



Spotlight on homelessness and emergency housing

Imagine 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?

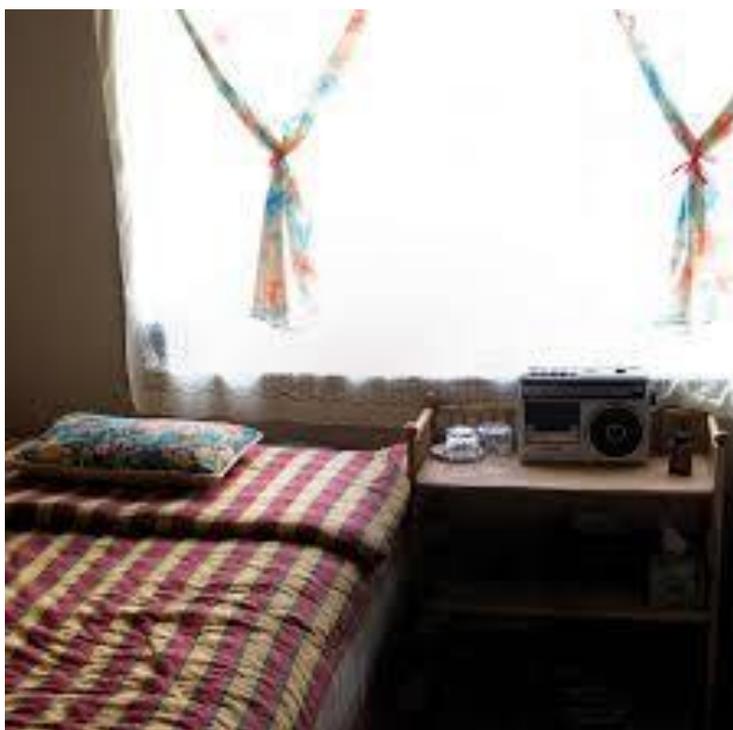
Emergency housing providers are having to deal with these situations every day, all over the country, but particularly in Auckland. There's more demand for emergency housing than there has ever been and providers are distressed. And while local communities are coming together to find solutions we still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

In this article, written in May 2016 by Community Housing Aotearoa, we explore the scale and issue of homelessness looking at what some communities and emergency housing providers are experiencing. We look at a number of the practical responses from the community housing sector and 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 Kaitiaki 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 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 Maori that will reconnect them spiritually, physically and culturally with their whanau, hapu and iwi. “



The scale of the issue in New Zealand

We were all shocked last year to learn of the [Citizen's Advice Bureau's \(CAB\) figures on](#) clients' need for emergency accommodation. Their November 2015 in-depth analysis of over 2000 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 that Māori and younger people under 30 years were disproportionately represented in these figures. Their research also showed that in the five years to the end of June 2015, emergency housing was their fastest growing area of enquiry. The number of enquiries in this area had doubled since 2010. CAB will be carrying out further analysis of enquiry data later this year.

[In a survey over three months](#) 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. And 47 per cent (568) of these homeless people were children. The research found that for families without housing, it is common for them to be homeless for up to six months before the situation can be resolved. More than 49% of the respondents had not been in contact with the Ministry of Social Development.

Amore et al (2013) used 2006 census data to estimate that nationally up to 34,000 people 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% of this group based in Auckland. This was an increase of 9% from the 2001 figures and we are awaiting the analysis of the 2013 figures.

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

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

Experiences over the country

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

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.

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 that during January and February this year they received around 100 inquiries for accommodation. Usually they receive about 240 inquiries over the entire year (Northern Advocate; March 8; 2016).



In an earlier newsletter 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, you can [read the article here](#). The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment estimated the number of Christchurch residents experiencing "housing insecurity" between 5500 and 7400 in March 2013 (Stuff; Feb 5, 2016).

Fairfax NZ/ Help for the Homeless founder Amy Burke says there remains a lack of affordable housing in Christchurch

In April 2014 the **Tauranga Moana** Nightshelter Trust estimated the chronic street homeless numbered 30-40 (Pay of Plenty Times, April 23, 2014).

Figures provided by the Salvation Army to the Southland Times for the year ended June 30, 2013, 164 people fitted the definition of being homeless in **Invercargill** (Southland Times; 19 Nov, 2013)

[Emergency housing providers](#) around the country are saying there are major delays in clients exiting emergency housing and finding access to permanent housing. 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's delays in getting permanent housing. We've got one young mother who came to us from the hospital with her new born baby, she's been with us for nine months; and another mum and her six children have been with us for fourteen months because there's no house big enough for the family.

