

# Ending Homelessness in New Zealand

## Final Report of the Cross-Party Inquiry on Homelessness

10 October 2016



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Parliament Buildings, Wellington

# Foreword

*Tēnā koe, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā tatou...*

*Firstly from us here at Te Puea Memorial Marae, Manaaki Tāngata: we would like to congratulate contributing parties for taking the time to come, listen and talk to grassroots, to those who had felt the brunt of this mamae and to those who were trying to fill a gap in a broken system. In the end it was really the smiles and laughter of 104 homeless mokopuna that kept us focused and driven. The report findings and recommendations reflect the prevailing views of what we saw, heard and felt over recent months, but much more urgent attention and respect needs to be given to the disproportionate number of Māori whānau who for many reasons find themselves without a home. To us here, it was simple, our Marae was a better front door for this social service provision, our engagement style was what it needed to be, we got more done, we took away barriers and we shared the workload as a whānau. We chose the name Manaaki Tāngata for a purpose, it is what we do here at Te Puea Memorial Marae, it also reflects the legacy and expectation given to us by our tupuna: Te Puea Herangi.*

*Paimārire*

*Te Puea Memorial Marae: Manaaki Tāngata*



## Executive Summary

The hundreds of submissions and pieces of evidence presented to the Cross-Party Inquiry into Homelessness show that the level of homelessness in New Zealand is larger than any other time in recent memory and is continuing to grow. The housing crisis is causing an extreme level of homelessness, particularly in Auckland, with families forced to live on the streets, in cars, and in garages.

While New Zealand has had an underlying level of homelessness for some time, there has been a substantial increase in recent years driven by a lack of affordable housing. Many of the problems causing homelessness track back over 30 years, but the current Government has exacerbated the situation by allowing the housing crisis to spin out of control. It has the power to fix it if it is prepared to take the necessary steps.

Homelessness is no longer dominated by the stereotypical rough sleeper with mental health issues and is now more often a working family with young children. Māori and Pasifika communities have disproportionately suffered, along with new migrants who also face substantially higher rates of homelessness. Submitters told us that the vulnerability of other groups such as people with disabilities, the rainbow community and people with mental health issues is exacerbated by homelessness.

The small steps taken by the Government so far are insufficient. To address the problem the Government needs to implement a comprehensive set of measures that address the housing crisis at every level.

There needs to be a substantial scaling up of resources to tackle homelessness using Housing First and Whānau Ora approaches.

The Government must step in and address the overall housing crisis by cracking down on speculation in the property market and building significantly more affordable houses. An expansion of state and community housing to provide long term affordable rental accommodation is vital. Without an increase in permanent housing for the homeless to go into, the issue will not ultimately be addressed. We have also identified through the inquiry, a range of other practical measures to reduce homelessness. These steps make up the 20 recommendations of our Inquiry.

Fixing homelessness won't be cheap. The proposals in this report, when fully adopted, would require significant investment. However this needs to be considered against the cost of doing nothing. Submitters told us it costs around \$65,000 to keep a person homeless. When we have 4,200 people without shelter that is over \$250 million a year homelessness is costing us.

To deliver all of this, the Government must develop a nationwide strategy to end homelessness. This needs to set out exactly what it will deliver and how to end the chronic levels of homelessness that New Zealand is now facing.

The submissions to the Inquiry showed that this issue is now more important than ever, and we call on the Government to act boldly and urgently.

# Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Roll out Housing First as the primary response to severe homelessness.**
- 2. Increase the State housing stock.**
- 3. A systemic fix to the housing crisis: Build more affordable houses, reduce the cost of building a home, and tackle speculation in the property market.**
- 4. Create a national strategy to end homelessness.**
5. Support Kāinga Whenua housing and develop greater flexibility to recognise multiple owned property title.
6. Long term funding for Community Housing Providers to build houses.
7. Retain the Official Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness and collect regular data on homelessness.
8. Expand housing for the elderly.
9. Income related rent subsidies for existing community housing tenants.
10. Greater security of tenure for renters.
11. Review the Accommodation Supplement.
12. Use vacant state housing stock for emergency housing.
13. Homes for people leaving state care.
14. Information sharing between agencies addressing homelessness.
15. Work with Pasifika aiga to create Pasifika homelessness services.
16. Permanently remove the Housing New Zealand dividend.
17. More support for homelessness workers.
18. Expand agencies able to undertake needs assessments and refer tenants to emergency housing.
19. Improve the quality of rental housing.
20. Increase youth housing and services.



