those who are homeless are an extremely disadvantaged population that is usually statistically invisible. Data from sources such as the social housing register are notoriously unreliable. Amore et al (2013) believe figures, such as the social housing register, are unlikely to record the full extent of housing deprivation as many homeless are not on the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) waiting list. They do not appear in poverty, unemployment or living standards statistics because they do not live in permanent private dwellings.

There is a severe lack of emergency accommodation and an increasing number of homeless in New Zealand, yet Dr Sam Tsemberis, an international proponent on housing for the homeless, commented in 2015 that New Zealand could end 'rough sleeping' in this country within two years.⁵

Experiences over the country

The census figures and research show there is a homeless issue in New Zealand but the experiences of emergency housing providers demonstrate there has been a significant

1 Leggatt-Cook, Homeless in Aotearoa: Issues and Recommendations, New Zealand Coalition to End Homelessness; 2007

2 Citizens Advice Bureau ;Spotlight on Emergency Accommodation; Nov 2015.; p.2

3 Salvation Army; Invisible in the Supercity, November 2015, p.29;

4 Amore K, Viggers H, Baker, MG, & Howden-Chapman, P (2013). Severe housing deprivation: The problem and its measurement, Official Statistics Research Series, 6; Statistics New Zealand

5 Newshub, Housing First could end homelessness; Kanoa Lloyd; October 20, 2015

deterioration since the census data was reported. Providers around the country are struggling to address the marked increase in demand for housing assistance.

In March this year, Te Tai Tokerau Emergency Housing in Whangarei reported receiving around 100 inquiries for accommodation in January and February. Usually they receive about 240 inquiries over the entire year.⁶

In an article in the previous edition of *HousingWORKS* (March 2016; pp. 40-44), we highlighted the shortfall in social and affordable housing in Christchurch as the area continues to rebalance itself after the loss of so many houses in the 2011 earthquakes. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment estimated the number of Christchurch residents experiencing 'housing insecurity' to be between 5,500 and 7,400 in March 2013.⁷

In April 2014, the Tauranga Moana Nightshelter Trust estimated the chronic street homeless numbered 30 to 40.⁸

“ Emergency housing providers around the country are saying there are major delays in clients exiting emergency housing and finding access to permanent housing. ”

Figures provided by the Salvation Army to the *Southland Times* for the year ended 30th June 2013 cited 164 people fitted the definition of being homeless in Invercargill.⁹

Emergency housing providers around the country are saying there are major delays in clients exiting emergency housing and finding access to permanent housing.¹⁰ What's missing is a consistent and coordinated response from those government agencies that have contact with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and a clear strategy to address the issue.

“The system is flooded and the system is failing”

Jan Rutledge of Auckland emergency housing provider De Paul House says the system is flooded and the system is failing:

“We had our busiest year ever last year and it's increasing again this year with two to three walk-ins for emergency housing each working day. And yes – people are staying too long in our housing because there are delays in getting permanent housing. We've got one young mother who came to us from the hospital with her newborn baby, she's been with us for nine months; and another mum and her six children have been with us for 14 months because there's no house big enough for the family.”

Jan says one reason for the delays is the assessment process at MSD for the social housing waiting list – people need advocacy to navigate it:

“We've had high risk people take eight weeks just to get onto the MSD social housing waiting list. The waiting times to access the 0800 number are excessive with delays of up



to 40 minutes or longer. It's hard to understand for those who have English as a second language and, if you don't answer a phone call, you can be dropped off the list. And you have to have an address – you can't do that if you're transient so you can't get on the waiting list. The system is punitive and people are dropping out of the process. The situation is worsening. People are being charged rents to live in tool sheds and carports with no tenancy protection. There needs to be the political will to look at how we address homelessness in this country and the system needs to change.”

Corie Haddock, Co-Chair of the New Zealand Coalition to End Homelessness, says:

“Most cities in New Zealand have issues with homelessness and this won't change until the Government admits there is a problem and acts accordingly to address it.”¹¹

The national context and Government's review of funding for emergency housing

In March 2015, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) initiated a review of the funding arrangements for emergency housing. The intention was to get a better understanding of the pressures facing the emergency housing sector.

