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11 August 2016

Cross-Party Homelessness Inquiry  
Parliament Buildings  
WELLINGTON

Tēnā koe i nga ahuatanga o te wa

**Cross-Party Homelessness Inquiry**  
***Submission to Labour, the Green Party and the Māori Party***

**Introduction: Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu**

Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu writes in response to the *Cross-Party Homelessness Inquiry*, following the request for submissions on homelessness in New Zealand.

Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu is a limited partnership, supported by the nine iwi of Te Waipounamu through a Shareholders Council known as Te Taumata. Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu was launched in July 2014 as the South Island Commissioning Agency for Whānau Ora. Te Taumata has appointed an independent governance board which is responsible for the investment strategy. The name, Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu, represents the convergence of the rivers of Te Waipounamu, bringing sustenance to the people, and reflecting the partnership's founding principle of whānaungatanga.

Commissioning in the context of Whānau Ora is the process of identifying the aspirations of whānau and investing in them whether they are new or existing initiatives. These whānau-centred initiatives are expected to best reflect progress towards Whānau Ora outcomes.

Whānau Ora is an inclusive approach to support whānau to work together as whānau, rather than separately with individual family members. We consider that Whānau Ora outcomes will be met when whānau are:

- Self-managing;
- Living healthy lifestyles;
- Participating fully in society;
- Confidently participating in Te Ao Māori;
- Economically secure and successfully involved in wealth creation;
- Cohesive, resilient and nurturing;
- And able to act as responsible stewards of their living and natural environments.

As the Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency for Te Waipounamu, Te Putahitanga is committed to supporting all individuals and whānau in Te Waipounamu to achieve their aspirations. Te Putahitanga supports individuals and whānau, including those experiencing homelessness, to not just be economically secure, but to also confidently participate in society and in Te Ao Māori. Consequently, Te Putahitanga supports policies, providers and individuals that work to assist those experiencing and facing homelessness.

The impact of increasing housing pressures and subsequent homelessness in recent months has been demonstrated by data. In 2013, 41,705 New Zealanders experienced severe housing deprivation, a significant increase compared to 28,649 New Zealanders in 2006 (Table 1, “Homelessness accelerates between censuses”, June 2016, University of Otago, Wellington). This is alarming given the impact of homelessness, both in the short and long term.

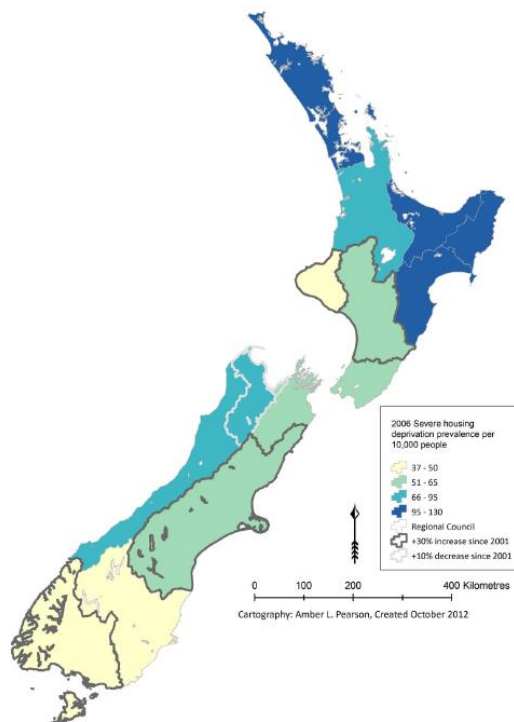
**Table 1** Count and proportion of the census subject population identified as severely housing deprived, not severely housing deprived, and housing deprivation status cannot be determined, 2001-2013<sup>(a)</sup>

Category	2001		2006		2013	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Severely housing deprived	28,649	0.8	33,295	0.8	41,705	1.0
Not severely housing deprived	3,639,845	97.2	3,942,626	97.1	4,109,534	96.6
Housing deprivation status cannot be determined	76,038	2.0	83,953	2.1	103,356	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,744,534</b> (a)	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,059,876</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,254,594</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figure 1: Table 1: “Homelessness accelerates between censuses”, June 2016, University of Otago, Wellington

While much of the recent media coverage of homelessness has been on the issues faced by those in Auckland, Te Waipounamu has not been immune to the challenges facing individuals, and whānau experiencing homelessness. The provinces of Canterbury and Southland have seen a 30% increase in severe housing deprivation since 2001 (Amore et al (2013). *Severe housing deprivation: The problem and its measurement*, Official Statistics Research Series, 6, 35). For this submission, Christchurch has been profiled as a South Island case study.

