Developing a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality: Consultation
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Purpose</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1  Why is a definition needed?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Why do we care about the quality of housing in New Zealand?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Why do we need a framework for housing quality?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  What is our starting point?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Proposed definition and conceptual framework for housing quality</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1  Definition of housing quality</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2  The four elements in a housing quality framework</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  What do we need from you?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  References</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Appendix</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People live in a range of situations in New Zealand</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Purpose

In this consultation we propose a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality to use in New Zealand’s data system. We are now seeking feedback so they can be refined and developed.

1.1 Why is a definition needed?

Currently there is no official statistic measuring housing quality in New Zealand. Developing a definition and conceptual framework is the first step in helping address that information gap.

1.1.1 Process

The proposed definition and framework for housing quality have been researched and developed as part of a co-design project led by Stats NZ, working with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), and the Building Research Association of New Zealand (BRANZ). Māori advisors and other stakeholders, including government agencies and non-governmental organisations, were consulted over the course of the project.

Information on the research that has contributed to the development of this definition is available in International and national definitions and frameworks for housing quality.

We encourage you to read this consultation paper carefully and then give us your feedback on the proposed framework, the concept of housing quality, and the definitions of related terms, using the online submission form: Developing a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality: Submission form.

The webpage Developing a definition for housing quality: Consultation contains the submission form.

2 Why do we care about the quality of housing in New Zealand?

Knowing about the quality of housing is important. The right to adequate housing is recognised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in multiple international human rights treaties that New Zealand has ratified.¹

Housing is one of the dimensions in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) framework for measuring wellbeing² and a key part of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals.³

The UN Sustainable Development Goal for housing states that by 2030 all people should have access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services. In New Zealand, the Indicators Aotearoa project⁴ will use these frameworks to report on the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

The importance of adequate housing is well-supported by research. Numerous New Zealand and international studies link poor housing quality with poor physical and mental health. Poor health, in

---

² OECD (2015).
³ The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of a wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
⁴ Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand is being developed by Stats NZ as a source of measures for New Zealand’s wellbeing. The set of indicators will go beyond economic measures, such as gross domestic product (GDP), to include wellbeing and sustainable development.
turn, leads to increased hospitalisation and absences from school and work, which have implications for the economy.\textsuperscript{5}

The economic impacts from using substandard residential building designs and materials are evidenced by the estimated NZ\$11.3 billion cost (2008 value) of the ‘leaky homes crisis’ that occurred in New Zealand during the 1990s and 2000s.\textsuperscript{6}

Poor quality and poorly located housing can impact on the social and cultural wellbeing of the population and groups within a population. For example when Māori moved to urban areas in large numbers after World War II, the government followed a policy of deliberately ‘pepper-potting’ housing for Māori to promote assimilation.\textsuperscript{7} This resulted in difficulties maintaining cultural identity and language.\textsuperscript{8}

Since 2000, issues relating to housing quality have been of increasing concern for public policy in New Zealand. There has also been growing concern about the population excluded from adequate housing, whether they are homeless or living in substandard accommodation. These concerns have fuelled a demand for information on housing quality. This demand has highlighted that there is little information about housing quality in New Zealand.

3 Why do we need a framework for housing quality?

Currently there is no single, agreed definition of housing quality, nationally or internationally.

A topic like housing quality is broad enough to encompass a number of interrelated aspects and dimensions, so a narrow definition would be insufficient. In such cases, we often use a framework to capture an agreed way of thinking about the topic in question.

Frameworks are a good way of mapping out a topic – collating, describing, and defining all its different parts.

In the data system, frameworks play a crucial role in developing measures, but they should be broad enough to encompass all the different aspects of a topic, even if not all of them can be easily measured.

4 What is our starting point?

We are looking at housing quality in relation to people as well as the physical structure.

Housing quality can be viewed in two ways: through a building lens, which looks purely at the structure of the building, and through a human rights framework, in which people’s interaction with the building provides the key element. In a human rights framework, housing quality is a critical part

\textsuperscript{5} Stats NZ (2015).
\textsuperscript{6} New Zealand Productivity Commission (2012).
\textsuperscript{7} Benton (1997).
\textsuperscript{8} Meredith (2005).
of the right to adequate housing. The people-centred approach is supported by a number of existing international frameworks and is the approach we took when developing this framework.

