



Older People's Home Repairs and Maintenance: Ageing Well in Place in New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper considers the role of house condition, comfort and safety in assisting older people to stay in their own homes and connected to their communities. It reports on a five year research programme exploring the repair and maintenance investments and practices of older people. This paper discusses findings from the 2008 national survey of Older People's Home Repairs and Maintenance involving 1,600 people aged 65 years and over. Data is presented on participants' perceptions of the condition of their homes and their maintenance and repair investments. The paper also presents qualitative data from community case studies on older people's perceptions of the condition and performance of their home, their maintenance and repairs practices, and their future housing aspirations. Home maintenance and repairs issues identified by providers of services to older people are also discussed. The paper provides quantitative data from New Zealand national dwelling condition surveys.

Keywords: older people, repairs, housing.

Introduction

This paper considers the role of house condition, comfort and safety in assisting older people (65 and over) to stay in their homes and remain connected to their communities.

The paper presents findings from a five year research programme – *Ageing In Place: Empowering Older People to Repair and Maintain Safe and Comfortable Houses in their Communities*; in particular from: a national survey of older people's repairs and maintenance practices with older owner-occupiers and tenants; interviews with older people about their dwelling condition, repairs and maintenance practices, and future housing planning; and interviews with providers of older people's services about older people's repairs and maintenance needs.

The interviews were conducted as part of two case studies being undertaken for the research programme. The case studies are in two towns in a South Island district (Marlborough) and a small North Island town (Kawerau).

This paper commences with a description of the *Ageing in Place* research programme. Then New Zealand datasets providing information on the condition of the homes that older people live in are discussed. The next section discusses findings from the 2008 National Survey of Older People's House Performance and Their Repair and Maintenance Practices. Findings from the two case studies are then discussed. A concluding section considers the main themes and implications from the study for improving the condition of older people's homes in New Zealand.

Ageing In Place Research Programme

The aim of the *Ageing In Place* research programme is to optimise New Zealanders' ability to age positively and be valued, integral members of their families and communities by reducing older people's disengagement and isolation associated with poor house condition and performance.

The research programme addresses four critical questions:

- Do poor house performance, dilapidation and the burden of repairs and maintenance push older people from their houses into higher dependency living and disengage them from their communities?
- What services, products and assistance do older people need to maintain their houses as safe and comfortable places in which to live and do those needs vary according to locational, neighbourhood or socio-cultural characteristics?
- Are those services, products and assistance accessible, and are there some groups of older people whose access is particularly vulnerable?
- How can the private, public and community sectors best deliver the repair and maintenance services, products and assistance that will support older people to ensure that their homes are well maintained, in good repair and perform safely and well?

This research programme recognises that the individual and externalised costs of poorly maintained, repaired and performing homes are significant. Such dwellings are likely to be cold, uncomfortable, and unsafe. They tend to be associated with fuel poverty, ill-health, neighbourhood decline, dependency and negative environmental impacts. Older people are not resilient in houses that are poorly repaired, cold, and expensive to run. They become unhealthy, stressed and at risk of injury. Dilapidated housing and the burden of maintenance and repair have been identified as major factors in prompting older people to disengage from their communities and shift into higher dependency residential environments (Arblaster et al, 1996; Environmental Epidemiology Unit, 1999; Eurowinter Group, 1997; Hanson, J., 2001; Heywood, Oldman, and Means, 2002; Hopton and Hunt, 1996a; Hopton and Hunt, 1996b; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1998; McCarthy et al 1985; OECD, 2003; Scharf et al, 2001; Scharf et al, 2002; Terry and Joseph, 1998; Tinker, A., 2003; Wilkinson, Armstrong and Landon, 2001).

In many countries it is recognised that repairs, maintenance and stock up-grade is a significant component of maintaining the national infrastructure. It is also recognised that encouraging and assisting older people to address their repairs and maintenance needs is important if older people are to age in place and to keep well (Bridge and Flynn 2003; Leather, 2000; Mullins, Beider and Rowlands, 2004; ODPM 2002; Scottish Executive 2003).

