

# REINVIGORATING HOMEPLACES

---

## The impact of house repairs on Māori wellbeing

*Fiona Cram\**  
*Sarah Tawhai†*  
*Morehu Munro‡*  
*Ana Apatu§*

### Abstract

For many Māori, it is the presence of their kin that transforms a dwelling into a home. However, when that dwelling needs repairs, it can compromise health and wellbeing and be a barrier to homemaking. Two Kaupapa Māori qualitative studies in Hawke's Bay interviewed 24 whānau members living in 18 whānau-owned houses about the impact of government-funded critical house repairs. Thematic analysis highlighted that critical repairs were primarily needed as a result of financial hardship. Most participants were positive about the repair work done by Māori tradespeople. Dissatisfaction of a few participants demonstrated the need for increased communication between all those involved in the house repairs. When the repair work was completed, homeowners were grateful for drier and warmer houses. Overall, repairing Māori owner-occupied homes improved occupants' health and wellbeing, revitalised homemaking, inspired renovation plans, and comforted older whānau members about the longevity of their home for future generations.

### Keywords

health, homemaking, housing, maintenance, Māori, repairs, wellbeing

### Introduction

We need to do everything we can to at least provide people with safe shelter.  
—Mārama Fox (Māori Party, 2016)

Whānau-owned homes are a precious taonga that can provide shelter and support for those who reside there and those who visit. As many Māori will attest, it is whānau that make a house a home (Boulton et al., 2022; Cram, 2020), and these

\* Ngāti Pāhauwera. Director, Katoa Ltd, Auckland, New Zealand. Email: fionac@katoa.net.nz

† Ngāti Kahungunu. Independent Community Researcher, Hastings, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

‡ Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Pāhauwera. Community Researcher and Director, Te Ohonga Ake Charitable Trust, Wairoa, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

§ Ngāti Kahungunu. Chief Executive Officer, Wharariki Trust, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

homes are spaces and places where traditional and contemporary relationships are developed and sustained, and where people past, present, and future are woven together (Superu, 2018). Thus, a home is a safe haven where Māori can construct their identities, perform their day-to-day lives, and feel at ease and free to be themselves (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Saville-Smith & James, 2018). This is not to dismiss or downplay the family violence experiences of some whānau, whose house is a site of hurt and terror rather than a place of safety (Cram, 2020).

Although whānau do not have to own a house to feel they have a home, the inability of many whānau to find good-quality, affordable, and secure rental accommodation contrasts sharply with the housing stability that owner occupation can provide (Cutts et al., 2011). Even so, the cost of living can see Māori owner-occupiers having to make choices between mortgage payments and home maintenance and repairs (Waldegrave et al., 2006). This is not solely a Māori “problem”. House maintenance is not strongly pursued by any ethnic group in Aotearoa New Zealand, except perhaps immediately prior to the sale of a house. This is problematic as a house in need of maintenance and repairs can be a risk to residents’ health and wellbeing (Thomson et al., 2013).

The findings from two small qualitative studies are reported here to explore Māori homeowners’ experiences of critical house repairs, that is, repairs that are essential to ensuring the functionality, safety, and structural integrity of a dwelling (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2023). Twenty-four whānau members who resided in one of 18 whānau owner-occupied houses that were part of a house repairs programme were asked about the impact of critical repairs on whānau wellbeing. To provide a context for these studies, this introduction looks at the state of Māori housing and the challenges to homemaking experienced by Māori owner-occupiers.

### ***Māori housing and Māori homeowners***

The colonisation of Aotearoa has disrupted Māori homemaking. The loss of Māori ancestral lands has been dramatic over the time period of British colonisation, from 1840 to the present day. As the Pākehā population increased, their demand for land increased, and Māori land was consequently alienated by many means, including purchase, confiscation, and legislative imperatives (e.g., Public Works Act 1981; see also Waitangi Tribunal, 2010). Māori freehold land now makes up only 5.5% of the land mass of this country, or just over 1.4 million hectares (Livesey, 2010). Māori

aspirations to build on their remaining whenua have been stymied by legislation, regional council planning and bylaws, and title problems and whānau disputes, to name just a few of the barriers (Arbury & Cram, 2023; Toomey et al., 2017). It is only relatively recently that the Crown’s strategic planning for Māori housing has been accompanied by the injection of the funding needed to start supporting people to build and live on their own land (Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga | Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2021). However, this is not an option for all Māori as there simply is not enough Māori land remaining. Māori homemaking has also suffered from the imposition of Western house designs and build technologies and their constraints on the ways whānau live their lives and the ontological security (i.e., a person’s sense of identity that is connected to the stability of their lived environment) whānau gain from their homes (Arbury & Cram, 2023; Cram, 2020).