### **Phil Twyford**

When housing goes wrong it has terrible spillover effects on people's health, education and life chances. In the course of this inquiry we've seen and heard a great many heart breaking examples of the damage people are suffering because of the current unprecedented levels of homelessness. When families are living in cars and pensioners living out their days in suburban campgrounds it calls into question the willingness of a Government to ensure the basic human need for shelter is being met. When we get housing right, it sets a platform for people to improve their lives, and their children's lives. The inquiry has underlined for us that the solutions to this crisis are all there. We just need a Government that has the political will to implement them.



### **Marama Davidson**

All New Zealanders should have a safe place to call home. This is an issue that has been so close to my heart since long before I entered Parliament. Throughout this inquiry I have been saddened and inspired by the hundreds of stories that people have shared with us. This report brings together those voices and sets out what the Government needs to be doing to end this homelessness crisis. The Government needs to provide leadership on a whole-of-system response; working with tangata whenua, local government, the homelessness sector, community and faith groups to implement a comprehensive plan to fix homelessness. The Green Party is committed to making sure that every whānau has a warm, dry and safe home. This report sets out the way forward for that mahi and I am excited about where we can go from here.



### **Marama Fox**

The report of the Cross-Party Inquiry into Homelessness aims to bring the kōrero of whānau, their challenges, and obstacles to the forefront of the Government's agenda to make a real difference in their lives, and to the lives of those affected by homelessness.

Our Inquiry's travels provided valuable insight into the state of our nation's most vulnerable – our tamariki, our mokopuna and our families.

Whānau told us how they live day to day, balancing money between food, shelter, bills and other necessities. Others less fortunate make do with a space on someone's floor, their car or even space on the streets.

We heard the Government's actions to address homelessness are far under-resourced. Homelessness is now in our regions, where supporting infrastructure and capability is truly lacking.

Our aim is for this report to bring pressure to bear on the Government to listen and to inform better policy and decision making.

If we are to make real, meaningful changes to allow our whānau to achieve their rangatiratanga, political parties across Parliament need to commit to a comprehensive and holistic approach to resolving this homelessness crisis.

# The Inquiry

In early July 2016 National Party members on the Social Services Committee voted against a select committee hearing on homelessness. In response the Labour and Green Parties called for a Cross-Party homelessness inquiry. The Māori Party joined this call and on 14 July 2016 the three parties launched the inquiry. We launched the hearings of the inquiry at Te Puea Memorial Marae in Auckland, the focal point of much of the recent homelessness issues.

The agreed terms of reference for the inquiry were to:

1. Consider whether the official definition of homelessness needs updating, and recommend accordingly.
2. Assess the evidence on the current scale of homelessness, whether it is changing and how, and what the causes of that change might be.
3. Evaluate possible policy responses to homelessness, including international best practice, and recommend accordingly.
4. Consider how homelessness is experienced by different groups in society and evaluate policy responses that respond to that experience. For example, Māori experience of homelessness and Māori-led initiatives to respond.
5. Hear public submissions and expert evidence, particularly from those directly affected by homelessness and their advocates, and issue a written report.

The inquiry issued a call for submissions and received 482 written submissions. Following the close of written submissions, the inquiry

held five public hearings inviting submitters to present oral evidence at:

- Te Puea Marae, Auckland – 22 August, 38 submissions heard
- Christchurch – 26 August, 16 submissions heard
- Tauranga – 29 August, 22 submissions heard
- Kaitia – 31 August, 12 submissions heard
- Wellington – 5 September, 45 submissions heard

In total we heard from over 500 New Zealand organisations and individuals, and whānau. We heard from those who had or are experiencing homelessness first hand, organisations helping the homeless, academics, and concerned New Zealanders who shared their stories with us and gave suggestions for how the situation could be improved. These submitters were often sharing their personal experiences and we want to thank them all for their courage in speaking with us. We heard many times that people are impatient for the Government to take real and substantial action to make sure that all New Zealanders have a warm, safe place to call home.