British research has found that the costs of repair are clearly unaffordable for some groups (Leather, 2000). The groups most vulnerable are owner-occupiers in dilapidated homes, including older people. Those on low and uncertain incomes are also likely to under-invest. Again older people are affected by this because they are marginal to the employment market and their earning power is limited by disability, illness or age.

Failure to address repairs and maintenance needs is not one simply of affordability. Research also shows that older owner-occupiers misread the outcomes of dwelling problems and miscalculate how long repair work can be delayed. Often they do not distinguish between essential and cosmetic work on their dwellings. They also tend to be reactive to presenting problems rather than systematic in preventative maintenance. Older people are least likely to assess the condition of their house accurately (Leather, 2000; Saville-Smith 2005b).

Previous Surveys of Older People's House Conditions, Repairs and Maintenance

Two New Zealand datasets provide information on the condition of the homes that older people (aged 65 and older) reside in. Those are the National Repairs and Maintenance Survey 2004 (Saville-Smith 2005a), and the 1999 and 2004 BRANZ House Condition Surveys (HCS) (Clark et al, 2000; Clark et al 2005). They show that the dwellings in which older people live tend to be in better condition than New Zealand dwellings overall. However, older people tend to overstate the positive condition of their dwellings and do not connect dwelling performance with dwelling condition. The datasets also consistently show that older people are prone to under-investing in their repairs and maintenance and have a pattern of repair and maintenance deferral.¹

The 2004 National Repairs and Maintenance Survey found that 83.5 percent of the older owner occupiers perceived their dwellings to be in *Good* or *Excellent* condition. The direct surveying of the physical condition of dwellings by BRANZ in the HCS, however, found that only 73.3 percent of the dwellings with older householders are in *Good* or *Excellent* condition.

A third of older homeowners in the 2004 National Repairs and Maintenance Survey reported that they had delayed or deferred some or all of their home maintenance in the twelve months prior to the survey. The main reason given by older people for delaying or deferring maintenance work was expense. This was cited by 25.9 percent of older people. Over half (58.9 percent) of older homeowners made no expenditure on home maintenance or repairs in the twelve months prior to surveying and around a fifth of older homeowners reported modest expenditures of NZ\$1-\$650 in that period. There were also substantial proportions of older home owners who intended to make only minimal investment in repairs and maintenance in the twelve months after surveying. Just over 52 percent intended to spend NZ\$650 or less. That includes 25.2 percent of older home owners with the intention of making no expenditure.

The 2004 survey also showed differences in the investment patterns of older and younger householders. While the under-investment in repairs and maintenance by younger age groups decreased between 1999 and 2004, among dwellings owned by older people, the value of unmet repairs and maintenance increased by 5.9 percent. In contrast, the value of unmet repairs and maintenance dropped for younger people's dwellings between 1999 and 2004 by 23.1 percent.

Associated with the increase in the value of unmet repairs and maintenance for older people's dwellings was a decline in the proportion of dwellings occupied by older people that were in *Good* or *Excellent* dwelling condition. The proportion of older people's dwellings in the *Good* or *Excellent* condition categories fell from 80.6 percent to 73.3 percent.

Even though those surveys showed the majority of older people's dwellings tended to be in good condition, on some house components, older people's dwellings were in persistently worse condition than those same components in the dwellings of younger people. Older people's dwellings showed inferior ceiling insulation relative to the dwellings of younger people in the 1999 and 2004 surveys. This is an important deficit, as ceiling insulation is critical to energy efficiency and ensuring thermal comfort. Other dwelling components in older people's homes that showed a lower average component condition included windows, roof claddings and steps/ramps. These components pose problems for older people's health and safety. Deteriorated roof cladding and windows contribute to poor thermal performance in a

¹ The pattern of repair and maintenance deferral is also characteristic of home owners under 65, as shown in the National Repairs and Maintenance Survey 2004 (Saville-Smith, 2005).

dwelling. Deteriorated steps and ramps pose potential fall and injury risks to older people, as well as limiting their movement in and out of their homes.

The 2008 National Survey of Older People's House Performance and Their Repair and Maintenance Practices

The 2008 National Survey (Saville-Smith, James and Fraser 2008) built on the earlier National Repairs and Maintenance Survey 2004. Older people were only a subset of the samples of the earlier datasets, consequently their representational power is limited. The 2008 National Survey aimed for a larger, more representative sample of the older population.