Surveillance of and research about the state of Māori housing has a decades-long history in New Zealand (Arbury & Cram, 2023). Over much of the 20th century and into the 21st, research has raised alarm bells about the quality of Māori rural housing and the overcrowding of Māori homes more generally (Douglas, 1986; Ferguson, 1995; Māori Women’s Housing Research Project, 1991). Recent surveys, including the New Zealand General Social Survey (Stats NZ, 2018), Te Kupenga (Statistics New Zealand, 2014; Stats NZ, 2020), and the Census, continue to document the poor condition of Māori homes. Housing habitability includes housing quality (indicated by the presence of dampness, mould, and cold) as well as home ventilation and heating and other aspects such as whether residents have suffered from flu or cold-like symptoms, or asthma in the previous 12 months. In the 2018 Census, two out of five Māori reported they lived in homes affected by dampness or mould (compared to one in five New Zealand Europeans) (Stats NZ, 2021b). It is now well known that poor housing quality can impact negatively on people’s lives across many domains, including health and safety, employment, education, social connectedness, and identity (Statistics New Zealand, 2016; Stats NZ, 2021a, 2021b).

In 2012, the New Zealand Productivity Commission reported on issues related to affordable housing for Māori. While understanding that a house for Māori is often more about connection to people, place, and culture than it is about a financial investment, the Commission observed that low incomes and low financial literacy were two stumbling blocks to Māori realising their

housing aspirations. Māori confined to the rental housing market are then at risk of being overexposed to the financial and wellness burdens of poor dwelling performance (Johnson et al., 2018).

This overexposure can also occur for Māori homeowners. Māori who live close to their ancestral marae, for example, are more likely to own their own homes and experience more positive cultural outcomes (e.g., Māori language proficiency, kaitiakitanga) than Māori who live further away. As Broughton explains, “The role of housing in enabling people to connect to their tūrangawaewae is important to Māori wellbeing” (Stats NZ, 2021a, p. 1). However, Māori living close to their ancestral marae are also more likely to experience financial hardship, and their homes are more likely to be crowded (Stats NZ, 2021b). As the Social Policy and Evaluation Unit (Superu, 2017) noted, “The experience of housing quality varies greatly by household living arrangements” for whānau Māori (p. 125).

While Māori homeowners may downplay and potentially deprioritise their home’s need for repair because of affordability issues, access to a warm, dry, safe, secure, and watertight house remains a basic right for all whānau and tamariki (Superu, 2018; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2016) and an important foundation for their health and wellness (Howden-Chapman et al., 2015). When the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing Leilani Farha reported on her 2020 visit to Aotearoa, she was very clear that the right to adequate housing must be framed within the rights and responsibilities set out in te Tiriti o Waitangi (Farha, 2021). She also found that this right was being eroded by housing being seen as a speculative asset, and that the consequent burden of homelessness, unaffordable rents, and poor-quality housing was being shouldered by Māori, in clear breach of te Tiriti. Her description of Māori separation from their ancestral lands as “a dark shadow that hangs over the country” gave impetus to her recommendation that the New Zealand Government must address historic injustices and ongoing discrimination against Māori (Farha, 2021, p. 5).

Efforts to support Māori homeowners to effect repairs to their homes have a long history, beginning with lending schemes run by the Department of Māori Affairs in the 1980s (Arbury & Cram, 2023). In the 2000s, for example, the government’s Rural Housing Programme enabled critical repairs to be carried out when homeowners could not afford the repairs themselves (Saville-Smith & Wehipeihana, 2007). In 2014, the Māori Housing Strategy He Whare Āhuru, He Oranga Tāngata

led to improvements in the quality of housing for Māori communities, through the work of the Māori Housing Network. When the research reported here was conducted in 2021–2022, funding for critical home repairs was available through Work and Income | Te Hīranga Tangata (2023). In the Hawke’s Bay, a critical repairs programme was implemented as a collaboration between Hawke’s Bay District Health Board, through its Child Healthy Housing Programme, Te Puni Kōkiri, and Wharariki Trust (Hastings District Council, 2020). The homeowners interviewed in the two studies described below received their critical housing repairs through this programme (referred to herein as the “house repairs programme”).

