

10 July 2019

Committee Secretariat
Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Re: Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Bill

Tēnā koe,

The Wellington Regional Healthy Housing Response Group (RHHRG) would like to formally register support for the Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities Bill.

A warm dry home is the foundation of health and wellbeing throughout life¹. Housing is an important underlying determinant of health, with housing quality and household crowding playing a major role in health outcomes. Poor living conditions, including dampness and crowding, are significant risk factors for acute rheumatic fever. Housing is contributing to hospitalisation and re-hospitalisation rates for children in New Zealand, notably for respiratory infections. These poor housing conditions increase risk of future ill health and poorer performance across a range of social indicators. The burden of disease associated with housing conditions is particularly high for Māori and Pacific whānau.

The policy and legislative environment that spans housing is complex – from homelessness (supply and demand) to tenancy/landlord relationships, fuel poverty, housing/health literacy (quality). Given that policy and legislation significantly affect housing quality and housing supply, a coherent approach among all the agencies involved in the housing space will have better impact and avoid duplication. The RHHRG was established to support a collaborative, regional approach to healthy housing in the Wellington region with a stated vision of “Everyone in the Wellington Region lives in warm, dry and safe housing by 2025”. The RHHR Steering Group is made up of over 30 agencies working in the housing space in the wider Wellington region with a working group who are actively involved in: research on housing data, a community-based housing insulation upgrade, and advocacy on healthy heating.

The RHHRG acknowledges and commends the work of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in seeking to bring together urban development powers and functions to support community wellbeing through this Bill. The Bill successfully looks beyond the provision of houses to the importance of community and recognises the role urban development can play in creating both homes and communities. Reorienting the work and role of Housing New Zealand (HNZ) towards to do this will be a positive step forward for both clients and Aotearoa as a whole.

The RHHRG **recommends the following amendments be made** to the Bill to recognise the link between the provision of homes and communities and population health and wellbeing:

- **Section 10: Membership of board of Kāinga Ora–Homes and Communities** – include in **health and public health** as an important capability for members to the board.

¹ New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine (2013). "Housing Policy Statement." Available from: https://www.nzcpmh.org.nz/media/120350/nzcphm_healthy_homes_standard_submission_2018.pdf.

- Section 12: Objective of Kāinga Ora–Homes and Communities – introduce an additional objective of **supporting health and wellbeing**.
- Section 13: Functions of Kāinga Ora–Homes and Communities – include opportunities for financial assistance for immediate home repairs. Financial limitations are often the reason for home owners not maintaining their houses in good repair, and there are certain repair priorities that if not addressed can accelerate physical deterioration of the house².

Further observations and requests:

RHHR members have observed that the current ad hoc urban development is struggling and unable to deliver the very real need of people, particularly the vulnerable, for secure tenure, allowing them to live within a supportive community and close to services. **Critical to the success of Kāinga Ora is the building of meaningful partnerships, consultation at the community level and clear and timely communication with stakeholders.**

This Bill is primarily concerned with a structure of a new entity with good intentions for improved, joined-up urban development to advance the need for increased housing and changes to the ways in which New Zealanders live, work and get from one place to another. While this is greatly needed, it remains to be seen how this will work in practice and will require workplace culture change of those moving from working for HNZ to working for Kāinga Ora to ensure an organisation and team who prioritise people and partnership.

Members of the RHHRG deliver the Ministry of Health’s Healthy Homes Initiative programmes which works with families, agencies and local partners to provide education and access to interventions which will create warm, dry and uncrowded home. This programme has already developed referral processes with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and HNZ to include fast tracking onto social housing waitlists and benefit reviews for clients assessed under these programmes. However, even though there are these protocols in place, the experience is that the effectiveness relies wholly on staff engagement – high turnover does not help. **RHHRG recommends that Kāinga Ora have strong engagement and high-level buy-in with relevant programmes and services available.**

One challenge experienced by many seeking social housing is the MSD housing assessment process. Social services have commented on this, noting: (1) the assessment process varies depending on MSD staff; (2) MSD sees everything through the lens of benefit receipt; and (3) MSD staff do not have a housing perspective. These challenges contribute to the highly stressful reality of being homeless and in temporary accommodation while searching for more permanent solutions. **RHHRG requests that this challenge be considered during the process of disestablishing HNZ and establishing Kāinga Ora.**

While the process of disestablishing HNZ and establishing Kāinga Ora will have no direct impact on current tenants, it is likely even the change of names and appearance could cause some stress and concern among tenants. **RHHRG requests that a considered effort is made to communicate in a timely manner to relevant stakeholders and particularly with tenants to explain clearly the changes that are happening.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. The point of contact for this submission is:

Dr. Elinor Millar
Public Health Medical Specialist, Regional Public Health
Email: Elinor.Millar@huttvalleydhb.org.nz

² https://www.branz.co.nz/cms_show_download.php?id=4158d0bdfcc81dacb0caf37e9423259fabec292d

Nāku noa, nā



Roger Blakeley
Regional Healthy Housing Response Working Group Chair