The target population for the national survey was New Zealanders aged 65 years or older living in a private residential dwelling. A simple random sample of 1,600 older people was selected and interviews undertaken by telephone. The survey has a margin of error of ± 2.5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire of predominantly close-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed by CRESA and used questions similar to those in the previous 2004 survey. Research New Zealand Ltd was commissioned to undertake the telephone interviewing and supply the raw data for analysis.

The Survey Participants and Their Homes

Almost three-quarters of the survey participants were what might be described as 'younger old' people. That is, they are aged 65-74 years. The participants overwhelmingly (91.1 percent) identify as New Zealand European (Pakeha). Only 2.4 percent identify as Maori. While almost all (98.8 percent) of participants draw on New Zealand Superannuation or Veterans Pension, over half (59.1 percent) also reported other sources of household income, such as wages/salary, private pensions, or investments. The majority of survey participants (78.0 percent) lived in households of older people – either by themselves or as a couple.

As is typical for New Zealand's housing stock, the survey show that the dwellings in which older householders live are dominated by detached single-storey dwellings. A considerable proportion (41.2 percent) of the dwellings were built in 1978 or later, that is, after the introduction of building regulations requiring insulation. Most dwellings are owned mortgage-free, although 10.3 percent of older householders reported having a mortgage.

House Comfort, Condition and Safety

As in previous surveys, the older people in the 2008 survey are confident in the condition and safety of their dwelling: 46.1 percent describe their dwelling condition as *Excellent* while a further 42.7 percent describe their dwelling condition as *Good*. Despite this, there are indicators that many of these dwellings do not perform well.

While 88.8 percent of householders reported their dwellings as in *Good* or *Excellent* condition, only half reported that their heating system always keeps them warm in winter. In addition, 34.4 percent of householders reported problems with damp, mould or condensation. Almost a quarter (24.7 percent) reported that they have had slips or falls inside or immediately outside their home. Almost a quarter (24.7 percent) also reported that they have had to make some modifications to their dwelling to allow them to move around their house. These factors together indicate a higher prevalence of poorly designed or maintained homes than older people themselves perceive.

Problems that older people have in keeping their homes warm enough in winter reflects the poor thermal performance of New Zealand's housing stock. Recent research shows that substantial proportions of older people find it difficult to heat their homes adequately (CRESA and Public Policy & Research 2009; Povey and Harris 2005). The average winter living room temperature in New Zealand houses is

17.8° C and average bedroom temperatures are even lower, around 14° C. (Isaacs et al 2004b; Isaacs et al 2003; Isaacs et al 2002; Isaacs et al 2005). These temperatures fall well below World Health Organization recommended indoor temperatures for older people.

Repairs and Maintenance Practices

The median amount that survey participants had spent on repairs and maintenance in the previous 12 months was NZ\$1,100. The most common activities they undertook were: exterior re-painting, interior re-painting and/or wall papering, installing a new heating system, and roof repairs.

Almost a fifth of survey participants (19.4 percent) reported that they have delayed repairs or maintenance of their dwellings. The primary reason for this was perceived expense, with 55 percent of householders citing this as the primary reason for delays. A further 17.9 percent reported that it was too inconvenient to do repairs or maintenance, while 5.9 percent reported that they were unable to get tradesmen.

Typically older people in the survey relied on the building industry (particularly tradespeople) for information about repairs, maintenance, renovations and modifications. They reported very little engagement with independent and professional assessors either in the building industry or other sectors such as health and accident insurance. Family and friends also made important contributions to information for a considerable proportion of older people around dwelling repairs, maintenance, modifications and renovations. About a quarter of older people reported relying on their own expertise to assess their repairs and maintenance needs.

Case Studies

As part of the *Ageing In Place* research programme, case studies are being conducted in four areas of New Zealand, including two towns in a South Island district (Marlborough) and a small North Island town (Kawerau). The interview data discussed in this paper is from the case studies in Marlborough and Kawerau. The purpose of the case studies is to gather qualitative data on older people's repairs and maintenance practices and investments, the extent to which repairs and maintenance burdens may prompt a move to a higher dependency living environment (such as to a retirement village, rest home or to live with family), and the repairs and maintenance service needs of older people.