“ According to Government, they will provide \$41.1 million over the next four years in Budget 2016 for emergency housing. ”

While formal feedback from the online survey has not been made to date, on 9th May, Government announced new funding for emergency housing. According to Government, they will provide \$41.1 million over the next four years in Budget 2016 for emergency housing. It will fund, at any one time, 800 emergency housing places around the country – about 3,000 emergency housing places across the country each year for the next four years.

The bulk of the new operating funding will be used in two ways:

- The Ministry of Social Development will contract community groups to provide about 3,000 emergency housing places

6 Northern Advocate; Housing provider in sit-down over slow service; Mikaela Collins; Mar 8, 2016

7 Cera.govt.nz/sites/default/files/common/canterbury-wellbeing-index-June 2015, Housing Affordability and availability; June 2015

8 Bay of Plenty Times; “Shelter found for Tauranga homeless” retrieved www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times; April 23, 2014

9 Southland Times; retrieved www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/9414129/Homeless-problem-worsens; 19 Nov, 2013

10 www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/78869317/Lobby-groups-to-examine-housing-issues-at-New-Zealand-Housing-Summit; April 13, 2016

11 Press release: Coalition to end homelessness; 15 January 2016; www.scoop.co.nz

each year. This will result in 800 places at any one time over the year as the emergency housing provided to a family/individual is anticipated to be for up to 12 weeks; and

- A new emergency housing Special Needs Grant to support individuals and families with the cost of emergency housing for up to seven days if they are unable to access a contracted place.

“ Community Housing Aotearoa is concerned about the flow-on housing needed once people have spent their allotted three months in emergency housing. Where are the long-term options? ”

This is great news for emergency housing providers struggling to meet demands every day. But Community Housing Aotearoa is concerned about the flow-on housing needed once people have spent their allotted three months in emergency housing. Where are the long-term options?

The funding announcement indicated there will be a Request for Proposals process commencing in June. The requirements of this RFP process will provide insight into whether the concerns of emergency housing providers to have the full cost of housing and service provision funded are addressed.

Prior to this announcement, piecemeal funding was provided to Auckland emergency housing providers and to some in Christchurch:

- A \$500,000 one-off distribution of funding in early 2015 for 16 organisations with existing MSD contracts; and
- A \$2 million allocation for new emergency provision in Auckland for 120 places over two years. Emerge Aotearoa was announced as one of the providers receiving this funding in March 2016 and at least one other provider was in negotiations with Government.

Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) expect more announcements from Government around emergency housing soon. Existing emergency housing providers eagerly await announcements on the details of the new funding as they continue to cope with increasing demands. CHA is keen to play a part in ensuring providers have up-to-date information and are supported to navigate through any funding allocation process.

Emergency housing providers have asserted the need for the full cost of service delivery to be funded. Current policy settings for the funding of housing and support being offered by Government are nowhere near the level needed to sustain the services, and some providers do not receive anything.

“ We need to see the full continuum of housing operating effectively where people have access to the social and affordable housing they need when they need it. ”

Financial stress is not the only issue reported by emergency housing providers. Difficulty in getting clients housed once they have completed the 10 to 12-week programmes is problematic with some families waiting eight to 10 months for permanent housing. A more streamlined pathway to follow-on housing would increase the number of people housed, maximise benefits of programmes because sustainability and stability are assured, and make better use of resources. Ultimately, we need to see the full continuum of housing operating effectively where people have access to the social and affordable housing they need when they need it.

Meanwhile, there are no policy settings to set the context for emergency housing to operate within or to enable local communities to address homelessness in their area. It is not yet clear how the recently announced funding will tackle these additional issues.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE AROUND THE COUNTRY

Government might not have a strategy on homelessness but local governments and communities are not waiting around to address this issue.

A number of local authorities have established homeless policies and strategies. In some areas, such as Hamilton and the far north, local responses to homelessness are taking new and innovative directions:



The People's Project in Hamilton

In Hamilton, the People's Project has housed 186 people since it was set up in 2014 and aims to end homelessness in the city by the end of 2016. People's Project head, Julie Nelson, says their aim was to end homelessness – not to manage it. Instead, the People's Project has taken a housing first approach.

