



## Joining the dots on housing conditions, health and wellbeing

The evidence linking poor-quality housing with poor health and wellbeing outcomes just got stronger. With a better understanding of how poor-quality housing impacts people and who is most at risk, policy makers can more successfully target interventions to make the biggest difference to Kiwis' lives.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, cold, damp and mouldy homes are far too common, and it is an issue that has been around a long time. Dampness is present in one in five homes, and patches of mould (larger than A4 paper size) are found in one in six homes, according to 2018 Census data. This is expected to be consistent in the 2023 Census data.

Far from being havens of comfort, damp and mouldy Kiwi homes are likely harming the people who live in them. It is a problem that directly impacts our communities unevenly and has negative implications throughout our society. Improving housing conditions for better health and wellbeing would likely result in improved whānau and community relationships, higher school and workplace attendance and a lower burden on our health system.

Fixing the cold, damp, mouldy home problem is complex. Effective solutions rely on an accurate understanding of how widespread the problem is, what contributes to it and how it affects different communities.

BRANZ partnered with MBIE and Tatauranga Aotearoa | Stats NZ to collect new data on housing condition and occupant wellbeing. Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga | Ministry of Housing and Urban Development was connected in, once it was stood up, in late 2018.

Information on the internal and external condition of housing for more than 800 houses nationwide was collected via BRANZ's Pilot Housing Survey. Household wellbeing information was collected by the Stats NZ General Social Survey. It is the first time that data from any BRANZ housing assessment survey has been collected, linked and analysed in parallel with a Stats NZ survey.

Analysis of the linked data showed poor-quality housing was linked to lower levels of occupant wellbeing and comfort in the home. Households most likely to experience issues due to poor housing are single-parent households on a lower income and/or include people who identify as Māori and/or Pasifika. These findings strengthen support for investment in targeted interventions for those most at risk.

BRANZ will continue its work monitoring housing quality and occupant wellbeing and use its unique industry standing and networks to help drive positive change. Furthermore, BRANZ data is now incorporated into Stats NZ's secure data warehouse, the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), and is easily accessible to other researchers. This allows for further exploration and understanding of the relationship between housing quality, occupancy and occupant wellbeing in New Zealand.

Strengthening the evidence will drive momentum towards all Kiwis having a warm, dry, healthy home regardless of background, income, ethnicity, or household composition.

### READ MORE

- »» BRANZ (2023). Study Report 482 *Housing condition and occupant wellbeing. Findings from the Pilot Housing Survey and General Social Survey 2018/19.*  
[branz.co.nz/pubs/research-reports/sr482](https://branz.co.nz/pubs/research-reports/sr482)
- »» BRANZ Research Now: Pilot Housing Survey 2018/19 #4 *Findings on housing condition and occupant wellbeing.*  
[branz.co.nz/pubs/research-now/warmer-drier-healthier/pilot-housing-survey-4-findings-on-housing-condition-and-occupant-wellbeing](https://branz.co.nz/pubs/research-now/warmer-drier-healthier/pilot-housing-survey-4-findings-on-housing-condition-and-occupant-wellbeing)
- »» Stats NZ. *Housing in Aotearoa: 2020.* [stats.govt.nz/reports/housing-in-aotearoa-2020](https://stats.govt.nz/reports/housing-in-aotearoa-2020)

## IN THEIR WORDS

**Dr Rosemary Goodyear,  
Principal Analyst in Census Insights,  
formerly Senior Design Analyst in the  
Wellbeing and Housing Team at Stats NZ**



### **How did the partnership with BRANZ on this project come about?**

The government's review of tier 1 statistics in 2012 identified an information gap in understanding housing quality. Also, previous BRANZ surveys had revealed that people often considerably underestimate the poor quality of their housing.

I'd been working on housing statistics and published research on ways to measure housing quality in New Zealand. It identified that one of the best ways to measure housing quality is to combine the self-reported housing quality information from one of Stats NZ's household surveys with objective information obtained from independent expert assessments.

BRANZ was keen to follow up on this recommendation and suggested carrying out a pilot housing survey to test the idea.

### **What made the collaboration successful?**

BRANZ, MBIE and Stats NZ came together with a common vision and goal – better measurement of housing quality, especially a greater understanding of the wellbeing effects of poor-quality housing.

MBIE led the work around measuring and defining housing quality. Stats NZ included a question in the General Social Survey granting BRANZ permission to contact participants to carry out follow-up assessments. BRANZ provided funding and expertise, carried out the physical housing assessments and led analysis of the data. It was the boost of funding from MBIE that enabled BRANZ to assess 800-plus homes. Stats NZ supported the data analysis, linking data between the surveys and making it available in the IDI.



**This research means we can now better understand the links between physical housing conditions and mental and physical wellbeing.**

The collaboration has resulted in the most comprehensive housing survey in New Zealand since the 1930s. We'd like to thank all survey participants as they are the ones that have made these insights possible.

### **Why is this research important and who will benefit?**

This research means we can now better understand the links between physical housing conditions and mental and physical wellbeing. It also shows inequalities in housing quality, including the variations in the quality of owned or rented homes, and how people of different ethnicities and incomes are affected.

### **What are the next steps you'd like to see for this research?**

It would be great to see the data used more widely and to repeat the research. The data we collected in 2018 provides a baseline from before the healthy housing legislation was put in place. Repeating this measurement would allow better monitoring of policy initiatives.