

Attitudes towards MDH

As medium-density housing becomes more prevalent in the face of increasing housing pressure, its successful uptake partly depends on people’s attitudes.

HISTORICALLY, New Zealanders have aspired to the quarter-acre dream – a stand-alone house with a large, private backyard. However, we have seen a significant reduction in section sizes for stand-alone houses and, increasingly, medium-density housing (MDH)

is emerging as an alternative as New Zealand cities grapple with housing pressure and urban sprawl.

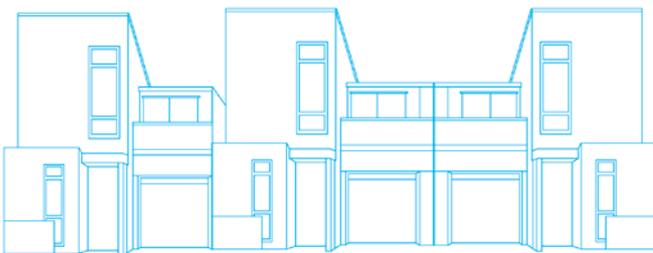
MDH needs to become widely accepted, if not desirable, if it is to become a viable housing option in this country.

General attitudes

To gauge this acceptance, the BRANZ Housing Preferences Survey asked 1,600 randomly selected households their opinions about four types of housing commonly built in New Zealand (Figure 1). Each type represented a



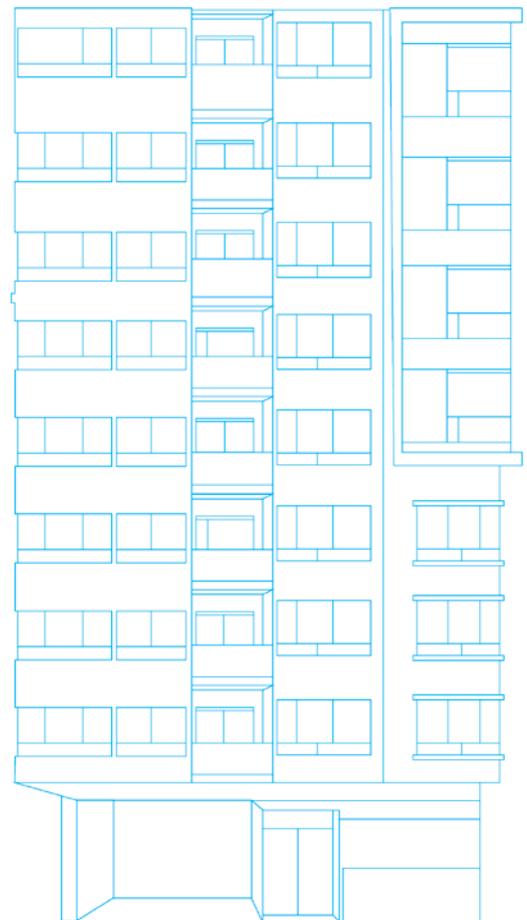
This is a stand-alone house on its own section with a back yard. It is the most common type of home in New Zealand.



This kind of house is often called a terraced house or attached townhouse. They have at least one common wall with the neighbouring home and can be in blocks of two or three or in longer rows.



This is a low-rise apartment building or block of flats. These are up to 4 storeys high and usually have a common entranceway or shared car parking.



This is a high-rise apartment building. These buildings have a common entranceway, and if parking is provided, it is usually a shared garage. These buildings are much taller than low-rise apartments or flats and have elevators.

Figure 1. Four types of housing commonly built in New Zealand.

different density of housing – low-density stand-alone housing, medium-density attached units, low-rise apartments and high-density apartment buildings.

Attitudes towards the different housing types varied depending on density. The general trend was that stand-alone housing rates more favourably than the other housing types and that MDH is preferable to high-density high-rise apartments.

MDH was rated more favourably by participants who already had experience living in attached housing or low-rise apartments compared to those who'd never lived in MDH. However, participants with MDH experience were, at best, ambivalent about MDH, responding neutrally rather than favourably on most housing factors.

This means that, rather than liking MDH more, they disliked MDH less than participants who'd never lived in MDH before.

Even when participants with experience of MDH showed more favourable attitudes towards MDH, they still preferred stand-alone houses overall.

Likes and dislikes

The survey also revealed participants' perceptions of specific aspects of MDH when compared to other types of housing.