Julie Nelson says:

“While we adopted housing first and are seeing tremendous success, we must see this as part of the wider system of care in our community where everyone is doing their piece in the efforts to end homelessness.”

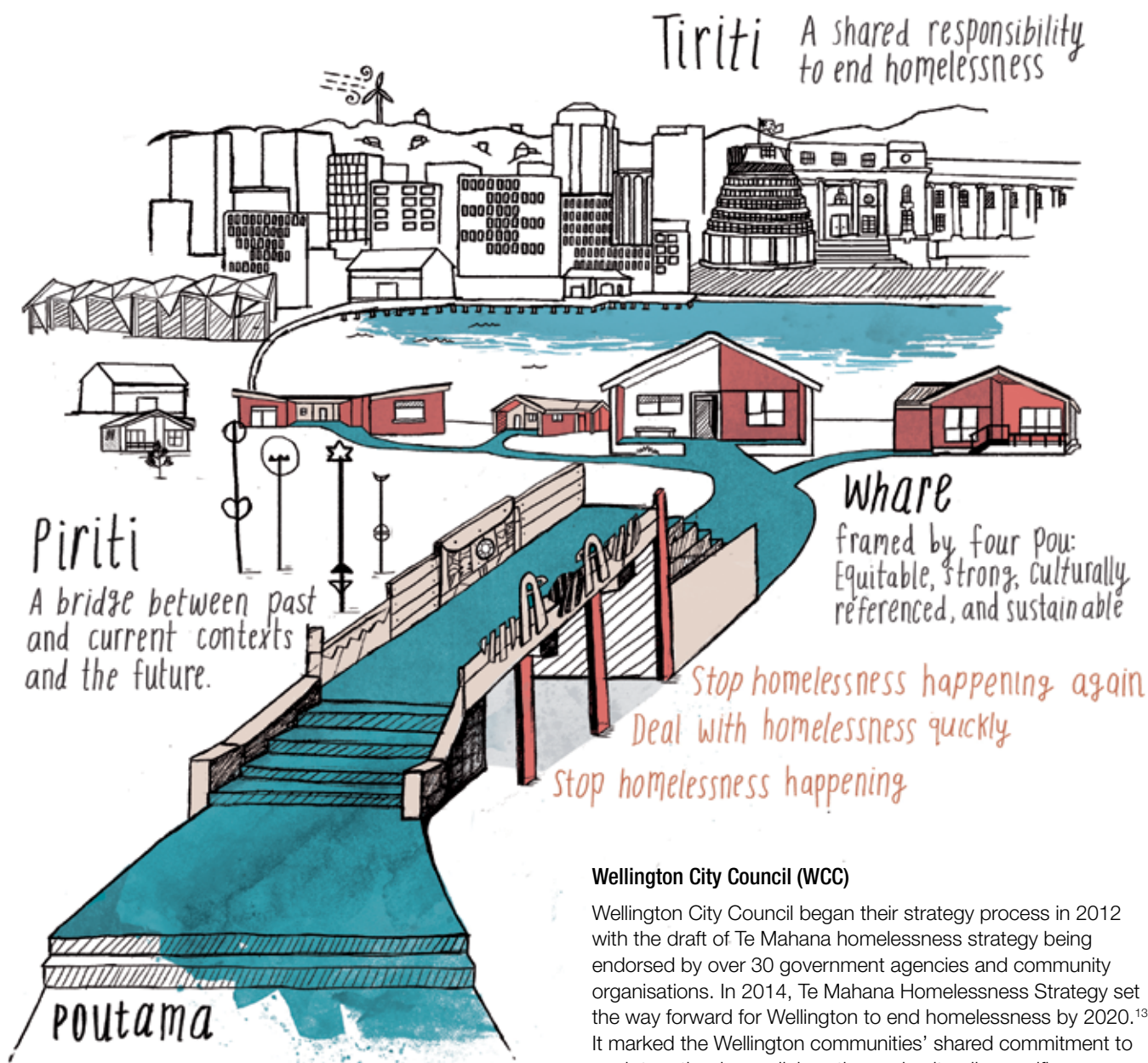
He Korowai Trust in the far north

Earlier this year, He Korowai Trust purchased an historic hotel on the main road of Kaitaia to be turned into crisis accommodation. Derelict and abandoned, this property is costing the trust upwards of \$200,000 to refurbish and will have 35 self-contained rooms.