The following diagram (Figure 1) has been adapted from the housing statistics framework in the 2009 review of housing statistics (Stats NZ, 2009). This framework identified four concepts to be measured as Tier 1 statistics within the category of housing adequacy. Figure 1 shows the four concepts – one of which is housing quality (habitability).9

Our starting point for defining housing quality was this concept of ‘habitability’. In developing a housing quality framework, we identified the need to understand and consider housing quality in a holistic way. For Māori, the interaction of a house with whānau, community, and location is considered a key part of housing quality. After discussing this aspect with experts, our concept of housing quality was expanded to include ideas of sustainability and the ability of housing to support specific needs of individuals, family, and whānau in their communities.

Figure 1

Four key concepts of housing adequacy

---

9 The future development of a Tier 1 statistic measuring housing quality (habitability) will be aligned with the concepts in the housing quality framework but may not measure all parts of the framework.
5 Proposed definition and conceptual framework for housing quality

There are two aspects to this consultation on housing quality: a definition, and an associated framework, which has four elements.

5.1 Definition of housing quality

Housing refers to the structures in which people live. For further information about living situations see the Appendix.

Housing quality refers to the degree to which housing provides a healthy, safe, secure, and resilient environment for individuals, families, and whānau to live in and to participate within their kāinga and communities.

5.2 The four elements in a housing quality framework

Housing quality is about the lived experience of people in their house. We identified four elements of housing quality as important because they support wellbeing in the broadest sense by enabling people to live as they wish in a healthy and safe environment, now and in the future. Individuals, families, and whānau are at the centre of this framework. The four elements interact with and support each other.

The four elements are:

• housing habitability
• housing functionality
• environmental sustainability
• social and cultural sustainability.

While housing habitability and environmental sustainability primarily relate to the physical structure, housing functionality and social and cultural sustainability also include the interaction of individuals, families, and whānau in their communities (Figure 2). Habitability and environmental sustainability can also be impacted by how the occupants use the house.

Other aspects of housing such as affordability, suitability, and availability, as well as freedom from discrimination, are considered separate topics and are not included here.
Developing a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality: Consultation

Figure 2

Conceptual framework for the proposed definition of housing quality

Location (i.e., where the house is situated) is an important part of all these elements but may interact with them in different ways.

For housing habitability, the location of a house may be an essential part of safety. The house may be located away from things that could affect the safety of the occupants, such as the threat of natural disasters. The interaction between location and habitability can also affect health and wellbeing. An example of this is proximity to a busy motorway resulting in exposure to noise, stress and pollutants.

Location can also be linked with environmental sustainability. For example, location can determine whether the house has access to sun. Sunlight can provide a house with natural light, warmth, and a renewable energy source.

The occupants’ personal circumstances, behaviour, knowledge, and skills may support or compromise the ability of the house to provide a quality environment now and into the future. For
example the occupants’ financial ability to heat the home to a minimum 18°C (the World Health Organization’s minimum recommended temperature for any occupied area of the home).

5.2.1 Housing habitability

Housing habitability is an essential aspect of housing quality. We have defined housing habitability as:

the degree to which housing and its location provide a physically safe, physically secure and physically healthy environment. It relates to the design, construction, materials, and service provision of a house and to how well it has been built and maintained. Habitability covers the primary function of housing as providing shelter, focusing on the condition of the house’s physical structure and the facilities within it.

The subcomponents within habitability are further defined below.

Housing provides a physically safe environment when it has a sound structure reasonably resilient to natural hazards (such as extreme weather), is free from material hazards or hazards that may cause accidents. This includes adequate smoke alarms and escape routes. The location of the house should be free from avoidable hazards such as frequent flooding.10

Housing provides a physically secure environment if it offers reasonable protection from intruders.

Housing provides a physically healthy environment if it has drinkable water, including hot and cold water supplies; facilities for personal hygiene and laundering, food preparation and prevention of contamination, and waste water treatment; a safe source of energy; access to natural and artificial light; protection from noise transmission; and protection from cold, dampness and mould, and excess heat (including the provision of weathertight structures, insulation, ventilation, a safe heat source, and drainage).

10 Resilient Communities (nd).
5.2.2 Housing functionality

We have defined housing functionality as:

the degree to which the design, construction, and location of housing support the specific physical, cultural, and social needs of individuals, families, and whānau in their kāinga and communities.

Housing functionality may vary according to cultural background, family situation, and physical, spiritual, and emotional needs.

Housing functionality covers elements of housing that play a role in reducing the limitations of disabilities. This is especially important within the context of an ageing population. It is also important to consider not just the physical needs of people living in a house but also their visitors (the concept of ‘visitability’).