The district of Marlborough, with a population of over 42,000, has the oldest age profile in New Zealand. In the last census (2006), 16.2 percent of the district's population was aged 65 and over, compared to 12.3 percent of New Zealand's total population. Kawerau is a small town of almost 7,000 residents, which was established to service the pulp and paper industry in 1953. For many years it had a very young age profile, however, in 2006 the proportion of its older population was similar to the national proportion. From 1996 to 2006 the 65 and over age group in Kawerau doubled, from 6.1 percent to 12.4 percent. This increase in the older age population is due to residents retiring in the town, as well as older people moving to the town, in part because of affordable house prices.

In the case studies, in-depth interviews were conducted with older people and with providers of services to older people. Both sets of interviews were concerned with finding out about older people's repairs and maintenance investment, practices and needs.

In Marlborough 36 interviews were conducted with 42 older people (including six couples). Those interviews involved 28 women and 14 men. In Kawerau 35 interviews were conducted with 42 older people (including seven couples). Those interviews involved 19 women and 21 men. In each area, ten of those interviews were conducted with older people who had moved into a higher dependency living environment, in order to examine to what extent repairs and maintenance issues had influenced their movement decisions. The higher dependency living environments include a rest home, retirement village and living with family. The remainder of the interviews (26 in Marlborough and 25 in Kawerau) were conducted with older people living independently (both as owner occupiers and tenants). Most of

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those were living on their own or with a partner. A few had other family members living with them, though they were still the householder with primary responsibility for the management of their home, including decisions about repairs and maintenance.

Overall, 21 interviews were conducted with providers of services to older people in Marlborough and Kawerau. Those services comprised:

- Home repairs and maintenance services (two interviews)
- Older people's services including advocacy and social services (seven interviews)
- Older people's housing providers (six interviews)
- Older people's health services (four interviews)
- Home insulation services (two interviews).

House Condition and Performance

There were some differences in older people's perceptions about the physical conditions of homes in the two areas of Marlborough and Kawerau.

In Kawerau most of the 25 interviewees lived in houses built before 1978. The majority of them considered the condition of their homes to be *Good* or *Average*. Two considered the condition of their home to be *Poor*. Kawerau interviewees identified condition problems particularly with wall and floor insulation, rotting timber, leaking spouting and drainpipes, deteriorating roofs, inaccessible bathrooms, outside steps and decking in poor repairs and needing small repair jobs. Over half reported damp or condensation in their home.

In Marlborough 13 of the 26 interviewees lived in homes built before 1978. Almost all considered the condition of their home to be *Excellent* or *Good*. None considered their home to be in *Poor* condition. In Marlborough less than one third reported problems with damp and condensation. None reported repairs needing to be done.

Repairs and Maintenance Practices

In one of the case study areas, Marlborough, three-quarters of those interviewed had done some repairs and maintenance in the previous twelve months, and in Kawerau (where more repairs were identified as needing to be done), one half had done repairs and maintenance in the previous twelve months. The most common repairs and maintenance jobs were similar to those reported in the 2008 national survey: exterior re-painting, and interior re-painting and/or wall papering.

In both areas, over half had decided to delay repairs or maintenance of their dwellings. As the survey participants reported, the primary reason for delay was perceived expense followed by inconvenience. Poor health, either of one's self or partner was also cited as a reason for delay. Comments included:

It's a matter of prioritising money, we're only on pensions.

Painting needs to be done but because of [my husband's] health it's not easy having people come in and out. I don't want to have the humbug. It's not imperative that it's done. But if something needed to be done I'd go ahead and do it.

Interviewees also reported that difficulties in getting someone to do the work was a reason for delay. Sometimes they did not know who they should get for the job, or could not get a tradesman interested in doing a small job. Some older people said they relied on family members to help with repairs and maintenance, and had to wait for them to do the job. These comments were typical:

I can't find anyone to put down second hand carpet. Upgrading the painting and wallpapering inside – it's finance and time ... the chimney was damaged in recent gales

and needs fixing. But I won't do that until my grandson comes, I wouldn't go up on the roof by myself now.