**“Our data shows homelessness is increasing sharply, in particular rough sleeping is growing rapidly for those who come to DCM - that number has doubled over 5 years. We're also noticing the people who use DCM services are getting poorer, and are struggling under a more significant debt burden than previously witnessed.”**

*Stephanie McIntyre, DCM*

# Key Findings

## Definition of Homelessness

In 2009 Statistics New Zealand together with Housing New Zealand and the Ministry of Social Development came up with a comprehensive definition of homelessness.

Homelessness is defined as living situations 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 uninhabitable housing.

### **Without shelter**

Living situations that provide no shelter, or makeshift shelter, are considered as without shelter. These include living situations such as living on the street, and inhabiting improvised dwellings, such as living in a shack or a car.

### **Temporary accommodation**

Living situations are considered temporary accommodation when they provide shelter overnight, or when 24-hour accommodation is provided in a non-private dwelling, and are not intended to be lived in long-term. This includes hostels for the homeless, transitional supported accommodation for the homeless, and women's refuges. As well as people staying long-term in motor camps and boarding houses, as these are not intended for long-term accommodation.

### **Sharing accommodation**

Living situations that provide temporary accommodation for people through sharing someone else's private dwelling. The usual residents of the dwelling are not considered homeless

### **Uninhabitable housing**

Living situations where people reside in a dilapidated dwelling are considered uninhabitable housing.<sup>i</sup>

When the Government has criticised this definition as too wide, it has missed the point. As Dr Kate Amore from the University of Otago told our Wellington hearing, by international standards the definition is actually modest and conservative. Every person caught by this definition is in severe housing need and we need to provide them with a safe place to call home. No person should be forced to live in substandard accommodation with no security over where they might live tomorrow.

Sleeping in a car or a garage should not be considered an adequate home.

Since its adoption this definition has been adopted internationally by the Institute of Global Homelessness<sup>ii</sup>. During our inquiry we found strong support for retention of the existing definition as a comprehensive measure of homelessness because homelessness is much more than just rough sleeping.

# Scale of the Problem

The evidence the Inquiry heard suggests the level of homelessness in New Zealand is at crisis levels and is continuing to increase rapidly. We heard about agencies overloaded from demand and from people made homeless due to evictions, high rents, abusive partners, bureaucratic rules or approaches denying them support.

While there is an underlying level of homelessness that has always existed in New Zealand due to poverty, inequality, and gaps in social security entitlements, it appears increasing housing pressures have created an unprecedented level of homelessness. We repeatedly heard from submitters that in the last two years the level of homelessness in their area had dramatically increased driven by a lack of access to affordable housing.

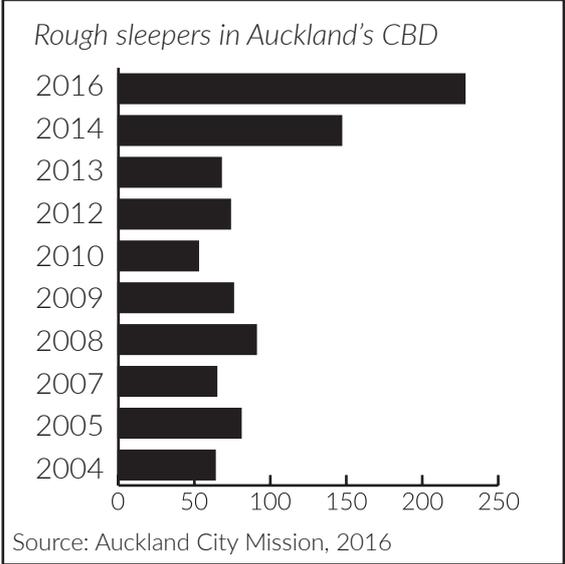
The most comprehensive measure of homelessness the Inquiry considered was from Dr Kate Amore at the University of Otago. Using the official definition of homelessness and data from the 2013 census supplemented with surveys of emergency housing providers this report found that in 2013 there were 41,207 homeless in New Zealand – 1% of the population. Of these 4,197 were either living rough or in a mobile dwelling such as a car, 8,447 were staying in emergency housing, camp grounds, boarding houses, or marae, and 28,563 were staying in severely crowded or unsuitable dwellings such as living in a garage.<sup>iii</sup>