Jan says that 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 from MSD 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 that *'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.'* (Newshub, 12 January 2016)

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

In March 2015 the Ministry of Social Development 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. While formal feedback from the online survey has not been made to date, on 9 May, Government announced new funding for emergency housing.

Government announced that it 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 3000 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 NGOs to provide about 3000 emergency housing places each year. This means 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.
- 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.

This is great news for emergency housing providers struggling to meet demands every day. But CHA are 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 as to 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
- \$2 million allocated for new emergency provision in Auckland, for 120 places over 2 years. Emerge Aotearoa were announced as one of the providers receiving this funding in March 2016 and at least one other provider was in negotiations with Government.

CHA expect more announcements from Government around emergency housing soon

and existing emergency housing providers await announcements on the details of the new funding eagerly as they continue to cope with increasing demands. CHA are 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 is nowhere near the level needed to sustain the services, and some providers do not receive anything.

David Zussman, CHA Senior Programme Manager, comments that financial stress is not the only issue emergency housing providers report. Difficulty in getting clients housed once they have completed the 10-12 weeks programmes are completed is problematic, with some families waiting of eight to ten 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,” he says. Ultimately we want 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 158 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 said their aim was to end homelessness - not to manage it. Instead, the People's Project has taken a housing first approach, she said. *“Working with people to get people into a house, and then seeing what they need, to actually be able to live well within that house.”* We will be profiling the People’s Project in our next newsletter.



He Korowai Trust in the far North

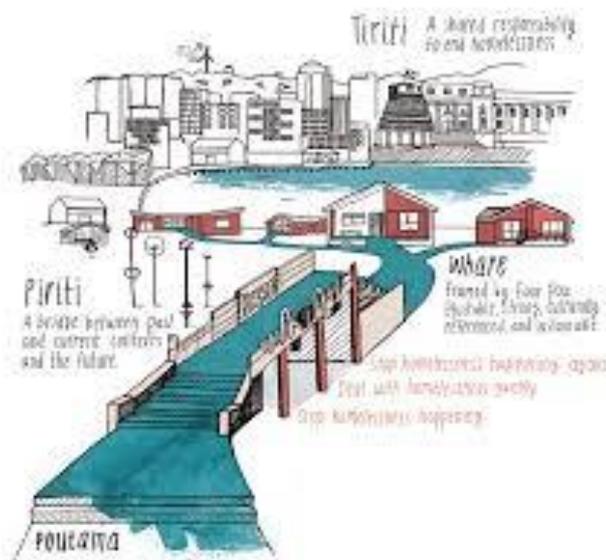
Earlier this year He Korowai Trust purchased an historic hotel on the main road of Kaitaia to be turned into crisis accommodation. Derelict and abandoned, it's costing the trust upwards of \$200,000 to turn it around and will have 35 self-contained rooms. *“I walk into some real horrible situations that I would pay a million dollars never ever to hear or see. But nothing excites me more than seeing our young babies smile,”* says Ricky Houghton of He Korowai Trust (One News; retrieved 14/4/16).

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 the council’s focus on homelessness over the last two years has yielded some powerful insights and uncovered alarming trends. The council are working closely with Community Housing Aotearoa 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 in 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. 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 decided issues including to research the size and extent of homelessness in Tauranga; the total number of rough sleepers, hidden homeless and demographics; identify the living environments of the homeless; and associated issues impacting on them due to being homeless, e.g. health.

[Rotorua homeless action plan](#)

This was launched on 12th February, 2016. Lifewise Trust, who work with the homeless in Auckland, have been working with the Rotorua City Council, Ngati Whakaue, community and voluntary agencies to develop a local Homeless Action Plan. This included building a locally based project steering group, agreeing on a plan, 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.

And 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

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

There will be a focus on Housing First in the May 26 Newsletter with a profile of the Hamilton People's Project and additional information on the Housing First model.

Where to from here?

Some important work has started in various communities but there's still a long way to go. CHA want 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

Adopting the community housing sectors strategy **Our Place** to ensure 50,000 more people are housed by 2020. If we don't have the affordable and social housing to move people into we won't address emergency housing requirements-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 Cath 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.”* (Press statement; March 30, 2016).

