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**The Royal Australasian College of
Physicians' submission on Kāinga Ora –
Homes and Communities Bill**

July 2019

Introduction

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Bill (the Bill).

The RACP works across more than 40 medical specialties to educate, innovate and advocate for excellence in health and medical care. Working with our senior members, the RACP trains the next generation of specialists, while playing a lead role in developing world best practice models of care. We also draw on the skills of our members, to develop policies that promote a healthier society. By working together, our members advance the interest of our profession, our patients and the broader community.

Key points

- Housing is a social determinant of health – when housing is of poor quality health and wellbeing are impacted
- The Bill signals positive changes to ensuring health and wellbeing are functions of the State public housing provider
- “Warm, dry and healthy” public housing and an emphasis on tenants leading “lives with dignity” are applauded
- The commitment to the needs and rights of Māori for housing is positive
- This Bill and other legislation focused on wellbeing would be strengthened by a consistent definition of wellbeing across government activity

Healthy housing - #MakingItTheNorm

In 2017, the RACP launched its #MakeItTheNorm campaign, calling for Healthy Housing, Good Work and Whānau Wellbeing to be the norm for all people, whānau and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our campaign title drew on Prime Minister Norman Kirk’s famous words – “All people want is somewhere to live, someone to love, somewhere to work and something to hope for”^{1 2}.

The RACP sees housing, good work and whānau health and wellbeing as key determinants in achieving health equity. Ensuring our homes are warm, dry and safe for children and all whānau members is a core component, as healthy housing encompasses both the physical and social environment of a home. Homes must be insulated, able to be ventilated and control for moisture and dampness.

New Zealand’s housing stock is predominantly timber-clad single-level dwellings, with the majority constructed prior to the introduction of mandatory insulation in 1978. Many houses require extensive upgrading, particularly in the residential tenancy sector, to ensure they are compliant with new Healthy Homes Standards. The health impacts of damp, cold, and mould-ridden houses are significant,

¹ Good Work is work that is engaging, fair, respectful and balances job demand, autonomy and job security. It is characterised by safe and healthy work practices and it strikes a balance between the interests of individuals, employers and society. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. The health benefits of Good Work. Sydney: Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2013. Available from <https://www.racp.edu.au/advocacy/division-faculty-and-chapter-priorities/faculty-of-occupational-environmental-medicine/health-benefits-of-good-work>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

² The Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Make it the Norm: equity through the Social Determinants of Health. Sydney: The Royal Australasian College of Physicians; 2017. Available from <https://www.racp.edu.au/fellows/resources/new-zealand-resources/new-zealand-election-statement-2017>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

debilitating, and in the case of conditions like bronchiectasis and rheumatic fever, life-long. These health conditions will inhibit attendance at school or work, affecting income and education, and impact mental health and wellbeing.

In 2019, the RACP continues to take stock of government progress against our recommendations in our key domains of healthy housing, good work and whānau wellbeing – is Aotearoa New Zealand #MakingItTheNorm?

Response to the Bill

The RACP welcomes the announcement of the Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Bill, which disestablishes Housing New Zealand Corporation and its development subsidiary HLC Limited and enacts Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities as a Crown entity. As an Agency, Kāinga Ora's focus will not only have the provision of healthy, affordable housing as a central tenet of its purpose, but also contributing to the development of sustainable, thriving communities that promote wellbeing.

While this is a bold and aspirational goal, building holistic understandings of the critical importance of the integration of housing and urban development is essential. The desired integration – resulting in homes and communities which are health-promoting, safe, accessible and connected – must be understood and supported across government departments, between central and local government, and by society.

Government Policy Statement on Housing and Urban Development

The RACP is encouraged by the introduction under the Bill for Kāinga Ora to present a policy statement on housing and urban development, and supports its intentions, particularly its commitment to work closely and in partnership with Māori.