The Government frequently cites the social housing register as a measure of homelessness. This is a severe underestimate of the level of need because tight criteria and ineffective provision mean not all of those in housing need can or will qualify for this register. We heard from several homeless or previously homeless submitters who had

not been able to gain access to the social housing register despite their situation. Even on this measure in June 2016 3,877 were waiting for social housing and this figure has been increasing since June 2015 when it was 3,352.<sup>iv</sup>

We also had many submitters provide evidence of the level of homelessness in their area and heard of several organisations' increased demand. Downtown Community Ministry (DCM) in Wellington has seen a doubling of the number of homeless people they interact with in the last five years and the situations of those they engage with are more dire. An Auckland City Mission survey this year found a record 228 people sleeping rough in the Auckland CBD, in temporary accommodation, or in hospital due to homelessness.<sup>v</sup> The Citizens Advice Bureau in 2014/15 received 3,000 enquiries for emergency housing up from 1,500 in 2010/11.<sup>vi</sup>

It is important to note that these figures have a high rate of churn. The Salvation Army in 2015 found that 51% of people who approached the Salvation Army or De Paul House for help in Auckland had been homeless for under a month while only 13% had been homeless for more than a year.<sup>vii</sup>



# Responses to Homelessness

## What we are doing now?

There are pockets of New Zealand where incredibly good support is being provided for the homeless but coverage is patchy and many people fall through the cracks. We heard from numerous community organisations who have been doing great work to house the homeless for a number of years. This work was not been matched by efforts by the Government which were widely seen as insufficient to deal with the problem.

The Inquiry heard repeatedly from these organisations and others that they were stressed and unable to cope with the level of homelessness they were facing. Wellington social worker Jude Douglas said the experience of working with the homeless is *“like a medic in a war zone with no supplies.”* Comcare Trust housing support services manager Annette Sutherland said *“Do I choose a woman who is eight months pregnant living in a car? Or do I choose somebody who is homeless in hospital and about to be discharged? These are the choices you have to make when you're running emergency housing.”*

There are a large number of people who slip through gaps in provision of our Government agencies dealing with the homeless, Housing New Zealand and the Ministry of Social Development. We heard this is partly due to a reduction in the number of places available. Housing New Zealand tenant numbers have dropped dramatically since 2011 and the increase in community housing provider places has not made up for this. It is also due in part to attitudes and processes that mean people who should be eligible for support do not receive it. The Salvation Army reported 41% of those they dealt with had no contact with the Ministry of Social Development which suggests a degree of alienation

between homeless people and the service providers who are supposed to be helping them.<sup>viii</sup> Submitters like Te Paea Marae also told us the Government sometimes dumps homeless people onto other agencies instead of housing them. Citizens Advice Bureau last year noted it was relatively common for homeless people to have already been to both HNZ and Work and Income before being referred to them.<sup>ix</sup>

Our existing organisations can make a real difference to help the homeless when there are enough temporary beds, enough resourcing for full wrap-around services, people are given the help they are entitled to, and enough permanent affordable housing is available for people to move in to. However none of these conditions are currently being met. There is no nationwide system to provide people with the homes they need. The resourcing providers are receiving is not enough to deal with the large volume of homelessness we are now facing and some people are falling through gaps in support. This means we need both an increase in funding and to look at some new approaches to help a greater number of people receive the assistance they require.

**“Our housing market is fundamentally broken - it can no longer provide decent, warm, safe houses and that basic human right, which is shelter, is no longer available to all New Zealanders.”**

*Shamubeel Eaqub, Economist*

## New approaches?

We heard in the course of the inquiry about new approaches we should be looking at to complement our existing services.

Te Puea Memorial Marae in Māngere, Auckland, where the Inquiry began its public hearing, is a good example of a new approach. Through a unique and more direct approach to housing the homeless, which didn't rely on appointments and needs assessments, the Marae was able to help 181 people who had been unable to be supported by the current system. It showed having members of the same community helping their counterparts can be a powerful motivator in getting people to seek support. While we should never have to rely on Marae as a way of addressing homelessness, Te Puea Marae helped deal with the surge in homelessness we faced over the winter and provided a potentially useful way of approaching our engagement with whānau in need. Their outstanding work has given us insight into a better way to do social services by removing the barriers that stop people seeking the help they need.