Ricky Houghton of He Korowai Trust says:

“I walk into some real horrible situations that I would pay a million dollars never ever to hear or see. But nothing excites me more than seeing our young babies smile.”¹²

12 www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/historic-kaitaia-hotel-to-become-a-haven-for-those-in-need; Jan 5, 2016



Both Auckland and Wellington City Councils have been addressing the issue of homelessness in their cities for a number of years, working closely with their communities to develop strategies and practical responses to homelessness:

Auckland solutions

Councillor Cathy Casey, Chair of the Community Development and Safety Committee at Auckland Council, says Council's focus on homelessness over the last two years has yielded some powerful insights and uncovered alarming trends. Council is working closely with Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) to help address the growing demand for emergency housing across the region and to improve the coordination of existing services.

The initial focus of this collaboration is in improving the co-ordination of a network of emergency housing providers focused on families, and updating regional housing and homeless action plans.

Wellington City Council (WCC)

Wellington City Council began their strategy process in 2012 with the draft of Te Mahana homelessness strategy being endorsed by over 30 government agencies and community organisations. In 2014, Te Mahana Homelessness Strategy set the way forward for Wellington to end homelessness by 2020.¹³ It marked the Wellington communities' shared commitment to work together in a collaborative and culturally specific manner to end homelessness in their city.

WCC worked closely with the community to develop the strategy, and they fund several organisations and projects to deliver Te Mahana's aims. Smaller towns and cities have started to feel the impact of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in their areas, and are working in their communities to find solutions.

Tauranga City Council

Facilitated by the Tauranga City Council, community groups have been meeting in Tauranga to look at the issue of homelessness. At their recent meeting in April, they identified a number of issues such as the need to research the size and extent of homelessness in Tauranga including the total number of rough sleepers, hidden homeless and their demographics; and to identify the living environments of the homeless and associated issues impacting on them due to being homeless (e.g. health).

¹³ www.wellington.govt.nz/~media/your-council/plans-policies-and-by-laws/plans-and-policies/a-to-z/homelessness/files/2014-temahana-strategy.pdf?la=en

Rotorua Homeless Action Plan

Launched on 12th February this year, Rotorua Homeless Action Plan is the work of Lifewise Trust (who work with homeless people), Rotorua City Council, Ngati Whakaue, community and voluntary agencies. Part of the plan has included building a local-based project steering group, identifying ongoing funding solutions, and securing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between community and government agencies that clearly defines the roles of the services working to address homelessness.

Around the country, community housing providers are choosing to find different ways to address the issue of homelessness in their communities:

Housing First community of practice

Housing First is a newly established group sharing practice and learning about the concept of housing first in New Zealand. Members include agencies that are implementing and/or evaluating housing first. The concept of housing first involves moving people quickly into permanent housing with support to pursue their goals and improve their quality of life.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Some important work has started in various communities but there's still a long way to go. Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) wants to see a joined-up approach to tie funding mechanisms into what is being enabled locally. This would see Government coming to the party to support the following:

Addressing the supply of affordable housing

The supply of affordable housing needs to be addressed by adopting the community housing sector's strategy, Our Place, to ensure 50,000 more people are housed by 2020. If we don't have the affordable and social housing into which to move people, we won't be able address emergency housing requirements as it all has a flow-on effect.

Homelessness is a growing national issue yet calls for a national strategy from some groups have fallen on deaf ears. There is leadership at a regional and local level, and some local authorities are engaging with the issue but this focus is not consistent throughout the country.

