

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: A healthy home is a human right

- High-quality public housing meets the needs of Aotearoa NZ
- Housing is affordable

RACP recommendations to make healthy housing the norm

- Prioritise building of public housing as an essential infrastructure project in the economic recovery
- All new public housing is built to universal design standards
- Build greater numbers of larger houses, or smaller properties in close proximity to one another to support whānau connectedness while giving people space to live, play and learn

Nina is 4 years old. She's in hospital with Rheumatic Fever. Nina's house is crowded: there are 13 in her whānau, including her siblings, parents, Nanny and Poppa, aunts and cousins. Everyone squeezes into a three bedroom house – the living room is used as a sleeping space, and Nina's aunt and cousins slept in the garage through the first lockdown in April. Nina shares a bedroom with three of her siblings and the sisters top and tail in a set of bunkbeds.

Nina had complained of a sore throat, as had some of the other children in the house during the weeks of lockdown. When the other children recovered after a few days, her parents thought she would be okay – she was playing with her siblings, eating, and did not show any symptoms other than her sore throat. One day Nina was slow to wake up: she was tired and lethargic, and said her arms and legs were hurting her. She felt hot and was flushed.

Nina and her whānau went to the hospital Emergency Department, and imaging showed inflammation in Nina's heart. Nina was admitted to the Paediatrics ward, and once a diagnosis of Rheumatic Fever was confirmed, she was started on antibiotics.



“We all get sick in this house, it's so damp and cold. I don't want my sister-in-law and her kids sleeping in the garage, but they don't have anywhere else to go – they are on all the waitlists already”

NINA'S MUM SHANNON

Whānau in overcrowded homes are our hidden homeless

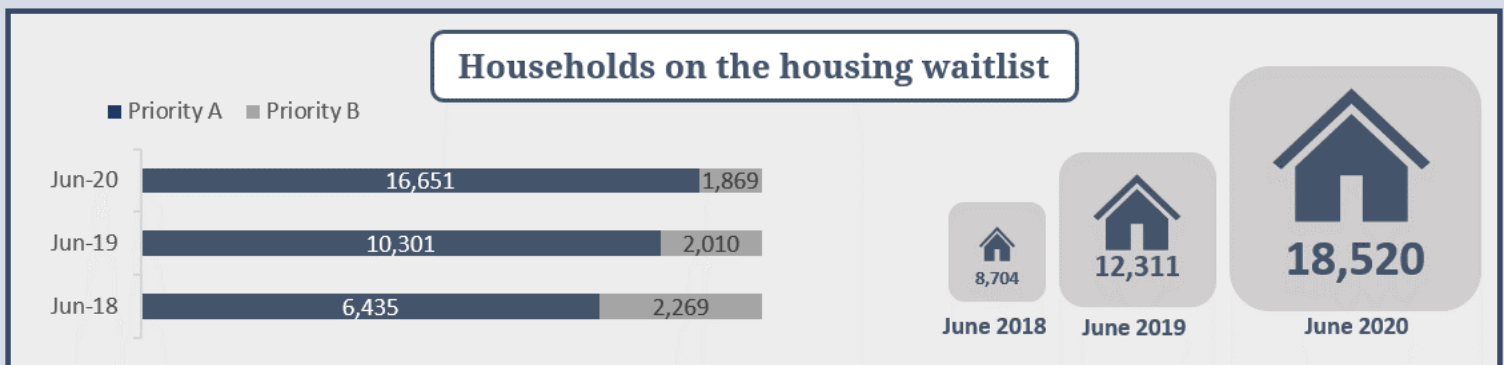
Household crowding is Aotearoa NZ's most dominant form of homelessness affecting more than 30,000 people.

When housing affordability is low and supply limited, many whānau on low incomes are forced to crowd together and turn to unsuitable forms of housing, like garages, sheds, caravans, and cars. Doubling or tripling up the number of families in a home will share the costs of rent but increases the risk of infectious diseases spreading.

Infections such as acute rheumatic fever, meningococcal disease, tuberculosis, and skin infections are all strongly linked to household overcrowding. Overcrowding can also be a factor in worsening mental wellbeing through loss of privacy and levels of noise. Family violence is also aggravated by overcrowded conditions, particularly where stress levels are high.

Urgent need for public housing

The demand for social housing has surged to 18,520 households in June 2020. Around 84 per cent of these are Priority A, or in the most urgent need. A social housing building programme has progressed, but has not moved fast enough to meet the waves of need as whānau struggle to find affordable housing. Since June 2018, 2,813 new state houses have been built. Aotearoa NZ needs at least six times this number to meet existing demand, which is only projected to increase as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.



Housing must be accessible

Just 2 per cent of Aotearoa NZ's housing meets accessibility standards.

Housing that meets the needs of disabled people is urgently needed. 17 per cent of people with disabilities reported a need for housing modifications, with the greatest need for changes in the bathroom. The need is most pronounced in public housing. Over 900 disabled people and their families are waiting for housing which meets their accessibility needs. This means disabled people are living in homes that may be hazardous.

The RACP calls for all new public housing to be built to universal design standards. Houses that use universal design standards can be accessed, understood and used by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. This means that homes are inclusive by design, and importantly recognises that needs change over time. People's accessibility and mobility needs may increase, particularly as they age, or if they are recovering from injury or illness.

Peter is 72. He lives alone in a rural area.

Peter had a farm accident, which forced him to retire early. He gets headaches and his arthritis has worsened, making moving around his house challenging. As his mobility has decreased, Peter has found it harder to step over the side of the bath to use the shower. Outside his house, the handrail leading to his front steps needs fixing, and the steps are slippery with moss. Peter relies on his walking stick but is worried about falling.



“My accident set things back for me. Even though it was years ago, I still get headaches and dizzy spells. I worry I am going to have a fall one of these days”

PETER'S ACCIDENT AFFECTS HIS MOBILITY