Nevil Pierse from He Kāinga Oranga pointed to the Housing First approach in Canada to help the homeless there. Under Housing First, rather than shifting the homeless through stages of housing they are placed immediately into stable long term housing and then wrap-around support is provided. Pierse noted the costs to services of a person being homeless in New Zealand were likely to be around \$65,000 per year. The Housing First programme in Canada cost around CA\$15,000 per person or NZ\$15,800 and 96% of the cost of that the Government got back in reduced costs such as fewer hospitalisations and reduced medical costs. This approach is already being trialled in

Hamilton, New Zealand, by The People's Project where it has found success. There is \$3 million of funding available to trial Housing First over the next few years but as submitters pointed out this amounts to \$750 per person who is without shelter. Accounting for existing emergency housing funding, full adoption of Housing First would likely require more than seven times the current level of funding. This model has found success overseas and in light of these results the OECD in 2015 recommended countries adopt housing first approaches.<sup>x</sup> As a submission from a member of the New Zealand Coalition to End Homelessness warned however, Housing First is not an approach that will work for all homeless people. It is primarily a measure to address those who are without shelter. We also need approaches to address groups with specific needs that a generic Housing First approach may not work for.

There is a need to try new approaches to address the homelessness needs of specific groups. We heard from numerous submitters that there is a critical lack of emergency accommodation that is suitable for youth who are alone. 24% of homeless people are under 15 and another 27% are 15-24 years old.<sup>xi</sup> We heard suggestions for several ways to better service support for youth such as the Youth Hub proposal in Christchurch.

**“In New Zealand it costs about \$65,000 to keep someone homeless, per year.”**

*Nevil Pierse, He Kāinga Oranga*

## Impacts of Homelessness

The impact of homelessness is not felt evenly by all communities with our Māori and Pasifika populations particularly affected. Research by the University of Otago showed that while 4 in every 1,000 European people are homeless, that figure is ten times as high for Pasifika at 39 per 1,000, and very high for the Māori population at 21 per 1,000. Asian individuals also had a rate of 17 per 1,000 and Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African people had a rate of 13 per 1,000.<sup>xii</sup> Our Māori and Pasifika communities have repeatedly felt the brunt of homelessness and the recent increase in rates is no different.

We heard from several submitters about the particular plight of disabled people. The shortage of suitable properties and the lower employment rate of disabled people make it difficult for them to secure housing. Eviction can also be an issue with a submitter to the Auckland hearing having had their son in a wheelchair evicted with a 90 day notice by Housing New Zealand, who provided no help to accommodate him in another accessible home. The Disabled Person's Assembly in their submission to the Inquiry, among other

measures, called for the Government to incorporate Universal Design principles into a percentage of all housing it builds and to account for the needs of disabled people in its housing strategies.

New migrants, youth, LGBTI people, and solo parents were also groups we heard were particularly affected.

The experience of homelessness flows through to many other parts of people's lives, particularly affecting children's education and their health. Addressing the housing issues impacting these families will not only reduce levels of homelessness but also help tackle wider issues such as New Zealand's rheumatic fever rates and education disparities.

Addressing homelessness will mean different approaches are needed for different communities to ensure the burden of homelessness is lifted from all groups.

*"We became homeless early this year (2016). We are a kiwi family of 4. We both worked but after an accident my partner became unable to work. Suddenly with 4 weeks notice ACC stopped payments. We had previously sold our house as we couldn't afford mortgage on ACC payments. Long story short, we ended up living in a caravan at a motor camp for three months. Every day we tried to find a rental property but kept missing out. Eventually we did find a place to live, unfortunately it's not that great as when it rains the windows leak and two of the bedrooms are constantly wet and mould grows on the carpet. My son has to sleep in the lounge as he kept getting sick. We can't move as we have signed a year lease and there are so few rentals we can afford. We are luckier than some we met while being at the camp ground. There were families in tents with young babies, at least we had a heater in our caravan."*

Anonymous submitter, Wellington

## Other Issues

In 2008 the New Zealand Coalition to End Homelessness (NZCEH) issued a report *Homelessness in Aotearoa: Issues and Recommendations*. It set out many potential options to address homelessness which the Government has not implemented. As well as considering the recommendations in the Inquiry's report, the Government should review and implement the previous recommendations of the NZCEH report.<sup>xiii</sup>

The way we need to approach to homelessness was also an issue raised during the Inquiry. Submitters recommended that the Government apply a public health framework to homelessness. This means including people who are at risk of becoming homeless in the prevention work. It was suggested the Government develop a case management approach for individuals without homes with one person as the keyworker who is willing to meet with their clients in their own environment and who is empowered to respond quickly and efficiently when the situation is of a critical nature.