Auckland Councillor Cathy Casey is on record as saying:

"Importantly, the issue is not unique to our city. The time has arrived for a national strategy led by central government in partnership with the homeless sector and local councils, and a national target to end homelessness in New Zealand."¹⁴

Data collection

Better methods to measure the extent and nature of homelessness in New Zealand for more comprehensive responses to the issue are needed. The extent of homelessness in New Zealand has not been well-researched and there is a lack of data on what emergency, transitional or other housing needs to be developed. Local authorities have acknowledged the need to identify local housing demands across the housing continuum in their areas. This will go a long way to finding ways forward.

The traditional image we have of the homeless is the single male who is sleeping rough. But this has changed and what



WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

Statistics New Zealand define homelessness as:

"A living situation where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household, or living in unsuitable housing."

People who are sleeping out on the streets and in parks are the visible homeless. People who have no security in their housing – such as those staying night by night at a shelter or backpackers – are also homeless. Living in a garage or sleep-out without electricity or water would fall into this category. If someone has no fixed address, is 'couch-surfing' or moving between friends or family members, or living in their car, they also come under the New Zealand definition of homelessness.

People in this situation have no secure housing in the same way as if you were flatting and held a tenancy. This lack of secure housing also applies to people who live in boarding houses. For some, this is their housing of choice – for others, it is a response to housing insecurity.

emergency housing providers are seeing no longer fits this image. The largest number of homeless are young people who are almost statistically invisible. And we are increasingly seeing family homelessness, especially mothers and children.

Even someone outside the sector is seeing this an issue. Social entrepreneur James Crow sees the lack of good data on this issue to be one of the reasons homelessness is not being addressed. He believes this impacts on everything downstream including policy, funding and public engagement. He has launched the Gimme Shelter campaign to raise at least \$20,000 to develop the Homeless and Rough Sleepers Health (H.A.R.S.H) survey for roll-out on World Homeless Day on 10th October this year.¹⁵

Resources

The 9th May funding announcement – and the related Cabinet paper – represents a new approach by Government. Future funding scenarios need to ensure sustainability and address systemic weaknesses in order for providers to be "funded in a sustainable way so they can focus on improving outcomes for their clients" (says Paula Bennett). This would include the cost

¹⁴ Press statement; April 15, 2016 www.scoop.co.nz/stories/social-entrepreneur-launches-pledge-me-campaign

¹⁵ www.lifewise.bronte.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Rotorua-Homeless-Action-Plan-2015-2016.pdf retrieved April 21, 2016



of the 'support' component built into the funding of emergency housing provision. However, resources are also required in other areas to enable families to enter long-term housing once they no longer require emergency housing.

CHA believes the rise in demand for emergency housing is a symptom of the lack of affordable housing options further along the housing continuum (see 'Where does emergency housing fit in the housing continuum?' below for more).

This is an issue of poverty and shows people can't afford the homes at the other end of the housing continuum in the private

market. The community housing sector is doing its best to create more affordable social housing but demand still outstrips the resources the sector has to supply these houses. As previously mentioned in this article, the sector's plan, *Our Place*, identifies the way forward for 50,000 more people housed by 2020.

Co-ordination

More engagement between Government, emergency housing providers and local communities to support and enable local strategies to address homelessness is needed. Included in this engagement would be a review of the social housing waiting list system.

Many different government agencies interact with homeless people, including Housing New Zealand Corporation, Ministry of Social Development, Child Youth and Family Services, Corrections Department and district health boards. The Cabinet paper released as part of the Government's 9th May funding announcement confirmed there is no single government department that has responsibility for the coordination of services or funding for the homeless. This contributes to the gap in the provision of services to the homeless.