My grandson wasn't here to do it and the rest [of the family] are overseas at the moment.

Some of the interviewees simply did not see repairs and maintenance as a priority for them at their time of life:

Too old to start doing repairs. Windows outside need painting and any rotten wood replacing, but I won't be doing that.

Problems in Getting Repairs and Maintenance Done

The main repairs and maintenance problems that interviewees identified were:

- Difficulties in getting paid people to do small jobs, because it was not worth their while.
- Poor quality workmanship.
- Trusting workers. Some expressed feeling vulnerable to unscrupulous providers targeting older people.
- Difficulties in getting reliable information and advice about:
 - The scope of the work
 - Appropriate providers
 - Understanding quotations for jobs
 - Whether a quality job had been done.

The providers in the two case study areas reported on the concerns that their older clients raised with them about home repairs and maintenance. The main concerns that their older clients talked about were:

- A decline in ability to carry out routine repairs and maintenance themselves.
- Difficulties in finding someone to do the work.
- Difficulties in getting reliable information and advice about repairs and maintenance.
- The costs of repairs and maintenance. Some older people were faced with considerable expense due to years of foregone maintenance.
- Trustworthiness and reliability of repairs and maintenance providers.

The issues raised by providers were very similar to the ones raised by the older people who were interviewed. In particular, both the providers and older people commented on difficulties in finding the appropriate person to carry out a job, trustworthiness of repairs and maintenance providers, and difficulties in getting reliable information and advice.

Providers also identified some key factors that they saw affecting the ability of older people to manage their repairs and maintenance:

- The older householder's reluctance to acknowledge that they have repairs and maintenance problems.
- The older householder's reluctance to complain about un-met repairs. Some older people would simply accept a level of disrepair. Others would not complain about poor service or poor workmanship.
- Physical limitations, such as failing sight and hearing that prevent an older person seeing that repairs are needed. Mild dementia and mental health issues were also identified by some providers as limiting the ability of the older householder to perceive that repairs are needed.
- The older householder's lack of energy and capability to do repairs or organise to get a job done.
- The older householder failing to realise the health and safety implications of not doing repairs and maintenance, as well as decline in the dwelling's value.

- The older householder's misperceptions about the actual costs of repairs and maintenance. Some older people are not used to paying for small jobs to be done around the home because of past ability to do it themselves or have a partner do them; therefore they tend to underestimate the value of such work. Others have an unrealistic appreciation of the costs of labour and materials.

Providers noted that some older people are confronted with repairs and maintenance problems more than others. These tend to be older people who live on their own, who are newcomers to the area, who lack family support or who are not well connected to social and friendship networks. Women are more likely to need advice and assistance than men.

All the providers interviewed reported that their clients raised repairs and maintenance issues with them. Some providers said that it was only the occasional client who raised repairs and maintenance issues, while the older people's advocacy organisations, the social service providers and insulation providers noted that they receive a lot of enquiries about repairs and maintenance. Some providers also reported that their clients raise concerns about heating their homes, accessing funding for home modifications and obtaining home care services.

According to providers, older clients asked them for the following information and advice:

- Recommendations about repairs and maintenance providers.
- Information about financial assistance available for repairs and maintenance, modifications and home help.
- Help with understanding quotations that they have received for a job.
- Advice on whether a job had been done properly.
- Information on the operation and performance of particular products, particularly home heating products.
- Dealing with landlord over repairs and maintenance. Often the older person does not know how to approach their landlord, or they do not like complaining. They want a support person to help them contact the landlord.

Older people's advocacy organisations, social service organisations, insulation providers and health services said they were sometimes asked to recommend a repairs and maintenance provider. Some organisations did recommend particular providers, while others did not give recommendations. Key issues providers raised about giving recommendations were that their organisation had to be seen to be impartial and not supporting particular providers. Nor did they want to incur any liability or responsibility for others' work. One provider also commented that it was wary of taking on the role of 'next of kin' of the older person. In their view, families were the main supports for older people.

Impacts of Unmet Repairs and Maintenance

The providers identified a number of impacts of un-addressed repairs and maintenance issues on their older clients. Those impacts were mainly concerned with the health and safety of their clients. Other impacts were on the physical condition of the dwelling itself.