It is also essential that Māori service users and providers are included in the research, definition, planning, implementation, and evaluation of homelessness prevention

services to ensure they are informed by Māori values and a kaupapa Māori Framework.

For various reasons, most areas where there are severe homelessness issues have several Government or Council buildings vacant. Several submitters suggested utilising these spaces for emergency housing support as a temporary measure should be investigated. While there can be issues with properties like this being unsuitable for people to live in, if they can be made into warm, dry, and safe housing then this is something the Government and local councils should look at doing.

**“The Marae was a better front door for this social service provision, it took away all the visual barriers and allowed Agencies and Marae whanau to get on with doing what needed to be done, so not only did we find them homes, we worked with others to resolve a wide range of issues that were specific to each whanau. No appointments, no waiting queues, no frustration.”**

*Te Puea Marae*

*“In 2012 (I was still in school) we were kicked out of our house in Auckland because the landlord was renovating and it was cheaper than finding us a hotel, so we moved in with my mother's partner. Unfortunately he got angry and abusive so we had to leave. When we contacted WINZ, they suggested a specific motel to stay at (they'd pay but we'd have to end up paying it back). What WINZ forgot to mention was that this motel was run by gangs, most of the residents had just left prison, and it was well known as the local crack den (I was 17 at the time). When we notified WINZ, they cut our benefit (we didnt need to pay rent anymore) and refused to help us further. When I asked them directly for help, they told me to 'join the army'. Thankfully an old neighbor let us sleep at their place for a while and we were able to couch surf until we eventually found somewhere (no thanks to WINZ). We shouldn't contain homelessness. We need to eradicate it.”*

Patrick Kipfer, New Plymouth

# Recommendations

There is no one solution that can fix the current levels of homelessness. There needs to be a systemic fix across the housing market to tackle the underlying drivers of the current housing pressures and a programme to meet the needs of homeless today. The ideas brought up by submitters during our consultation are below. These are the solutions that the New Zealanders need so that we can all have a safe place to call home.

## **1. Roll out Housing First as the primary response to severe homelessness**

The Government should adopt Housing First as its primary way of working with the homeless and expand coverage to the entire homeless population without shelter. Under Housing First, rather than shifting the homeless through stages of housing they are placed immediately into stable long-term housing and then wrap around support is provided. While it may be necessary to tailor the policy to the clients, Housing First approaches have had great success overseas with people experiencing severe or long-term homelessness of which there is an estimated 4,200 in New Zealand. The Government has provided \$3 million towards Housing First and \$8.8 million per year for emergency housing but this should be expanded to a full adoption that actually funds people into homes. The Canadian trials suggest this could cost up to \$16,000 per person which would mean a seven fold increase to house the entire homeless population but with costs of around \$65,000 this could mean annual savings to the Government of \$270 million per year. It is beyond the ability of this inquiry to precisely model the costs of this approach but we call on the Government to do so.

## **2. Increase the stock of State housing**

While social housing transfers can be a part of growing the community housing sector the Government must retain its current stock of state housing. The inquiry repeatedly heard evidence that reductions in state housing stock are increasing the level of homelessness in New Zealand. While the Government may wish to do occasional transfers of stock to community housing providers who can provide different services to Housing New Zealand, this needs to be done in the context of increasing the level of both state and community provider housing.

Kate Amore's research indicated 15,000 to 25,900 additional houses are needed to house the severely housing deprived population.<sup>xiv</sup> If the Government wants to eliminate homelessness, that is the scale of increase in state and community housing needed.

The Government should also consider adopting a legislative target for Housing New Zealand to require it to build a minimum of 1,000 net additional units each year that demand for social housing is not met. This would create a mechanism to ensure that the Government is always able to ensure an adequate level of social housing.