Data collection

Better methods of measuring the extent and nature of homelessness in New Zealand to enable more comprehensive responses to the issue is 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 identified the need for establishing what local housing demands there are across the housing continuum in their areas. This will go a long way to identify ways forward.

The traditional image we have of the homeless is the single male who is sleeping rough. But this has changed and what 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 in turn affects 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 October 10th this year.

Resources

The 9 May funding announcement and related Cabinet paper represents a new approach by Government. Future funding scenarios need to ensure sustainability and address systemic weaknesses to ensure: *“Providers are funded in a sustainable way so they can focus on improving outcomes for their clients,”* as Paula Bennett has commented. This would include the cost 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 believe that the rise in demand for emergency housing is a symptom of the lack of affordable housing options further along the housing continuum – see more on this in the addendum.

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 are doing its best to create more affordable and social housing but demand still outstrips the resources the sector have to supply these houses. 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. Included in this 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, as well as District Health Boards. The Cabinet paper released as part of the Government's 9 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

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.

This article has been prepared by Angie Cairncross, David Zussman, and Chris Glaudel, May 2016 at Community Housing Aotearoa. Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) is the peak body for New Zealand's community housing sector. It represents not-for-profits and organisations providing affordable and social housing: from emergency housing providers, community housing groups and iwi housing to tenancy advice services, local authority housing providers and professional organisations supporting the sector.

Addendum:

Where does emergency housing fit in the housing continuum

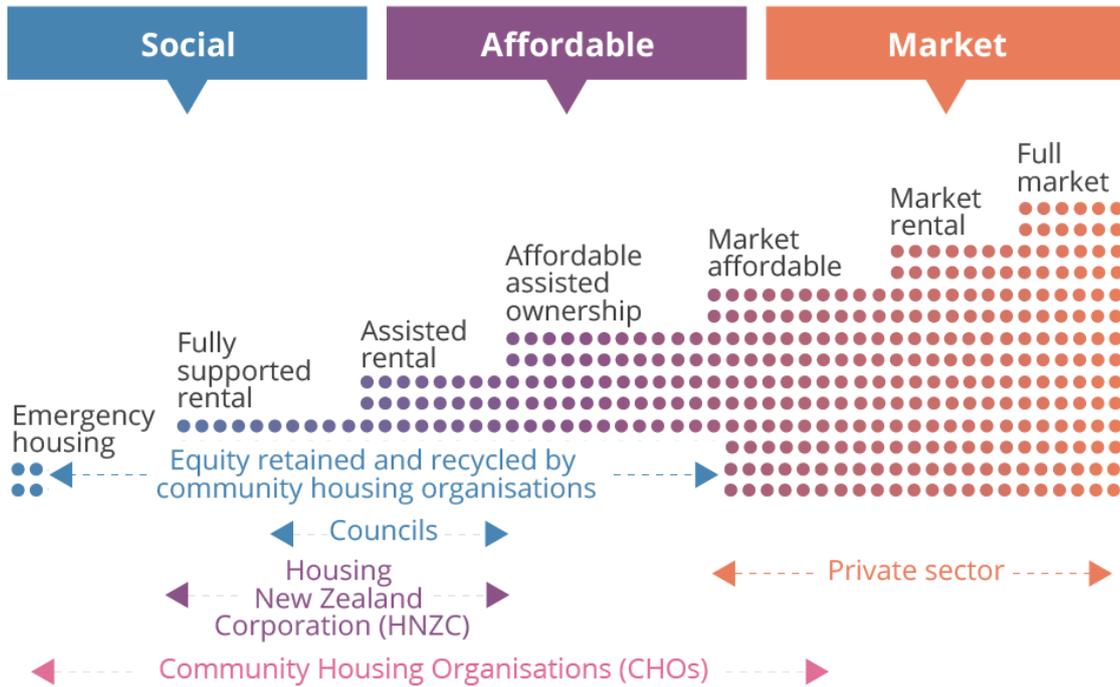
At the beginning of the housing pathway – the housing continuum- is emergency housing. Emergency shelters, night shelters, refuges and transitional housing have been the de facto response to homelessness in this country for a number of years.

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, seen below, 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 to 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 for people to move into. The impacts of rising rents, low incomes and limited access to affordable housing mean that 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.

The Housing Continuum



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