**Figure 9 Prevalence of severe housing deprivation per 10,000 people by regional council area, 2006, and percentage change since 2001**



**Data sources:** Statistics NZ and emergency accommodation providers

**Figure 2: Figure 9: Severe housing deprivation: The problem and its measurement, Official Statistics Research Series, 6, 35**

In Christchurch, there has been significant pressure placed on housing following the Canterbury earthquakes. Between 2006 and 2013, greater Christchurch experienced an 81.1% increase in the number of unoccupied dwellings, compared to a 21.8% increase in the Selwyn district over the same period. The Eastern suburbs of Christchurch were hit particularly hard, experiencing increases in the number of unoccupied dwellings of up to 250% (Canterbury Wellbeing Index June 2016, *Population*).

The loss of inhabitable housing, combined with the increased need for temporary rental accommodation, the need for housing for rebuild workers, and the loss of significant numbers of low cost social housing provided Christchurch City Council and Housing New Zealand Incorporation, has created a significant housing shortage in Christchurch. Rental prices have increased, so that the majority of properties in Christchurch city now have weekly mean rent above the national mean of \$372 per week. Consequently, members of society facing increased vulnerability in the post-earthquake environment are now more at risk than ever of homelessness.

Map 1: Percentage change in population within greater Christchurch 2006-2013

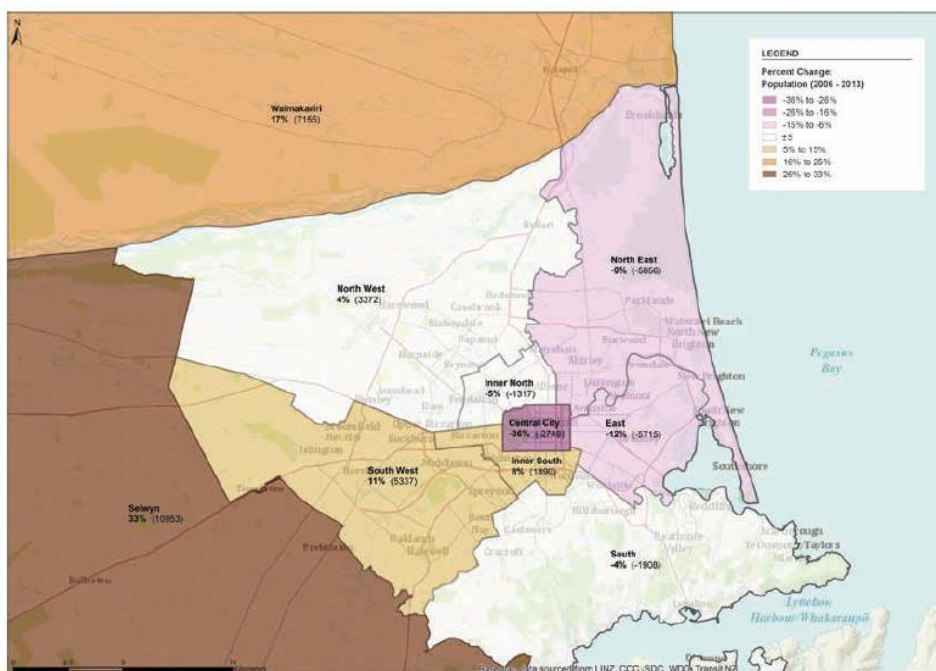


Figure 3: Map 1, Canterbury Wellbeing Index June 2015, Population

Te Puawaitanga Ki Ōtautahi Trust, a community support provider in Christchurch reported significant negative changes in housing for whānau in the post-earthquake environment. Homelessness (defined as living in caravans, motor camps and containers) and whānau living in outbuildings had increased significantly during the post-earthquake period, with whānau reporting increased stress and health issues resulting from housing pressures in the post-earthquake environment (Te Puawaitanga Ki Ōtautahi Trust, *Whānau Talk Housing: A survey of whānau about their housing situation*, July 2014). Anecdotal reports from whānau also indicated that overcrowding was common, and that quality of housing was low and having significant adverse impacts on those who lived there.