Providers identified clear health and safety impacts on older residents due to cold, damp and drafty homes and lack of floor coverings. Both health and social service providers gave examples of older people getting hypothermia due to the coldness of their homes. Those residents sometimes were sent to a rest home for the winter, and in a few instances this temporary move became permanent.

Those working in health services noted that older people affected by asthma and respiratory conditions were especially vulnerable in cold and damp dwellings. Older people with diabetes, arthritis and obesity were impaired in their movement in and around the home, and because of their condition, were especially vulnerable to accidents if their home was in poor repair.

Insulation providers noted that the poor condition of a dwelling could occasionally prevent the dwelling from being insulated. Those providers also noted it was common to come across repairs needing to be done and unsafe situations in older people's houses. One of the insulation providers commented that

their workers often came across old wiring in need of repair, roof leaks and water pipes leaking under houses. All these problems not only posed risks for the workers, but contributed to an unhealthy and unsafe house.

Older people's service providers also noted older people's health and safety were at risk through cold homes, dampness due to leaks, unsafe features such as steps in poor repair and broken concrete paths, water temperatures set too high and a lack of simple aids such as grab rails in the bathroom and toilet.

Providers also observed impacts on housing stock if repairs and maintenance are not done. One provider noted the tendency of older home owners to leave smaller jobs because of the expense, only to have those minor problems because major and expensive repairs. Another provider noted the reluctance of older tenants to broach repairs and maintenance issues with their landlord, until forced to when a small issue becomes an urgent problem.

Providers also noted that, as some older people do not realise the implications of failing to maintain their homes, the condition of the dwelling deteriorates. Several providers in Kawerau identified past failure of householders of all ages to address damage resulting from the 1987 Edgecumbe earthquake. This lack of attention to repairs and maintenance has now resulted in major problems in the local housing stock, including faulty wiring, damaged and unsafe chimneys, piles and foundations, and unstable hot water tanks.

Movement Decisions Relating to Repairs and Maintenance Burden

The older people living independently were asked why they had moved to the house they were currently living in. The most common reasons for moving were concerned with making their property easier to manage, and safer for them. The main reason for moving was to reduce the size of their house and section, while the second most popular reason was to get a house with better physical access, better design or better performance. The third most common reason for moving was to be closer to facilities and services such as shops and health services. Underlying all those reasons was often a concern about one's own or partner's health. The following comments illustrate these reasons:

In hindsight it has worked out well. It's a small place with minimum garden. We were only in here a year and I had my hip done. It was a good move. Nobody knows what's ahead of them. We could never have coped in the other house and I can walk to [the shopping centre] from here.

Flat ground was the priority and something not too far out ... I'd gone past this place lots of times and thought I wouldn't mind living there. When it came up for sale we took the opportunity.

Most of the older people were not considering a move in the next few years. However, they said that the main things that would prompt them to consider a move were: declining health, inability to manage the upkeep of house and section, and inability to cope with physical features such as stairs or a cold house. Comments included:

Less maintenance, a modernised home with no or low maintenance.

Maintenance is getting a burden. To do this place up, painting would cost a lot. You would be looking at \$30,000 - \$40,000 and that would knock our bank balance. I don't like a place to run down. The size is a worry too, it's too big for us.

Those living in higher dependency environments said that the main reason they had moved to that environment was due to their own or their partner's poor health. Those who had moved into retirement villages in particular commented that living in a dwelling where maintenance is taken care of was an attraction. Comments included:

I was on my own after my husband died. I had to pay for all my own repairs. I didn't have anybody to do anything for me, your children are always too busy.

When my husband was alive, when things broke, he mended them ... general upkeep was really an issue.

Inside the house, it got on top of me in the end.

Some providers were clear that the burden of repairs can prompt older people to 'downsize' their large family home and move into a rental dwelling or retirement village where their repairs and maintenance needs are managed by others. One older people's service provider gave several examples of older women who were considering a move because they could not afford to maintain their home. Housing providers considered that repairs and maintenance issues were a key factor in older people's decisions to move to their dwellings:

Home maintenance worries are a major reason why people want to come and live [at the retirement village]. Also safety and security and companionship. And the support and care available when and if needed.

