

Health equity in Aotearoa has been left unaddressed for far too long. The longer we ignore it, the more urgent the issues will become and the greater the resources which are lost in terms of human potential and lives. The RACP is committed to making health the norm for all, now.

Our members look beyond a three-year election cycle for the resources to make and sustain the changes urgently needed to realise the promises of Te Tiriti o Waitangi – equity, active protection, and tino rangatiratanga for all people of Aotearoa. We recognise that good health is supported by much more than infrastructure or staff: we need to look at the factors that promote healthiness, and work outside our traditional borders to advocate, collaborate and create.

The RACP's vision for health equity in Aotearoa NZ is enduring. We want to see a more fair and just society for the year when Aotearoa commemorates the bicentennial of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 2040.

### Our vision for Aotearoa in 2040: Housing is fair

- The system is welcoming and supportive to those experiencing any form of homelessness, and addiction needs are embraced and supported by services
- Residential Tenancies are based on an integrated rental system structure where homes are safe and healthy, and tenants have secure tenure

### RACP recommendations to make healthy housing the norm

- Interest from Residential Tenancies Bonds are invested in Tenancy Advocacy services
- The Tenancy system in Aotearoa is reoriented towards an integrated rental system, where there is less difference between private and public sector dwellings
- Housing First programmes are provided nationally as an urgent priority to support people with complex housing, health and/or addiction needs
- Emergency housing placements in motels are a last resort – the emphasis is on healthy, safe, and secure tenancies

Jo is 35 and lives in a regional town. Jo left an abusive relationship. The local women's refuge had no room, and she has been using all her connections to find somewhere to stay. While she waits for emergency housing Jo is sleeping on friends' couches, with her kids placed with foster families.

Jo's goal is to have a house where she and the kids are safe. She's doing her best to save a bond at her minimum wage job, because she doesn't know when the public housing system will come through for her.



*“Being homeless has kicked the ground out from under me. Everything is unstable. It makes everything harder: working, keeping in touch with my kids, saving money for our new place. My friends are so kind to let me stay, but they have a big whānau – they need the extra space”*

**JO ON HOMELESSNESS**

### Nearly 1 per cent of our population is homeless

The number of people experiencing severe housing deprivation is conservatively estimated at 41,644 people – approximately 0.9 per cent of the population. Compared with previous 2013 Census data analysis, it is estimated that severe housing deprivation has increased by 0.7 per cent per 10,000 population – an increase of around 4,400 people. This means that many people in Aotearoa NZ are struggling to find safe housing, and do not have a home to call their own.

### Motels are not solutions for our housing crisis

Our emergency housing system places whānau in desperate need of permanent housing in motels, only intended for short term stays, until more permanent accommodation could be arranged. The current system does not meet the government's own definition of homelessness: "rare, brief and non-recurring". Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants are intended to cover seven days' accommodation - the average emergency housing stay in a motel is seven weeks.

Reducing the reliance on motels as emergency accommodation must be a priority. Motels are only a stop-gap. The emphasis must be on providing safe, warm, dry and affordable homes for whānau. The reliance on motels to support our most vulnerable whānau is indicative of the scale of the issue: it has moved, as UN Special Rapporteur said in February 2020, from a housing crisis to a human rights crisis.

Anna is 25 and was made redundant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Living in the city, housing costs are high and while she lives with three flatmates, her rent and bills takes up most of her income from her COVID-19 Income Relief Payments, which will end in September.

Anna's marketing job gave her a good income and she was enjoying living in the inner city with many food and entertainment options. She had no savings and hasn't been able to find a new job – despite applying for dozens since her redundancy. She's worried they will be evicted if they miss rent payments, especially once they received notice that the landlord was increasing the rent by \$40 a week once the COVID-19 Rent Freeze ends.



“*My anxiety is in overdrive right now. If I can't find a job before my Income Relief payments run out, I have to go on Jobseeker Support, and move out of my flat. We just got a letter to say the rent is going up too*”

**ANNA ON THE COSTS OF HOUSING**

### Aotearoa NZ needs a fair tenancy system

One in three New Zealanders are renters in the private rental market, yet our housing system favours home ownership as the only desirable option, despite the most 'affordable' homes being priced many times the average income. Some cosmetic changes have been made to the Residential Tenancies Act 1986. Our rental system remains stuck in the 1980s, resulting in a lightly-regulated, market-driven industry. Tenants have few options other than the Tenancy Tribunal. Many tenants are unaware of their rights as renters, or of the Tribunal's functions.

The imbalance of power is starkly illustrated through Tribunal application data, where 90 per cent of applications arise from property owners, effectively rendering it a Landlords' Tribunal. The Tribunal is also funded by interest generated from tenancy bonds lodged by the property owner or manager, meaning that tenants' funds are being used to support a system from which landlords derive the most benefit.

Non-government organisations, including Community Law, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and small Tenants' Associations provide the majority of advocacy, and report high demand for their services. For tenants in smaller towns, there are even fewer services available. Regardless of location, reports show tenants throughout Aotearoa NZ are reluctant to take a case to the Tenancy Tribunal. They fear retaliation and retribution, including being evicted. There needs to be systemic change through long-term reorientation of the rental market and the modernisation of the Residential Tenancies Act. A comprehensive national tenancy advocacy service that is free to access must be an urgent priority for housing reform.