Te Putahitanga o Te Waipounamu, through its network of Whānau Ora Navigators, assists whānau who are facing challenging situations, which may include homelessness or the risk of homelessness. There are many other organisations across Te Waipounamu, like Te Puawaitanga, who are also working to assist individuals and whānau experiencing homelessness. However, it is recognised that that homelessness is a growing and extremely complex issue, and a multi-faceted and multi-agency approach is required to create positive change.

### Health Impacts

The cost of private rentals is a barrier to many whānau resulting in sharing the home with wider whānau members, or relocating outside of the Christchurch. Finding affordable, warm and dry housing is a key challenge. Whānau are often turned down for private rentals due to income or status. Whānau in sub-standard housing conditions, homeless or in outbuildings, are suffering health conditions such as skin infections and respiratory problems. They are also at risk of health conditions, including SUDI/SIDS, respiratory conditions, anxiety and stress. This is critical for those babies born prematurely.

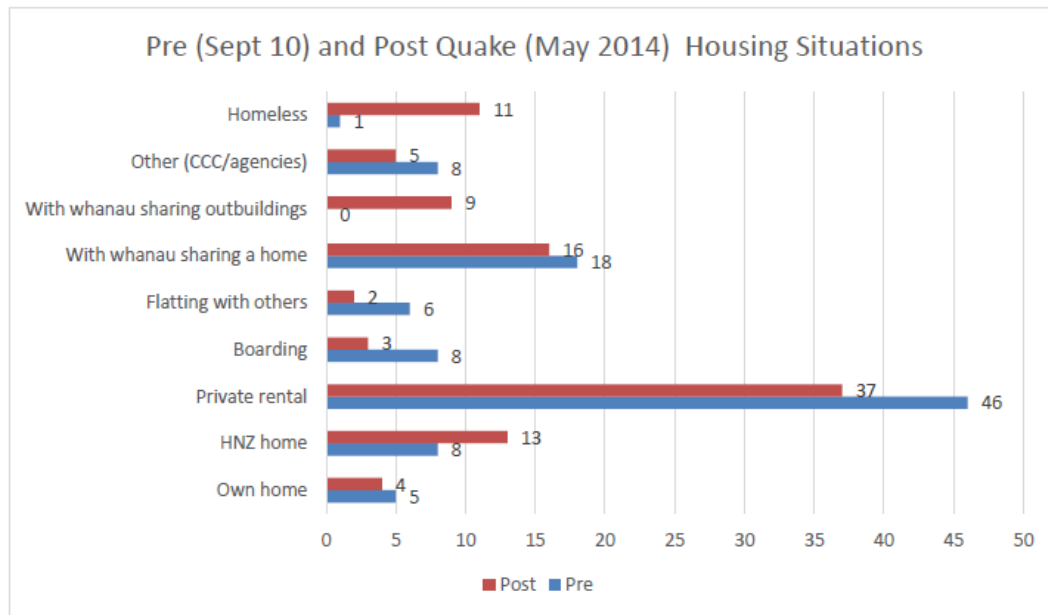


Figure 4: Whānau Talk Housing: A survey of whānau about their housing situation, Te Puawaitanga Ki Ōtautahi Trust, July 2014

### Definition of Homelessness

Homelessness, while coming recently into profile following the Christchurch earthquakes and the Auckland housing crisis, has long been an issue in New Zealand. However, many New Zealanders are unaware of the full scale of homelessness and its impact. Researchers have referred to this as “**the cultural invisibility of homelessness**” (“Geographies of Homelessness in New Zealand”, *Parity*, vol. 20, issue 9).

This cultural invisibility is partly due to a lack of understanding of the true nature of homelessness. For many people, homelessness is experienced by individuals living on the street as a result of alcohol or drug issues, exacerbating or exacerbated by mental health issues. However, what the Auckland housing crisis in particular has demonstrated is that homelessness also includes those who are employed but unable to afford housing and/or rental prices, those whose employment has been negatively impacted by the Global Financial Crisis, and those who have been forced to leave negative home experiences. As Amore et al found, “[a]lmost half of the adult severely housing deprived population was working in paid employment, studying or both” (Amore et al 48).

Homelessness is also not only confined to those living on the streets, but includes those reliant on shelters and night accommodation, and those living in unsuitable housing situations like living in cars or garages or in overcrowded homes. Consequently, a clear and succinct definition of homelessness is needed to provide a comprehensible understanding of what homelessness is in New Zealand.

