

Framework for housing quality





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Contents

Acknowledgement	3
Framework for housing quality	4
Purpose	4
Framework definitions.....	4
What is included within the four interconnected elements.....	5
Points to note about housing quality	8
References	8
Glossary	9

Acknowledgement

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Framework for housing quality

Purpose

Framework for housing quality outlines the components, related definitions, and scope of the concept of housing quality. Currently there is no official statistic measuring housing quality in Aotearoa New Zealand. Developing a definition and conceptual framework is the first step in helping address that information gap.

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.

Framework definitions

The framework for housing quality covers four interconnected elements: housing habitability, housing functionality, environmental sustainability, and social and cultural sustainability.

Conceptual framework for housing quality



Definitions for housing quality and the four interconnected elements of housing quality are provided below.

Defining housing quality

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

Defining the four elements of housing quality

Housing habitability – 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.

Environmental sustainability – 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. This includes resilience to climate impacts such as sea level rise, temperature rise, droughts, and extreme weather events. Environmental sustainability focuses on the resource efficiency, durability, and resilience of housing.

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

Social and cultural sustainability – 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.

What is included within the four interconnected elements

Aspects of the four interconnected elements of housing quality are described in detail below. It is important to remember that while these elements are described separately, they are all interrelated. Housing habitability and housing functionality are related to how the house is currently functioning. The sustainability aspects apply to how the dwelling functions now and into the future, and how it interacts with the social, economic, and natural landscapes of Aotearoa New Zealand. Other aspects that relate across all four elements are discussed at the end of this framework. These include location, the concept of ‘liveability’, and how an individual’s circumstances impact on housing.

Housing habitability

Physically safe

Housing provides a physically safe environment when it has a sound structure of physically safe materials reasonably resilient to natural hazards (such as extreme weather) and 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.

Physically secure

Housing provides a physically secure environment if it is designed to deter crime and offers reasonable protection from intruders. For instance, the physical structure can be made secure through the ability to lock doors. The orientation of houses and placement of windows overlooking the street can also provide informal surveillance that can help deter crime.

Physically healthy

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; access to safe and efficient sources of energy and heat; access to natural and artificial light; protection from noise transmission; and protection from cold, dampness and mould, indoor pollutants, and excess heat.

Environmental sustainability

Aspects of housing design and construction

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



Responsiveness to climate and environment

Responsiveness to climate is how responsive the building envelope is to the climate (different weather events). This includes the efficiency of energy and water use, the limited use of finite resources, and minimising the use of hazardous substances that could affect the environment.

Facilitation of sustainable living

Facilitation of sustainable living is the ability of people to live sustainably within the home and within their community. This includes factors such as a house's orientation on the site, access to solar gain, shading, heat and energy generation, adequate space for recycling and composting, and suitability for rainwater collection. This also includes the sustained health of neighbouring ecosystems.

Other considerations of environmental sustainability

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

Housing functionality

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 physical impairments. This is especially important within the context of an ageing population. It is also important to consider not only the physical needs of people living in a house but also their visitors (the concepts of 'visitability' and 'accessibility').



The components of housing functionality are described below. Whilst described separately, they work together to support and ensure wellbeing.

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.

Specific cultural and spiritual participation

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 and support.

Social participation

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

Economic participation

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

Connectivity

Connectivity is about access to transport, services, and the environment, including health services, education, employment, food sources, green spaces such as parks, and blue spaces such as beaches. Connection with the environment is important for mental and physical wellbeing. For Māori and other cultures 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

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

Specific emotional and mental health needs

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.

Social and cultural sustainability

Social and cultural sustainability relates to the adaptability and flexibility of housing to meet changing living needs and circumstances, for example different life stages and cultures. It recognises that the life of a house can be very long, and over that time it is likely to accommodate a range of individuals from different backgrounds and with different needs. For example, social and cultural sustainability includes 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. This also includes access to and provision for sustainable transport options to support connectivity and participation beyond the living environment.



Points to note about housing quality

Location

Location (where the house is situated) is an important part of all four 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. For example, proximity to busy roads and exposure to heavy traffic can result 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.

Location can also affect people's ability to access services, employment, and green spaces. Whether an area has easy access to public transport, cycleways, and walkways can be important in terms of both environmental sustainability (potential reduction of carbon emissions) and social and cultural sustainability (meaning that people are less reliant on private cars for transport).

Liveability

Liveability is a similar concept to housing habitability, however liveability is broader and includes aspects such as pleasantness and neighbourliness that are not covered by this framework.

Individual's impact on housing

The occupants' personal circumstances, tenure type, 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) or undertake routine maintenance.

References

Stats NZ (2018). [International and national definitions and frameworks for housing quality](#). Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.

Stats NZ (2019). [Housing quality: Findings from public consultation October 2018](#). Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.

Glossary

Accessibility: Refers to the design of a house so that it is accessible to residents with different physical needs (for example, those with mobility limitations or wheelchair users).

Blue space: Natural areas that are based around water, such as lakes, rivers, beaches, and coastal areas.

Building: see Dwelling

Building envelope: The entire exterior surface of a building, including foundations, walls, doors, and windows that encloses or envelops the space within.

Cultural participation: Cultural participation covers a range of activities and can be broken down into 'passive' and 'active'. For example, passive participation includes activities such as going to a park, a concert, or to the movies. Active cultural participation includes activities such as taking part in dance and theatre, making films, knitting, and creative writing.

Dwelling: A dwelling means any building or structure, or part thereof, that is used (or intended to be used) for the purpose of human habitation. It can be of a permanent or temporary nature and includes structures such as houses, motels, hotels, prisons, motor homes, huts, and tents. There can be more than one dwelling within a building, such as an apartment building, where each apartment or unit is considered to be a separate dwelling.

Environmental sustainability: 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. This includes resilience to climate impacts such as sea level rise, temperature rise, droughts, and extreme weather events. Environmental sustainability focuses on the resource efficiency, durability, and resilience of housing.

Framework: Represents an agreed way of thinking about or mapping a topic. A framework describes the topic's scope and provides definitions for aspects that relate to the topic. Frameworks support consistent collection and reporting of information.

Green space: Land that is partly or completely covered with grass, trees, shrubs, or other vegetation. Green space includes parks, community gardens, and cemeteries. Green spaces are set apart for recreational or aesthetic purposes in an otherwise urban environment.

House: see Dwelling

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

Housing habitability: 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.

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

Kāinga: home, address, residence, village, settlement, habitation, habitat, dwelling.

Liveability: Liveability is a similar concept to housing habitability, however liveability is broader and includes aspects such as pleasantness and neighbourliness that are not covered by this framework.

Natural environment: The natural environment encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally, meaning in this case not artificial. This environment encompasses the interaction of all living species, climate, weather and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity.

Social and cultural sustainability: 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.

Spiritual participation: Relates to the ability of a house to allow people to participate in religious or spiritual activities, either in the home or in the community, such as visiting a place of worship.

Visitability: Refers to the design of a house so that it is accessible to visitors with different physical needs (for example, those with mobility limitations or wheelchair users).

Whānau: An extended family, family group; a familiar term of address to a number of people – the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context, the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.