## **3. A systemic fix to the housing crisis: Build more affordable houses, reduce the cost of building a home, and tackle speculation in the property market**

The Government must build more affordable housing for homeowners, reduce the cost of building a home, and tackle speculation in the property market. The housing market

is a complex system with many parts but it is broken. The lack of affordable housing for home ownership means more pressure on the rental market, which ultimately means more renters at the lower end are unable to afford housing. The Government needs to tackle both the supply and demand of affordable housing to address this. The current policy of mixed tenure housing will not adequately provide more affordable housing if the 10% threshold remains. Simply building more houses will not reduce the problem if those new houses are priced out of affordable levels.

#### **4. Create a national strategy to end homelessness**

The Government should create a national strategy to end homelessness. Many local government organisations already have these and they are effective at ensuring there is concerted action to reduce homelessness. Government needs to lead a whole of system approach to ending homelessness. This needs to involve the homeless, local government, service providers, community housing providers, and Māori and iwi organisations. This should include identifying which Minister is accountable for the implementation of this approach and introducing a statutory obligation on that Minister to reduce homelessness. It must include mapping of existing service providers, analysis of gaps in provision, and clear targets for ending homelessness.

#### **5. Support Kāinga Whenua housing and develop greater flexibility to recognise multiple owned property title**

The Government should address the barriers to lending funds to build whānau homes on multiple owned Māori land. The Government

should also shift the administration of the Kāinga Whenua housing strategy away from Housing New Zealand to Te Puni Kōkiri. We should also develop structures for homes to be 'whānau-owned' so that children have a home for their lifetime.

#### **6. Long term funding for Community and Iwi Housing Providers to build houses**

The Government should make long term contracts with Community and Iwi Housing Providers for capital funding (10 years+). In order to increase Community Housing Providers' stock they need long term certainty of funding provision. They have certainty of operational funding from Income Related Rent Subsidies but capital funding from the Government has always been one off, sporadic, and minimal.

#### **7. Retain the Official Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness and collect regular data on homelessness**

The Government should retain the official 2009 Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness and Statistics New Zealand, working with the homeless support sector, should begin to collect official data on the level of homelessness. The evidence the inquiry received showed the current definition of homelessness is sound but there is a need for more data on what is happening to levels of homelessness to guide Government responses. In particular we need to collect more data on the level of demand, not just the occupancy of emergency shelters. The Government must also acknowledge that the Social Housing Register is not a useful indicator of demand for housing and that its current focus on rough sleepers is flawed as it ignores the "concealed homeless" living

in overcrowded accommodation with no security of tenure which are included in the official definition.

## **8. Expand Housing for the Elderly**

The Government should expand housing for the elderly. The Salvation Army showed last year that the ageing population could substantially increase the homeless numbers with up to 250,000 baby boomers likely to reach retirement age with little or no wealth.<sup>xv</sup> We heard from submitters there is already a shortage of adequate housing for the elderly and with the increase in population this will only get worse unless new supply is added.

## **9. Income related rent subsidies for existing community housing tenants**

The Government should create discretion for existing tenants of community housing providers to receive Income Related Rent Subsidies. When the Government introduced Income Related Rent Subsidies, Community Housing Providers were not able to use these for existing tenants to limit the cost of the change. This can create incentives on providers to evict tenants in order to gain access to income related rent subsidies and further pressure existing tenants already struggling to 'make the rent', which in turn furthers the cycle of homelessness.

## **10. Security of Tenure**

The Government should increase security of tenure for renters. Modernising our renting laws will help families put down roots in their communities. At present, tenants can be evicted with as little as 42 days notice and many become trapped in homelessness after facing repeated evictions. Solutions include a standard fixed term tenancy length of several years, a right of renewal for fixed

term tenancies and limiting rent increases to no more than once a year or preferably the length of lease, require transparency of calculating future rent increases, removing the ability of landlords to give a reduced notice period of 42 days in the event that they decide to sell their tenanted property, restricting 90 day notice evictions to limited reasons, and limiting the accommodation supplement to secure tenancies.

## **11. Review the Accommodation Supplement**

The Government should review the Accommodation Supplement. Submitters told us that even with the maximum accommodation supplement entitlement, they could not find an affordable rental in their area. The supplement has not kept up with rising rents and there are significant regional disparities. Submitters questioned whether the Accommodation Supplement is a productive spend and a review is needed.