Te Putahitanga o Te Waipounamu supports the definition of homelessness provided by Statistics New Zealand as it recognises the multiple elements of homelessness and attempts to encompass the non-physical aspects of a home, like the feeling of safety. The creation of a conclusive definition of homelessness has involved considerable debate, and has involved discussion of the social, political and economic elements of homelessness.

Consequently, while Te Putahitanga supports the definition of homelessness provided by Statistics New Zealand, it is also recognised that there are critiques to this definition. Te Putahitanga recommends that this inquiry should critically review the definition provided by Statistics New Zealand, in consultation with key stakeholders, to ensure that it is able to adequately reflect the nature of homelessness in New Zealand.

### **Data Collection**

Obtaining a true understanding of homelessness in New Zealand is extremely difficult given the obvious complexities of data collection. There is no central source of data on those experiencing homelessness, and data must consequently be drawn from a range of sources, including the census and data collected by community support services.

It is submitted that one of the outcomes of this inquiry should be to establish a centralised depository for the collection and analysis of data relevant to those experiencing homelessness. This central depository should be developed in consultation with researchers and community support service providers. The response to homelessness cannot be appropriate and adequate if the scale and scope of the issue is not known. There also needs to be a clear understanding of the different types of homelessness and the impact on individuals and whānau so that proper responses can be developed.

### **Māori experiences of Homelessness**

The experience of homelessness on different cultures can be vastly different. Those of European/Other ethnicity were more likely to be without accommodation, while those of Māori ethnicity experiencing homelessness were more likely to be living in situations of overcrowding with friends or family (*Amore et al, 43; see table below*). This suggests that, despite their experiences of homelessness, connections with whānau remain strong, and are a source of support when situations of homelessness arise. However, this can have detrimental effects on the whole whānau, as overcrowding is a recognised cause of many health conditions, especially where children are involved.

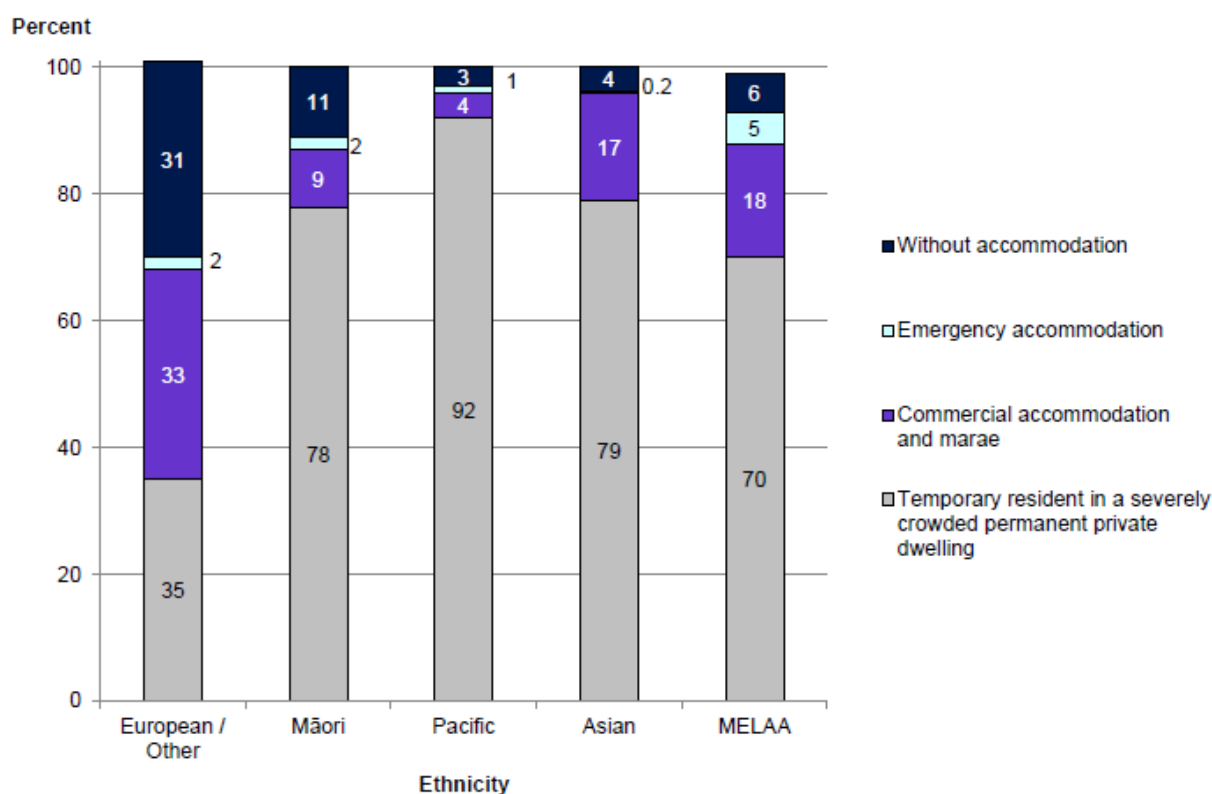
Homelessness is caused and influenced by a wide range of factors, including mental health challenges, alcohol and drug addiction, housing availability and affordability, and release from institutions. The impact of these wide-ranging factors cannot be combated by community support services or by local government alone. What is needed is a comprehensive and holistic strategy on homelessness lead by central government but actioned at the local level.

