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## Wellbeing high amongst public housing tenants

[New research](#) just released by [Motu Research](#) finds that public housing tenants have higher levels of wellbeing than do private sector tenants.

Length of tenure in a person's current house explains much of the difference between public and private tenant wellbeing: When private tenants have been in the same house for one to two decades, they have similar levels of wellbeing to that experienced by public tenants. This finding indicates that security of tenure is a strong candidate for explaining the observed wellbeing differences between public and private renters.

Another key finding is that wellbeing of public housing tenants is similar to that of owner-occupiers.

These results are of special interest given that public housing tenants have much lower incomes, on average, than do private sector tenants or owner-occupiers. In addition, public housing tenants have often faced severe hardships as a precursor to entering public housing.

Public housing in the study is broadly defined to include housing provided by central government (through Kāinga Ora - Homes and Communities), local government and Community Housing Providers (CHPs). Some of these agencies offer income-related rents, while some are not eligible. The wellbeing advantages of public housing are similar whether income-related rents are available or not.

The research is conducted as a component of the MBIE-funded Endeavour research programme, *Public Housing and Urban Regeneration: Maximising Wellbeing*, led by Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman of University of Otago.

Dr Arthur Grimes, who led the current study for Motu, said that the research findings are based on a specially designed survey of residents that included public housing tenants, private sector tenants and owner-occupiers. Many of the questions are drawn from Stats NZ surveys to enable comparison with results from official surveys.

While survey responses came from across the country, the analysis in the paper is based on residents within Wellington and Porirua Cities to compare people in the same urban area.

Dr Grimes stated: "Discovering that tenants in public housing have higher average levels of wellbeing than do private tenants may be surprising to some people given the life challenges faced by many tenants in public housing. The finding that public housing tenants have higher wellbeing indicates that substantial benefits arise from provision of public housing, whether that provision is by central government, local government, or Community Housing Providers."

An additional finding from the study is that wellbeing is enhanced when residents rate the quality of their house highly and when they rate their neighbourhood highly. People are more

likely to give a high rating to their house when the dwelling is warm, dry and in good condition. People rate their neighbourhood highly when it is safe and when there is a high degree of social capital, reflecting strong community relationships.

More detailed analysis shows that having a dwelling that is in good condition is especially important for the wellbeing of Māori residents, reflecting the cultural importance placed by Māori on hospitality and their visitors being comfortable in the host's home.

Professor Howden-Chapman commented: "The results show the importance of high-quality, secure housing and successful community development for residents' wellbeing. We have previously shown the importance of housing quality for health outcomes; this research adds to these prior findings by showing that high-quality housing also has broader wellbeing benefits."

The *Public Housing and Urban Regeneration: Maximising Wellbeing* research programme is continuing, with research into public housing governance, energy efficiency, transport, tenant wellbeing, housing quality and design, and community formation and urban design. All strands of research are underpinned by strong input from Māori and Pacific researchers.

The research discussed above, *Micro-geography and public housing tenant wellbeing*, is available as Motu Working Paper 23-08, at:

[https://www.motu.nz/assets/Uploads/PHUR\\_2023\\_Motu\\_WP\\_23-08.pdf](https://www.motu.nz/assets/Uploads/PHUR_2023_Motu_WP_23-08.pdf) .

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