## **12. Use vacant state housing stock for emergency housing**

Housing New Zealand should make some of its 2,500 vacant state houses available for emergency housing. While some are vacant for repairs many are the wrong size or in the wrong place for social housing tenants, pending sale, or awaiting redevelopment and could easily be used for emergency housing in the interim.

### **13. Ensure that people leaving state care have a home to go to**

Government agencies should have a statutory obligation to ensure that people have a home to go to when they leave hospital, prison, CYFS and foster care, or are evicted from a Housing New Zealand home. Housing New Zealand's eviction policy must be reviewed and the Government must ensure people it evicts have somewhere to go. There has been a substantial increase in Housing New Zealand evictions in recent time. While the agency needs to evict some tenants, the increase is concerning. Evictions are a major trigger of homelessness and the Government should not be allowing increased homelessness. A change in Housing New Zealand eviction policy would help people with disabilities who we heard have too often been evicted facing longer term struggles with homelessness.

### **14. Greater collaboration between agencies addressing homelessness**

The Government should create a system that allows information sharing between all agencies. Further, the Government should investigate creating a unit that brings together the vital agencies to reduce the overly bureaucratic system currently in place. Homeless people are frequently bumped around between agencies having to repeat their story each time. There is no reason why the Government could not create a common platform for reporting information to prevent this.

### **15. Work with Pasifika aiga to create Pasifika homelessness services**

The Government should work with Pasifika community groups to create Pacific support

services for the homeless. Te Puea Marae showed having Māori groups help homeless Māori delivered results beyond what generic services could in helping the homeless. The Pacific community also has very high levels of homelessness and existing community networks such as Pacific church groups that could be tapped into.

### **16. Permanently remove Housing New Zealand dividend**

Housing New Zealand is currently run as a state owned enterprise meaning it has to pay dividends to the Government and tax on its income. This reduces the amount of money it is able to spend on housing people and therefore increases the shortage of affordable housing. Making Housing New Zealand a public service would permanently remove its requirements to pay a dividend or tax and mean it could focus more on housing people in need.

### **17. More support for homelessness workers**

The Government should commit funds to support and develop people who work with the homeless to reduce burnout and 'compassion fatigue'. We heard from many working with the homeless that there was simply no support for them as people to deal with the issues they face working in the sector. This needs to change.

### **18. Expand the agencies able to undertake needs assessments and refer tenants to emergency housing**

The Government should expand the number of agencies able to undertake needs assessments and refer tenants to emergency housing to other agencies they commonly approach such as Housing New Zealand, the

Ministry of Health, the Police, and approved NGOs. The inquiry heard of many people who were bounced around between agencies to get support which means people fall through the cracks. People should be housed by their first point of contact where possible.

### **19. Improve the quality of rental housing**

The Government should implement new measures to improve the quality of rental housing and boarding houses, such as a rental Warrant of Fitness or stronger, more comprehensive standards. The inquiry heard from several submitters who ended up homeless after being forced to move from a home which was making them or their children sick. The Government has introduced new insulation standards but these provide large exceptions for properties fitted with insulated to old standards, have limited enforcement, and do not address fundamental issues that create mould in properties around heating, draughts, and ventilation.

### **20. Increase Youth Housing and Services**

The Government needs to ensure there is youth housing and services available in every major town and city, especially for rainbow youth. There is a high number of vulnerable homeless youth and there are virtually no specialist services available for them. We heard suggestions for several ways to better service support for youth such as the Youth Hub proposal in Christchurch.

**“Call it what you want, all of our whānau rawakore got ‘priced’ out of the housing market, this meant they had no options. All they could afford was an overcrowded accommodation or in one case a flash van as a ‘mobile home’”**

*Te Paea Marae*

*“My welcome at my friends homes had been worn out so I started sleeping in my car. I would leave work at three in the morning, park outside my ex-partners house and go to sleep. I would get up at 7am to move to another area before he got up to go to work. I would drive around for a while and go visit friends, families or go to the library to go on the computers to look at houses I knew I couldn't afford.”*

Rangi Wetere-Cook, Auckland

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