Functions and operating principles of Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities

The RACP welcomes the functions outlined in the Bill, notably:

Public housing solutions that contribute positively to wellbeing

- (a) Providing good quality, warm, dry and healthy rental housing
- (b) Supporting tenants –
 - (i) To be well-connected to their communities
 - (ii) To lead lives with dignity and the greatest degree of independence possible

The RACP recommends the Select Committee consider amending this heading to read “Public housing solutions that contribute positively to *health and* wellbeing. Public housing should be health-promoting, not health-impacting.

Housing supply meets needs

- (e) managing its housing stock prudently, including upgrading and managing its housing to ensure it remains fit for purpose
- (f) ensuring that the housing it develops is appropriately mixed (with public, affordable, and market housing) and is of good quality:

Well-functioning urban environments

- (g) Ensuring its urban development contains quality infrastructure and amenities that support community needs
- (h) Assisting communities where it has housing stock to develop and thrive as cohesive and safe places to live

The RACP calls for communities and urban environments to be health-promoting: offering children, parents, young people and older people the opportunity to navigate their neighbourhoods through active transport and enable effective and accessible public transport links. A health-promoting community enables citizens to live healthy lives and maintain healthy lifestyles. Healthy communities meet the basic needs of citizens, are committed to the quality and sustainability of the environment, have adequate levels of economic and social development, health and social equity, and facilitate relationships that are supportive and respectful^{3 4}.

Importance of partnership with tangata whenua

The RACP notes the particular focus on effective partnership and collaboration with Māori as a welcome priority in Kāinga Ora, including recognition of taonga under Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi such as ancestral lands, water, sites wāhi tapu and other taonga.

The College supports a needs and rights-based approach to achieve Māori health equity, as evidenced in the persistent disparities in health outcomes experienced by tangata whenua, and the guarantee of the right to health for Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We acknowledge the evidence detailing the impact of poor housing and other social determinants on Hauora Māori (Māori health and wellbeing), by the Waitangi Tribunal's recent report *Hauora: Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry*⁵.

Reference to the Crown's social objectives

The Bill is evidence of the work signalled by the previous Minister of Housing to enshrine the Crown's social objectives in legislation⁶. There is alignment between the functions of Kāinga Ora as outlined in the Bill and the social objectives of Housing New Zealand as identified by the Minister in September 2018.

Interpretation

Wellbeing is a difficult concept to define, and difficult to measure progress against. While the College welcomes the positive framing and inclusion of wellbeing as a key determinant, we find there is little

³ Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Health in All Policies. Position statement. [Internet] 2016; Sydney: Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Available from <https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/health-in-all-policies-position-statement.pdf>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

⁴ Rudolph L, Caplan J, Mitchell C, Ben-Moshe K, Dillon L. Health in All Policies: Improving health through intersectoral collaboration. Discussion paper. [Internet] 2013; Washington: Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. Available from <http://www.phi.org/resources/?resource=health-in-all-policies-improving-health-through-intersectoral-collaboration>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

⁵ Waitangi Tribunal. *Hauora: Report on Stage One of the Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry*. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal; 2019. Available from <https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz/inquiries/kaupapa-inquiries/health-services-and-outcomes-inquiry/>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

⁶ Housing NZ social objectives to be legislated. Media release 21 September 2018. Available from <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/housing-nz-social-objectives-be-legislated>. Accessed 4 July 2019.

consensus on what the government means by wellbeing. The definition of health in the Constitution of the World Health Organization links health and wellbeing:

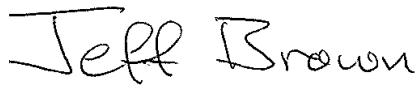
Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity⁷.

The RACP encourages the Select Committee to recommend this Bill and other legislative and regulatory instruments adopt a definition of wellbeing to ensure consistency across diverse programmes of activity.

Conclusion

The RACP thanks the Environment Select Committee for the opportunity to provide feedback on this consultation. We do not wish to make an in-person submission to the Select Committee. To discuss this submission further, please contact the NZ Policy and Advocacy Unit at policy@racp.org.nz.

Nāku noa, nā



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⁷ World Health Organization. Constitution of the World Health Organization. April 1948. Available from <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>. Accessed 4 July 2019.