
TOWARDS AN AGREED MINIMUM HOUSING PERFORMANCE STANDARD FOR RENTALS– RESULTS FROM NEW ZEALAND’S FIRST WARRANT OF FITNESS FIELD TEST

Professor Philippa Howden Chapman 1 <presenting author is underlined>

Damon Birchfield 2

Zach Rissel 3

Leigh Featherstone 4

Matthew Cutler-Welsh 5

Dr Julie Bennett 6

Tony Moore 7

Anne Gray 8

Megan Nagel 9

Michelle Elborn 10

1. University of Otago
2. Auckland Council
3. Wellington City Council
4. NZ Green Building Council
5. NZ Green Building Council
6. University of Otago
7. Christchurch City Council
8. Dunedin City Council
9. Accident Compensation Corporation
10. Tauranga City Council

Housing is one of the key material determinants of health and well-being; shelter is a fundamental human need. New Zealand housing is of a lower quality than most OECD countries and several national surveys and research studies have shown that private rental housing is in poorer condition than either social housing, or houses that are owner occupied. Living in substandard housing is seriously damaging the health of New Zealanders with children from low-income families, Māori and Pacific peoples disproportionately affected. Over 70% of all children who are in poverty live in rental accommodation (20% in Housing New Zealand housing and 50% in private rentals).

The current regulatory arrangements for rental housing have not been amended since 1947. Today these guidelines are seen by many as inadequate including the Children’s Commission’s Expert Working Group on Solutions to Child Poverty; the group has recommended the introduction of a Rental Housing Warrant of Fitness (WOF), as a means to addressing the health and safety of a large proportion of children living in poor quality private rental housing.

Councils are interested in developing a WOF tool that will assist in improving the quality of the rental housing stock, which would result in improved health outcomes and a reduction in injuries occurring in the home. A WOF for housing would provide a minimum standard for rental dwellings and would provide an information tool for tenants and landlords to understand the performance and safety of a dwelling.

This paper explores the results from New Zealand's first field test of a housing WOF method that includes houses from five regions throughout New Zealand involving more than 125 homes. It also includes a consideration of the particulars included in the assessment methodology.

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<Insert the presenting authors name and email> Professor Philippa Howden Chapman – philippa.howden-chapman@otago.ac.nz

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