A lot want to be in a situation where they are not reliant on family coming around to do repairs [living here] it means that family are coming to see them, not coming to do chores.

One health provider commented that some of their older clients lived in houses in very poor repair. Where the person has high support needs and there is significant safety risk from the condition of the house, that organisation generally refers the person for an assessment and consideration of whether rest home care is needed.

What Would Help Older People To Age In Place Well?

The majority of older interviewees living independently received some day-to-day support to help them remain living in their homes. That support included help with the lawns and garden, help with housework and personal care, transport to access services, meals provided, mobility equipment and personal alarms.

Both the older people living independently and those in higher dependency living situations were asked what do older people need to help them 'age in place'? Help with home repairs and maintenance was certainly something they identified. However, that was only one of a wide range of supports that they considered important to help older people to continue to live in their own homes.

In addition to home repairs and maintenance, they identified other support they needed:

- Companionship and contact with others
- Eating properly
- Help with housework
- Help with gardens and lawns
- Help with shopping
- Access to transport
- Information about services and assistance
- Respite care for a sick spouse
- Mobility aids
- Personal alarm
- Good local health services
- Help to maintain safety of the house
- Impartial financial advice

- Good needs assessment

Conclusion

The data from existing datasets and the 2008 National Survey of Older People's Repairs and Maintenance give a consistent picture of older New Zealanders' repair and maintenance patterns. Older people have high levels of owner occupation and confidence in the condition and safety of their houses. The dwelling condition of older people's dwellings has improved slightly between 1999 and 2004. However, there are clear indications that the dwelling stock in which older people live performs poorly, and that some older people over-estimate the condition of their dwellings.

The 2008 National Survey of Older People's Repairs and Maintenance also found evidence of poor house conditions affecting the older population. That survey found that only half of the participants reported that their heating system always kept them warm in winter. Over a third of householders reported problems with damp, condensation and mould and almost a quarter reported that they have had slips or falls inside or immediately outside their home. About a fifth of respondents to that survey reported that they had delayed repairs and maintenance, mainly for reasons of expense and inconvenience.

Qualitative data from interviews with older people and providers of services to older people also show that older people are worried about home repairs and maintenance. Over half of the older interviewees had decided to delay repairs or maintenance of their dwellings. The primary reason for delay was perceived expense followed by inconvenience. Poor health, either of one's self or partner was also a reason for delay. Both the providers and older people commented that older householders had difficulties in finding the appropriate person to carry out repairs, are concerned about the trustworthiness of repairs and maintenance providers, and have difficulties in getting reliable information and advice.

Providers observed that unmet repairs and maintenance certainly impacts on their older clients. Those impacts are mainly concerned with the health and safety of their clients. Other impacts are on the physical condition and value of the dwelling itself.

There is some evidence that the burden of repairs and maintenance does influence some older people to move to higher dependency living situations such as a retirement village or rest home where their repairs and maintenance needs are managed by others. However, the retirement village option is beyond the financial means of some older people.

A literature review conducted as part of the *Ageing In Place* research programme found a widespread trend towards programmes designed to facilitate and encourage owner occupiers to undertake repairs, maintenance and renovations of ageing stock. Assistance to home owners is increasingly focusing on preventing the deterioration of vulnerable stock in an effort to break the cycle of stock decline and reduce the costs of remediation. The review of 27 European countries found that 23 have programmes supporting owner occupiers to invest in repairs and maintenance. Canada, the USA and Australia also have such programmes.² In contrast, in New Zealand assistance is limited to emergency repairs on very sub-standard houses posing health and safety risks.

There is evidence that the repairs and maintenance issues identified overseas facing older owner occupiers, such as unaffordability, older people's lack of understanding of the nature of the repairs problem, and their difficulty in accurately assessing the condition of their dwelling, are also highly relevant and pressing in New Zealand. The *Ageing In Place* research programme provides a basis to help develop robust evidence about the repairs and maintenance needs of older people's dwellings so

² See also CRESA and Public Policy & Research (2009) for an international review of programmes to improve the performance and amenity of older people's dwellings.

that responses tailored to the nature of New Zealand's housing stock and older people's needs can be developed.

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