### *The present studies*

A Kaupapa Māori inquiry paradigm guided both studies reported here (Cram, 2017). “Kaupapa Māori” literally means “a Māori way” (Taki, 1996), and Kaupapa Māori research has a dual purpose of revealing Māori lived realities, knowledge, and ways of knowing and being, and providing a structural analysis of the societal facilitators of and barriers to Māori being Māori (G. H. Smith, 2012). Kaupapa Māori research sets out to make a positive difference for Māori through societal transformation that upholds Māori development aspirations and sovereignty (L. T. Smith, 2021).

Kaupapa Māori practices helped ensure that participants were cared for and hosted well by researchers, who were also related to them or members of their communities (Cram, 2017; L. T. Smith, 2021). The interviews conducted with participants were conversational, with questions asked in a comfortable and relaxed way to gain insight into people’s everyday lives (Keil & Elizabeth, 2017). Participant information sheets and consent forms were prepared for the two studies and approved by Hawke’s Bay District Health Board staff and Wharariki Trust, and participants gave either written or verbal consent. Participants received summaries of their interview(s) and three homeowners received their written narratives.

Study 1 interviews were conducted by authors FC and ST in 2021, in conjunction with an evaluation of outcomes for whānau of an accessory dwelling unit. Whānau from the seven houses in Study 1 were part of the house repairs programme, and three houses also had a cabin installed on the property. Study 2 interviews were conducted in 2022 by MM as part of an evaluation of the house repairs programme. Three houses had been repaired, and the whānau in eight houses were tracked through their repair journey. Whānau

in both studies were asked what their house was like before the repairs, what getting house repairs had been like for them, and what difference the repairs had made. Given the similarity in this line of questioning in both these small studies, the data collected were combined to provide insights into the house repair journeys of whānau.

## Method

### Participants

Twenty-four whānau members (18 wāhine, 6 tāne) residing in one of the 18 houses that were repaired participated in the studies. Eleven whānau members (8 wāhine, 3 tāne, across 7 households) participated in Study 1, and 13 (10 wāhine, 3 tāne, across 11 households) participated in Study 2. Participants ranged in age from their mid-30s to their early 80s.

### Households

Ten participants (8 wāhine, 2 tāne) resided in two-generation households ( $n = 7$ ), while 14 participants (10 wāhine, 4 tāne) resided in three-generation households ( $n = 11$ ). The two-generation households had an average of 6.4 resident whānau members, while the three-generation households had an average of 8.3 resident whānau members.

### Interviews

The majority of interviews ( $n = 13$  households) were with one whānau member, four were with two whānau members, and one was with three whānau members. The interviews covered four main topics (with follow-up questions asked for clarification): (a) the history of the house, including when it was built and how long the whānau had lived there; (b) the state of the house before the repairs were done, including physical state as well as how warm it was and any negative impacts on whānau members; (c) their pathway into the house repairs programme and how the repairs process had been for the whānau; and (d) the state of the house following repairs being completed, and if whānau had done any further work.

Participants ( $n = 15$ ) whose homes had already been repaired participated in one interview covering all four topics. Those whose houses were being repaired ( $n = 9$ ) during Study 2 were interviewed during the repair process (topics 1–3) as well as after the repairs were completed (topic 4). Often interviewers were guided to parts of the house so that participants could point out the things they were describing. Interviews took 35–55 minutes. Interview notes were taken, and the interviews

were also audio-recorded, with participants' permission.

### Analysis

Transcripts of the interviews and interview notes were treated as one dataset for the purposes of analysis. A contextualist method of thematic analysis was adopted that sought to “acknowledge the way individuals make meaning of their experiences, and . . . the ways the broader social context impinges on these meanings, while retaining a focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This is compatible with Kaupapa Māori inquiry, which interrogates what it means to be Māori as well as the structural impediments to Māori identity (G. H. Smith, 2012). The reading and re-reading of the transcripts and the resulting analysis was therefore more deductive than inductive, while still reflecting the issues discussed in the interviews.

### Findings

The three themes canvassed below are related to the interview topics described above; namely, the need for repairs, the repair process (including positive and negative feedback), and the outcomes whānau experienced when the repairs were completed. The three boxed sections below each contain the narrative of one household. Participants are identified by pseudonyms, with a second identifier indicating whether they just had their tamariki (māmā, pāpā) and/or their mokopuna (kuia, koroua) living with them.

