

Housing WOFs need to be combined with education, study shows

9 April 2019



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Alongside funding and regulatory support, understanding how housing affects health and safety can spur owners to make improvements to their properties, researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington and Waitara Initiatives Supporting Employment Trust (WISE) Better Homes have found.

The researchers carried out a voluntary housing warrant-of-fitness check on 83 properties in Taranaki, and then interviewed 40 of the homeowners to find out what improvements they chose to make.

Their research is published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

The researchers found that while most of the properties failed the Warrant of Fitness, 76 per cent of the participants had addressed or planned to address at least one of the identified issues with the [home](#).

Co-author Dr. Julie Bennett says: "This finding is in line with our previous research that shows that while hazards that are likely to affect health and [safety](#) are common in New Zealand homes, many of these defects can be easily rectified."

"This study has shown that when equipped with the knowledge the housing WOF provides, many people go on to make improvements voluntarily."

The research gave insight into why people elect not to make housing improvements. For some people cost was a factor. Other people did not believe that the identified [improvement](#) would make a difference to health and safety in the home.

Co-author Dr. Lucy Telfar-Barnard says this shows the importance of knowledge to encourage housing improvements.

"Some people said they wouldn't install a ground vapour barrier because it was dry under the house – not realising that even dry ground releases damp which rises into homes. Providing people with information on just how each housing defect affects health and safety may encourage people to make improvements."

While this research gives a number of insights into non-regulatory measures that would encourage owners to make housing improvements, the evidence suggests that a mandatory WOF would be required in order to ensure housing improvements were carried out on the large scale required.

Co-author Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman comments: "The enormous impact of [housing](#) on the [health](#) of New Zealanders means it is important we encourage improvements through subsidies and regulatory support, as well as clear and accessible information."

More information: Elinor Chisholm et al. Why

don't owners improve their homes? Results from a survey following a housing warrant?of?fitness assessment for health and safety, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2019). DOI: [10.1111/1753-6405.12895](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12895)

Provided by University of Otago

APA citation: Housing WOFs need to be combined with education, study shows (2019, April 9) retrieved 31 October 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-housing-wofs-combined.html>

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