

Media release

Research uncovers the extraordinary importance of the home

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The Public Health Association conference was today given a picture of how important a healthy house and a happy home is to the lives of its occupants, including teenagers.

Housing New Zealand's Healthy Housing project manager, Tracey Moore, told the public health workers gathered at Waitangi, that Northland has become the first region to have completed a Healthy Housing programme.

"Since 2003, we have visited more than 700 state homes in Northland and carried out 1,300 'interventions' including repairs, extensions, ventilation ducts, electric heating and insulation. The last house, in the Whangarei suburb of Raumanga was finished on 26 June," Ms Moore told the delegates.

The Healthy Housing programme, a joint venture by Housing New Zealand and District Health Boards in Counties Manukau, Auckland, Northland and Hutt Valley, aims to reduce avoidable hospital admissions from respiratory and infectious conditions. Research shows that these conditions are linked to overcrowding in homes.

Families are also visited by a public health nurse who can refer them to health services they may be missing out on such as immunisation, cervical screening, diabetes programmes, smoking cessation.

"There has been a 37 percent reduction in avoidable hospital admissions in the 12 months following a Healthy Housing intervention among Counties Manukau families," she said.

"We have had Northland parents tell us their children are coughing less and visiting the doctor less. But it goes beyond improved physical health. People report having more pride in their home, feeling more able to invite people around and therefore getting more involved in their community.

"Parents, freed from having to look after chronically ill children, have returned to the workforce or to education. And fighting between children has markedly reduced."

A researcher with Auckland University's Centre for Health Services, Research and Policy, spoke to the conference of the importance of their home to young people.

In her ground-breaking research, Rebecca Broadbent interviewed in-depth over three months, a group of 12-to-16 year olds across a socio-economic range and from a variety of homes: state and private housing.

"The young people regarded their home as very important to them. They saw it as a safe place that they could walk through open doors into, where they would be secure and things would be constant.

Mrs Broadbent told the conference that at a time when many other things were changing rapidly in their lives, it was important for their wellbeing that young peoples' homes remained a source of stability.

"The young people also felt a strong connection to their neighbourhood, and felt safer in their home because of their relationship with neighbours and neighbourhood. It is clear that the young people really valued their neighbourhood and the people in it and this contributed to their feelings of safety and stability in the home.

"I was quite moved at the heart these young people had for family, and for their home and even for their neighbourhood. And that was the same across the whole group who spoke to me."

For more information contact conference media advisor Liz Price on 0276 957 744.