

Gospel Manifesto: Healthy Homes Leads to Healthy Lives



Home is where the heart is, so the old saying goes but the question is, 'Is it a healthy heart?'

Health starts in our families, in our schools and workplaces, in our playgrounds and parks, and in the air we breathe and the water we drink. No wonder then that studying the relationship between housing and health is an ongoing activity worldwide. There are "confounding" factors in conducting research i.e. people in poor housing (and consequently dealing with real challenges at the community level), suffer so many deprivations that assessment of any one risk factor is almost impossible and the direction of cause and effect therefore often unclear. People who already suffer from ill health may tend to live in substandard housing by virtue of low income. Additionally, indices for measuring health and quality of housing are often insensitive and, linked to all the above, result in methodological problems when designing and conducting appropriate research.

However, the following excerpts from the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) report on healthy homes does not appear to be at all confounded, in fact, it is quite clear:

The CDHB acknowledges that the direct effects of cold homes on health include excess mortality from cardiovascular and respiratory disease amongst the elderly, increased respiratory problems in children, increased illnesses such as colds, influenza and mental health problems, and the exacerbation of existing conditions such as arthritis.

The CDHB recognises that home heating (temperature, humidity and ventilation), energy costs and fuel poverty are key housing issues with implications for health outcomes.

(CANTERBURY DHB POSITION STATEMENT: Home Heating and Air Quality.
Retrieved from <http://www.healthychristchurch.org.nz>

/media/62538/cdhbpositionstatement_homeheatingairquality.pdf)

In my own experience of ministering in a low-socio-economic area, people living in “unhealthy” housing do seem to suffer more aches and pains, nerves, diarrhoea and headache than those who live in modern warm homes. Anyone who works with children living in homes with visible mould and will confirm higher symptom rates, vomiting and sore throats afflicting children. Interestingly and confounding, most studies find that that smoking is not a factor in children’s health.

Overcrowding increases vulnerability to airborne infections - the majority of respiratory infections, meningococcal disease, tuberculosis and acute rheumatic fever and enteric diseases such as diarrhoea are often more frequent in overcrowded houses. In addition research suggests overcrowding can also be a threat to mental health.

Whoever you decide to vote for in September, I invite you to canvas your prospective MP’s opinion on the following:

- If health begins where we live, learn, work and play, why are some Kiwis homes hazardous to their health?
- Too many Kiwis don’t have the same opportunities to be as healthy as others, how will your party’s policies address this?
- All Kiwis should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education, or ethnic background. Does your party have a plan to address this issue?

Humankind is social by nature, and when the ties that bind begin to unravel, so does our health. Health begins at home in our families, with loving relationships, where kids can expect to be safe, nurtured and protected. Health begins with healthy communities, with safe streets, freedom from violence, and parks where kids can play. Health begins with a good education, where children learn not only how to read, write, and prepare for fulfilling, prosperous life, but how to treat each other with dignity and respect. And health begins with safe jobs and fair wages, where people derive a sense personal satisfaction from their work and connection to their co-workers. No institution alone can restore a healthy Aotearoa New Zealand that nurtures families and communities. That will require leadership, and a partnership of business, government, and civic and religious institutions. We can’t eradicate illness, but we can foster good health. And health begins with healthy relationships, healthy communities, and healthy jobs, which protect us from the stress of everyday life. That’s one prescription I’d be prepared to pay for - gladly.

- Rev Sheena Dickson
Convenor, Church & Society Group
Christchurch Presbytery