

## The Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty: Priority 2 - Housing WOF

We recommend that the government ensure all rental housing (both social and private sector) meets minimum health and safety standards, according to an agreed Warrant of Fitness, such as the Healthy Housing Index. These standards should be monitored periodically and effectively enforced, and gradually increased over time.

Living in poor quality housing is seriously damaging the health of many children in low-income families. Over 70 percent of all children in poverty live in rental accommodation (20 percent in HNZC state housing and 50 percent in private rental accommodation) (Perry, 2012). Research suggests that a significant proportion of private rentals are of poor quality.

Many houses are cold and damp, and poorly maintained; insulation is inadequate or nonexistent; heating is not efficient or effective. Some rental properties do not meet even basic standards for sanitation or safety.

The current regulatory arrangements are inadequate and have not been amended since 1947. The Government should ensure that all rental accommodation (both social housing and private rentals) meets minimum health and safety standards, according to a Warrant of Fitness. Costs associated with the Warrant of Fitness would be borne by landlords, but this could be partially offset through favourable tax treatment of any required improvements. Implementation planning should carefully consider how to mitigate the risk of costs associated with improving the quality of rental housing, which is required by a Warrant of Fitness, being shifted on to tenants.

There was almost unanimous support for having a rental housing Warrant of Fitness from the feedback we received, including the children's perspectives, community

meetings, survey responses and formal submissions. One approach to implement a rental housing Warrant of Fitness is to undertake a pilot and evaluation at a local community level, as included in Recommendation 30.

### Action Statement from Workshop focus group:

The focus group strongly supported the recommendation for a Warrant of Fitness for all rental housing. The group recognised that the implementation may need to be staged and that it is likely that financial incentives and tax incentives will be necessary to encourage landlords to comply.

The link between housing, health and education is clear and so the group determined that a National Standard for Housing should ensure that all houses be safe and health worthy.

To ensure fair, consistent and ongoing monitoring of house standards an independent body to be formed to monitor all state, council and private rental housing.

The Group strongly endorses the Auckland Council's proposal to pilot a Warrant of Fitness scheme. The need for strong public support of such initiatives will raise profile around the issue, support new ventures and generate a broader more inclusive discussion around the issue of housing security.

The group believes there is scope for community based organisations to fund small community demonstrations of Warrant of Fitness schemes.

The group recommended that a landlord leader be sought to champion the idea of the W.o.F. It is reasonable to expect that any house available for rental meet

minimum standard but there are wider individual rewards (eg. Increased stability of tenancy for tenants and landlords) and collective rewards) strengthening communities, higher levels of tenant engagement with their accommodation) that also need to be engaged with.

To assist incentivising improvements and increasing the supply of diverse housing a supportive (rather than punitive) regulatory environment is required. This would also support a higher engagement in looking at secondary and co-housing options.

Encourage organisations (iwi, community, church) to consider financially supporting apprentices in their training in the building and associated trades and then bonding them to work for the iwi, community and church membership for a set period of time building and maintaining homes.

The development of skill banks at community level where people could trade skills and services would support families' aspirations to improve their living arrangements.

In discussion about fuel/heating insecurity it was recommended that there be a Swap Programme of LPG/Gas heaters for more effective and safer heating options. This would be enhanced by an energy company or retailer championing this initiative within a healthy warm home framework.

There was strong support for a Capital Gains Tax (excluding the family home) to financially support housing initiatives.