The components of housing functionality are described below. We have separated out these aspects of housing functionality but they all work together to ensure wellbeing.

Specific cultural and spiritual participation refers to the extent to which housing supports cultural and spiritual needs. This can include the design of the house, such as the ability to have flexible spaces to accommodate visitors. It can also include the extent to which the location allows for cultural connection.

Social participation refers to the extent to which housing and its location enable access to social support networks.

Economic participation is about how the location allows for access to employment.

Connectivity is about access to transport, services, and the environment, including green spaces, parks, and beaches. Connection with the environment is important for mental and physical wellbeing. For Māori this can also refer to access to traditional food sources and other aspects of culture that relate to the physical environment.

Specific physical, sensory, and cognitive needs concern the extent to which housing design supports individual physical needs.

---

11 Saville-Smith and Saville (2012).
Specific emotional and mental health needs concern the extent to which housing supports and provides for emotional and physical wellbeing. This is closely tied to housing habitability and social and cultural participation, and connectivity.

Subcomponents that reflect the needs of specific groups could be added to complement the overall concept, and be developed by or in conjunction with these groups.

5.2.3 Environmental sustainability of housing

We have defined the environmental sustainability of housing as:

the degree to which housing design, construction, and materials interact with and impact on the natural environment to support habitability now and in the future. Environmental sustainability focuses on the resource efficiency, durability, and resilience of housing.

Environmental sustainability includes measurable aspects of housing design and construction. These include the quality of the building envelope and services within it, including materials, energy, water, and indoor environment (thermal comfort, indoor air quality, lighting, and acoustics).

They also include how responsive the building envelope is to the climate (different weather events), the efficiency of energy and water use, the use of finite resources, and production of toxic substances in the construction.

The durability of the materials, their resilience to climate change, and the resilience of the housing site are also considered.

5.2.4 Social and cultural sustainability of housing

We have defined the social and cultural sustainability of housing as:

the degree to which housing design is flexible enough to respond to changes in the specific physical, cultural, and social needs of individuals, families, and whānau, thereby supporting functionality across time.

This relates to the adaptability and flexibility of housing to meet changing living needs and circumstances, for example different life stages and cultures. It may include housing with accessibility for all ages, design and construction to facilitate future modification, or thoughtful design with spaces that can be adapted to different functions.
6 What do we need from you?

This document outlines a proposed definition for housing quality and discusses the proposed elements in a conceptual framework for housing quality.

We invite feedback on the proposed framework, the concept of housing quality, and the definitions of related terms.

To provide feedback:

- go to Developing a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality – online submission
- complete the form and submit it.

Alternatively:

- download Developing a definition and conceptual framework for housing quality: Submission form (PDF, 399 KB)
- complete the form, save it, and email it to housingqualityframework@stats.govt.nz.

Submissions close at 9am on Wednesday, 14 November 2018.

The webpage Developing a definition for housing quality: Consultation has links to this consultation document, the submission form, FAQs, and the international and national research document.
7 References


8 Appendix

People live in a range of situations in New Zealand

For the purpose of this framework, housing relates to structures where people live or reside. This includes the housing stock, non-permanent dwellings (such as mobile homes), and improvised dwellings.

Non-private dwellings (eg hotels, motels, marae) are excluded from the concept of housing in this framework, as their main purpose is to provide short-term or transitory type accommodation.

While boarding houses would be classified under non-private dwellings, we recommend they be included within the concept of housing in this framework as they fall under the Residential Tenancies Act 1986 and are of considerable policy interest.

Rough sleeping, such as people sleeping on park benches, is also excluded from the concept of housing in this framework.

How does the housing quality definition apply to housing in this context?

While recognising that housing in New Zealand encompasses more than just the housing stock, the defined components of housing quality (habitability, functionality, sustainability) don’t necessarily apply in all circumstances.

It is important that non-permanent and improvised dwellings are captured within this framework to provide an overall picture of housing in New Zealand and the proportion of housing that is substandard or uninhabitable. However, it may not be considered appropriate, feasible, or relevant to assess the quality of non-permanent or improvised dwellings according to the proposed definition. At this stage, we envisage the housing quality definition will relate specifically to the housing stock.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HOUSING?**

Structures where people live or reside:

- **the housing stock** – fixed and permanent dwellings that have been approved for use as housing, including all dwellings covered under the Residential Tenancies Act
- **non-permanent dwellings** – such as mobile homes and caravans
- **improvised dwellings** – other structures where people live.