

Ending Homelessness in Aotearoa

Will Budget 2018 do the trick?

By Marc Slade and Scott Figenshow, *Community Housing Aotearoa*

The Government has made a commitment to end child poverty, with housing at the heart of its policies to achieve this. **Budget 2018** included a NZ\$100m emergency housing package to tackle the growing problem of homelessness, and \$2 billion towards the *KiwiBuild* affordable homes programme – moves heralded by some as ‘momentous’.

An estimated 41,000 people in a nation of 4.7 million people are in ‘severe housing stress’ – living in cars, tents and garages. These figures are just the tip of the iceberg, however, and homelessness needs to be seen in the context of failures in the wider housing system. There is increasing demand for social housing and decreasing housing affordability in many of New Zealand’s main urban areas with Auckland recognised as the world’s fourth least affordable city.

For many in our sector the formation of the new Government brought a strong sense of optimism based on the clear mandate for transformational



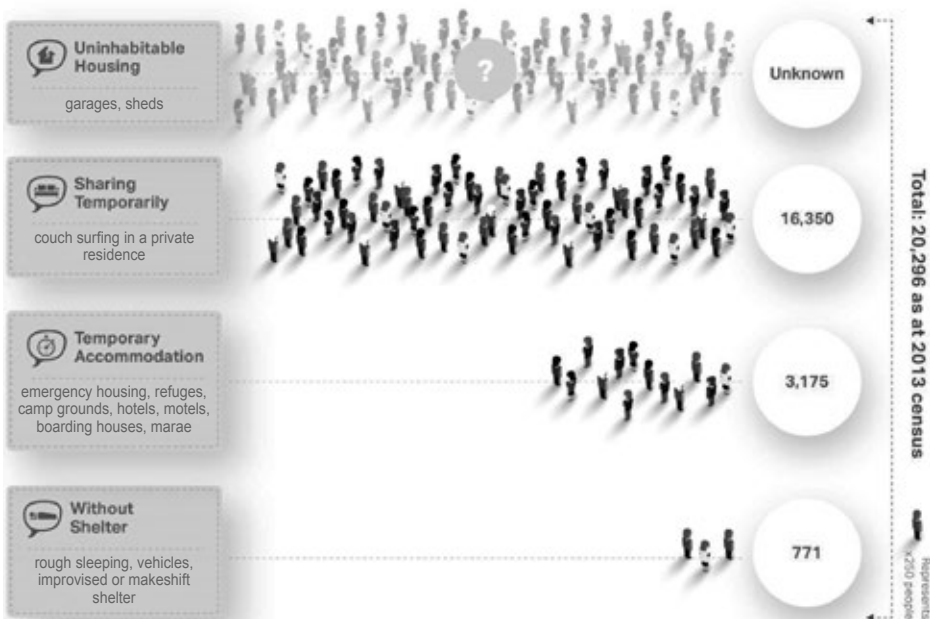
change towards a fairer, more just New Zealand and a commitment to tackling the growing issue of social inequality. This transformation is underpinned by a new emphasis on policy being driven by wellbeing outcomes rather than simple economic indicators such as GDP. The first test of this new approach is the 2018 **Budget** which Government declared was ...



Hon Grant Robertson *Minister of Finance at Budget 2018 printing*

“the first steps in a plan for transformation – a transformation of our economy, a transformation of our public services, and a transformation of the way we work together to improve the lives of all New Zealanders.”

We welcome the Government’s increased support for emergency housing and Housing First, both programmes introduced by the last government. We see this as a positive precedent for maintaining the continuity of proven

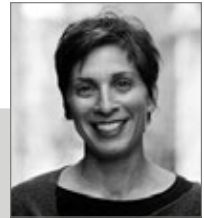


Estimated 2013 homelessness figures in Auckland [Source: Addressing Homelessness in Auckland, *Auckland Council*, July 2017]

responses to housing problems and hope it signals the potential for ongoing cross-party consensus in relation to the need to address New Zealand's housing crisis.

While the increase in funding for additional emergency housing and *Housing First* places is an important step in addressing homelessness, we call on Government to address the root causes of homelessness and further increase investment in social and affordable housing. In the coming year we would hope to see some new policy thinking in relation to ending homelessness, including the development of a human rights based housing strategy recognising adequate housing as a human right, and addressing homelessness as the worst excess of a broken housing system.

In her recent **Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council**, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, *Leilani Farha*, says ...



Leilani Farha

“... we are at a critical moment globally, housing conditions are fraught. Homelessness is on the rise, even in affluent countries.

In this report she advocates that all states should develop a human rights-based housing strategy, and that tackling homelessness is top of the list of issues to be addressed. She says ...

“the lived experience of homelessness and inadequate housing challenges the very core of what it means to be human, assaulting dignity and threatening life itself. It is these experiences that make homelessness and inadequate housing violations of human rights and not merely programme failures.

Her report states the human rights based strategies ...

“... must eliminate homelessness. A state is seen to be in violation of international human rights law if any significant portion of the population is deprived of access to basic shelter or housing. Addressing homelessness is therefore an immediate obligation.

continues ➔

The report outlines ten principles that all housing strategies should be built on. The first principle is that the right to housing should be recognised as a legal right, subject to effective remedies.

It is great that the Government recognises housing as a priority and is investing in aspects of housing supply, but to stand a chance of fixing this broken housing system it must address the systemic issues at the root of the problem. It needs to develop measures across the housing continuum. The community housing sector already has solutions that can assist the Government achieve its target, with over 30 years' experience providing homes that are affordable and retaining the value of public investment for social good.

Although the Government has publicly acknowledged the importance of partnership with the community housing sector, it has not supported these acknowledgments with meaningful policy changes which activate the potentially transformational role a properly funded and regulated community housing sector can play in ensuring all New Zealanders are well housed. For us, transformational would look like the government following Canada's lead in declaring housing as a human right and developing a collaborative human rights-based housing strategy committed to ending homelessness. It would look like making assistance to homeless people and whānau a legal duty of the state. It would look like policy that contributed to a functioning housing system across the continuum, including increasing support to community housing providers to deliver progressive solutions to people's housing needs. We are committed to working in partnership for a Budget 2019 that is truly transformational – recognising housing as a human right and implementing policies to address the fundamental system failures that are at the root of the current housing crisis.



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