### **Inter-agency Approach to Positive Solutions to Homelessness**

Many of the community support services working with those who experience homelessness are dedicatedly working to provide individuals and whānau with the necessities needed for everyday life. Local government has developed partnerships with many of these community support service providers to produce city-wide strategies to balance the needs of homeless persons with those of other citizens. However, assisting individuals and whānau into housing situations that best suit their needs can be extremely challenging.



**Figure 19 Severely housing deprived population by ethnicity and living situation, 2006**



**Data sources:** Statistics NZ and emergency accommodation providers

**Figure 5: Figure 9: Severe housing deprivation: The problem and its measurement, Official Statistics Research Series, 6, 43**

Te Putahitanga submits that an inter-agency governmental action group should be established to address the factors that contribute to homelessness in New Zealand. The forum should include representatives from key government Ministries alongside representatives from community support services, tangata whenua, and other cultural groups, and should discuss the range of cross-Ministerial solutions that can be made to address homelessness.

Even the changes that may seem relatively small and unrelated to homelessness should be considered in potentially impacting on homelessness in New Zealand. "More than half of the severely housing deprived population was younger than 25 years, and over half of those were children under 15 years" (Amore et al, 41). Living in situations of homelessness is extremely detrimental to children; their health suffers and being unable to concentrate in school can have significant lifelong impacts. Consequently, policy changes, like the increase of the age limit for children in Child, Youth and Family care made earlier this year, may ensure that young people are not driven to homelessness because they are too young to access appropriate support services when they leave care. This significant policy change may be the difference between positive life outcomes and a life overshadowed by the challenge of homelessness.

It should be recognised that homelessness is not merely an issue for community support services, Whānau Ora navigators or other groups dedicated to assisting the most vulnerable members of society. Homelessness is a societal issue and requires a societal response. Housing costs are the largest item in household budgets. Higher housing costs reduce

discretionary spend for households. Those experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness, in all its different forms, deserve a centralised and supportive approach that addresses the contributing factors to homelessness, as well as the development of positive solutions to homelessness in New Zealand.

Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu has had a particular interest with *Help for the Homeless* in Christchurch. This is an organisation that helps the homeless in Christchurch, distributing much needed food and clothing, assisting with housing and jobs. They organise events for the homeless to be involved in the community while they seek jobs. They also assist other organisations who are helping the homeless when needed. *Help for the Homeless* attend appointments, help with furniture once housed and offer ongoing support such as providing warm clothes and bedding and a meal a week.

We appreciate that there are practical strategies that could be implemented which could make an immediate difference to the quality of life. For example in Christchurch, if *Help for the Homeless* had a housing facility it could be a place that the homeless could come to for a meal, a shower, some rest, time out. It could operate as a hub – legal aid could be invited for regular appointments, there could be budget advisors, Work and Income assistance.

Finally, we note that many of our Whānau Ora entities are often able to work directly with the homeless through the course of their work, or more particularly in association with the role of a Whānau Ora Navigator. One pertinent example is Kākano Café and Cookery School in Christchurch where members of the homeless community work with café owner/entrepreneur Jade Temepara in the maintenance of the garden.

Te Putahitanga is open to any future engagement on the Cross-Party Homelessness Inquiry, and appreciates the opportunity provided by Labour, the Green Party and the Māori Party to engage in the consultation process.

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Heoi ano



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