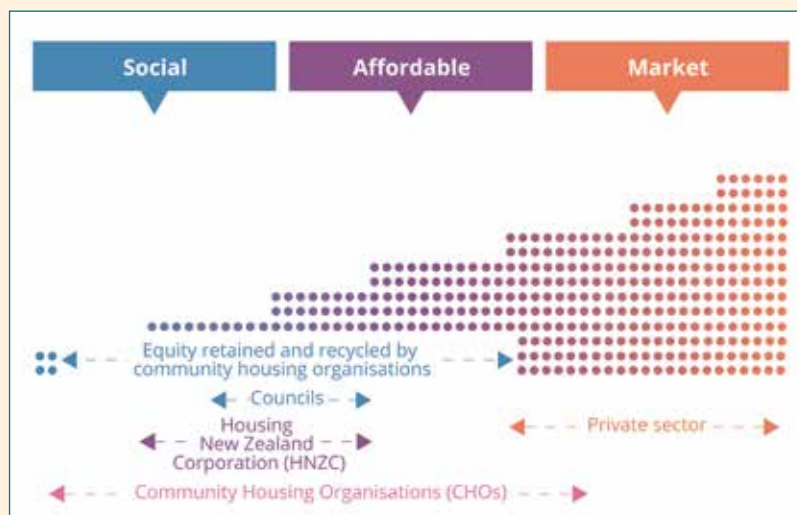
CHA's future work in this area

Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) hopes to build on the work being initiated in Auckland, connecting and supporting emergency housing providers across the regions, building resources and evidence, identifying policy opportunities and gaps, looking at best-practice and effective models in support of those groups working at the coal face.

Where does emergency housing fit in the housing continuum?

At the beginning of the housing pathway – the housing continuum – is emergency housing. Emergency shelters, night shelters, refuges and transitional housing have been the de facto response to homelessness in New Zealand for a number of years. Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) has used the concept of a housing continuum to identify the role community housing organisations have in providing homes to meet a range of housing needs in New Zealand.

The housing continuum (pictured right) shows the passage through housing from homelessness and emergency shelters (on the far left) through assisted rental in social housing to having a home in the private market. The role of social and affordable housing is to address market failures across all segments of the housing market, and to increase choice and movement between segments. The housing continuum concept helps identify these segments and provides a way to understand the state of each segment, how they are performing or failing to perform, and how they affect other parts of the continuum.



Emergency housing exists to respond to housing crises and is being provided in communities all over New Zealand. Services are struggling with rising numbers of homeless and a shortfall in secure, affordable housing into which to move people. The impacts of rising rents, low incomes and limited access to affordable housing mean we are seeing an increasing number of people that are homeless, and more and more demand on emergency housing.

Where one part of the continuum ceases to function – there is a flow-through effect to other parts of the continuum.

In conclusion

Some important work has begun that is helping to address the shortage of emergency housing and find temporary shelter for the increasing number of homeless in New Zealand. But there is still a long way to go to provide permanent homes. Much of this work has been initiated at the grassroots community level with central government only recently focusing on the issue. Real progress can only be made with the active involvement of all levels of government along with the community.

In the process of writing this article, we have been made aware, through the media and through our members' experiences, of some appalling situations where New Zealanders unable to afford rents or find a home are resorting to living in cars and garages. Recent Government announcements of funding for emergency housing providers will, for the first time, directly provide resources for the costs of accommodation. While this is necessary, it is not sufficient.

The challenge is rooted in the lack of social and affordable housing that can only be addressed by increasing the number of homes available to those on lower incomes.

Mā tini mā mano ka rapa te whai

By many, by thousands, the work (project) will be accomplished



Angie Cairncross is the Communications Co-ordinator at Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA). Angie was previously Editor of the Occupational Therapy New Zealand magazine, OT Insight. With a background in the social service sector and qualifications in editing, social policy and social work, she has spent many years working within the not-for-profit sector in New Zealand. This includes working at the interface of housing and mental health for Kites Trust in Wellington, advising on funding with NZCFA and the Department of Internal Affairs, and managing Vincent's Art Workshop.



David Zussman has worked in the social housing in both the UK and in New Zealand. His previous roles in New Zealand include Tenancy Manager with HNZA and Community Development Manager for the Talbot Park Community Renewal project. For 10 years, he was the Executive Director for emergency and community housing provider Monte Cecilia Housing Trust. David now works for CHA as Senior Programme Manager.



Chris Glaudel is the Deputy Director at Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA). Hailing from the United States, Chris brings over 20 years of experience in community development with core skills in housing finance, development, asset management and policy. He has overseen the development of affordable ownership and rental homes in central California and was responsible for the asset management of properties throughout California. A particular emphasis of his housing work has been supporting housing opportunities for persons experiencing homelessness and/or serious mental illness.

Social Housing Sector Update

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