Value for money

Participants responded neutrally about the value for money of MDH housing types, although they were somewhat more likely to say that stand-alone houses represented good value for money.

It is possible that, in the current housing market, New Zealanders do not see good value for money in any housing option.

Safety

Perceptions of safety decreased as the housing density increased.

Participants were more likely to agree that stand-alone housing neighbourhoods were safer places to live than MDH or high-rise neighbourhoods.

The predominance of garages with internal access and fenced private backyards in modern stand-alone neighbourhoods fosters a sense of separation from neighbours rather than communal living.

This result suggests New Zealanders may be endorsing a security and privacy-focused concept of safety rather than a community-focused one.

Enjoyable lifestyle

On average, the sample was neutral, tending towards disagreement that MDH provides an enjoyable lifestyle. However, participants strongly endorsed the idea that stand-alone neighbourhoods provide enjoyable lifestyles.

Not all MDH in New Zealand is well situated, and access to amenities may be poor. Many MDH communities still depend heavily on car transport. This may impact New Zealanders' perceptions of the quality of life and lifestyle that MDH neighbourhoods can offer.

In addition, it is impossible to know how participants define an enjoyable lifestyle.

Sense of community

Overall, participants believe that stand-alone housing provides a better sense of community than high-density housing.

Participants with experience living in MDH were more likely to think attached housing and low-rise apartments provided a good sense of community compared to participants with no MDH experience.

High occupant turnover due to the transitory nature of MDH tenure might explain why building a good sense of community is challenging in these neighbourhoods.

Visual appeal

Participants did not find MDH neighbourhoods visually appealing.

It is clear that aesthetics continue to be an issue for MDH in New Zealand. Building attractive and visually appealing MDH developments will be an important factor in increasing its acceptance in the future.

Leaky home issues

Participants were more likely to agree that MDH is prone to leaky home problems and tended to disagree that stand-alone homes were prone to leaks.

The perception that MDH housing types are more leak-prone could, in part, be explained by the greater visibility of remediation work on large MDH developments. This perception may also influence housing choices.

Willingness to live in MDH

Participants indicated that they overwhelmingly prefer living in stand-alone houses, even if they had experience of living in MDH. However, those who had lived in MDH before were significantly less likely to say they wouldn't live in MDH in the future.

This suggests that, as more New Zealanders experience living in well planned, visually appealing and liveable MDH, attitudes and perceptions might improve and more New Zealanders may consider MDH in the future.

When considering MDH options in the future, there were no significant differences based on age or gender, although

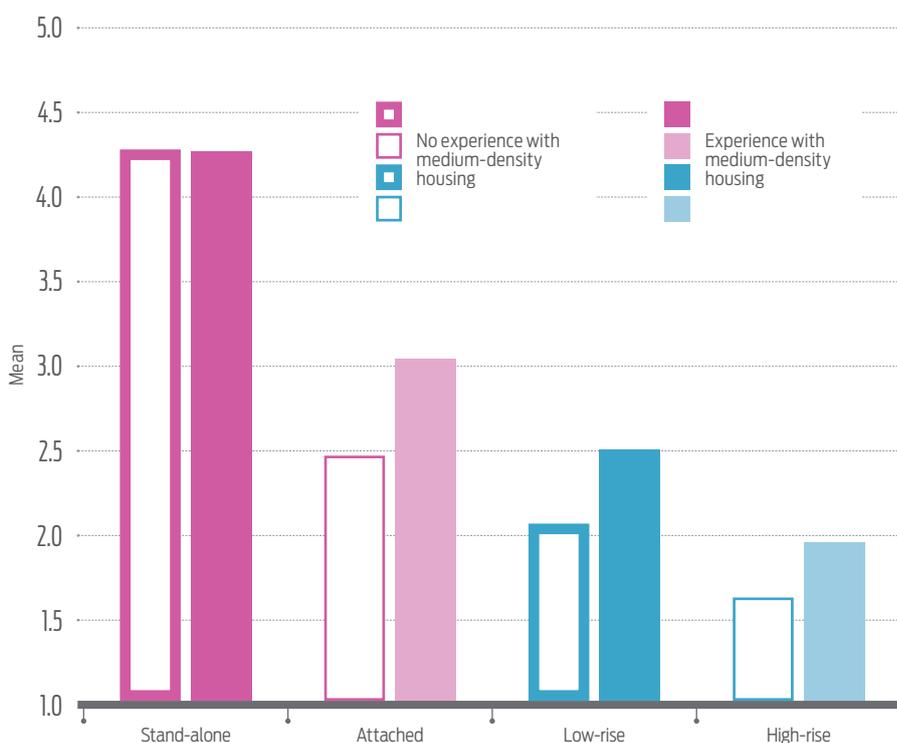


Figure 2. Respondents' willingness to live in different types of housing in the future.

Wellingtonians were more open to the idea than Aucklanders and Cantabrians.

NIMBYism

NIMBYism (not in my backyard) remains an issue for MDH in New Zealand. Participants' objections to new houses being built in their street increased with housing density.

This result is consistent with other research that found that New Zealanders are relatively comfortable with townhouses of up to 2 storeys in their neighbourhood. However, they become increasingly uncomfortable as the height and density of houses increases.

House size

MDH was generally perceived to be too small for the majority of participants. However, 30% considered an attached house would be the ideal size for them, and 21% felt a low-rise apartment was the perfect size.

This indicates that size is not a barrier to MDH for a small but significant proportion of New Zealanders.

Increasing acceptance

The results indicate that New Zealanders are not yet realising the benefits of safe and liveable MDH communities. If we are to increase the acceptability of MDH, New Zealanders will need to feel they can live in a multi-unit dwelling while maintaining the Kiwi lifestyle they desire.

Generally, much work remains to be done to increase acceptance of MDH and to educate New Zealanders on the advantages the housing type can offer.

However, it is encouraging to know that experience of living in MDH generally improves people's opinions of these houses. The more people experience living in good-quality MDH, the more acceptable it is likely to become.

More information

For further analysis, see BRANZ study report SR378 *The New Zealand Housing Preferences Survey: Attitudes towards medium-density housing*.

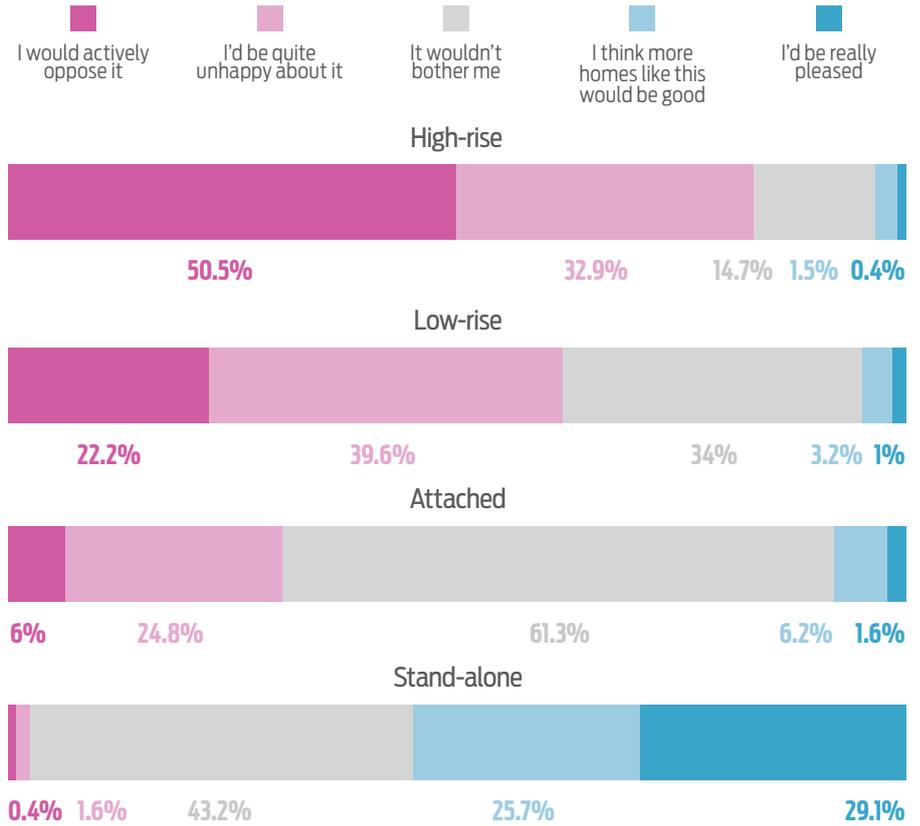


Figure 3. Respondents' attitudes towards different types of housing being built in their neighbourhood.

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