#### *The need for critical house repairs*

Many of the homeowners needed critical repairs to their homes as a result of their financial struggles and their inability to keep up with repairs when they were first needed. As a result, their houses were very cold, damp and/or leaking/draughty and consequently hard to keep warm. Mere (kuia) explained her sadness about the state of disrepair of her whānau house and its impact on the health of her tamariki:

When the health worker came . . . she could see the water pouring down the walls in the kitchen and in the mokos' bedrooms. But the main thing was the cold; it was freezing. The cold was alright for me and Dad, we just put more clothes on, but our kids, they really felt the cold, made me so sad. I also have two of my tamariki that suffer badly from asthma and also now three of my mokos.

The health worker spoken of by Mere was often

in touch with participants. She informed them about health and other support services they could access, and she had connected them with the house repairs programme. Tui (māmā) described her reaction to the health worker speaking with her about house repairs programme: “I was so encouraged, she made us feel worthy, that people cared.”

One of the first steps in the house repairs programme was a hui to let people know about the programme, introduce them to the people involved, and give them an overview of what they could expect. Some of those attending the hui said they were comforted to find out that other whānau were also experiencing tough times. Māhina (māmā) explained:

It was great to hear all the other people’s stories at that meeting. Most of them were in the homes of their whānau, with desires to get them fixed up for their children. I was also amazed that so many of us have at least three generations living under the same roof. Times are tough, no rentals, no jobs, food is so expensive; not like when we grew up. I feel so sorry for my family living in these times, it’s so hard.

Attending this hui often left people excited about getting their homes repaired. As Tui (māmā) said, “After leaving the hui I couldn’t wait to get home and talk to hubby” about the house repairs programme.

Whānau were offered house repairs because whānau members were in poor health or tangata whaikaha. For example, a whānau was referred to the programme to have their papakāinga home repaired because their youngest child suffered from severe asthma and rheumatic fever. Adults and older people who had chronic health conditions were seen as benefiting from critical repairs, along with others who lived in the house who were also impacted by the illness of others. Mārama (kuia), for example, described how her husband was at times overwhelmed by the impacts of living with his mother and mokopuna when they were ill:

My mother-in-law was always sick and in pain, moko too, sore bones, coughing, crying all the time, complaining about the cold. It was terrible, really hard times for us all. [My husband] would get so depressed he would just hop in the car and head back to [where we used to live], leaving me to sort the mess out.

The death of the person in their whānau who did repairs also impacted at least two whānau, with repair work on their home stalling because of this

loss and the grief associated with it. Subsequently, even if a whānau wanted to restart house repairs, they did not have the finances to employ someone.

In the house repairs programme, repairs were done following the head of the building company doing a housing condition assessment that identified and prioritised critical repairs. The repairs whānau houses needed were wide-ranging and included new roofs, refurbished bathrooms, replacement of rotten floorboards, plumbing repairs, replacement of hot water cylinders, new vents above stoves, guttering and spouting, fire-place replacement, fitting of windows and filling gaps in window surrounds to windproof them, painting walls, and electrical fixes (e.g., switches) that could include extensive electrical rewiring. Aria (kuia) described her reaction to hearing back what house repairs they would be getting after their house assessment was done:

It was really funny when [the builder] came. I was telling him about where I thought the holes in the roof were, hoping that at least we would get some new sheets of roofing and maybe they would put some new nails in. And then he tells me, “No, we will replace the roof and the guttering.” I burst into tears.

Two houses had non-compliant additions (e.g., a washroom area) that had to be rebuilt. Aroha (māmā) described her reaction to the somewhat unsurprising news that her laundry addition was non-compliant:

When [the builder] came back and told us about the problem with the laundry, I just cracked up, not surprised at all. I can just imagine my pāpā and all his whānau whacking it up from timber they collected because that’s what they did; I remember them building all the time; the outside toilet, the outside shed, the woodshed . . . they built them all.

### Repair process

This section touches upon both the delights and the frustrations participants expressed about the repair process. The house repairs were mostly carried out by a Māori-owned building business that employed Māori tradespeople who often had whakapapa links to the whānau whose homes they were repairing. Most participants spoke highly of the respectful way the repairs were undertaken. They described the head of the building company as “humble” and as “always going the extra mile”.

### Whānau Tuatahi

Those living in the home of Whānau Tuatahi included grandparents who had two daughters, a son-in-law, and three mokopuna. Being happy and having their mokopuna and children in their whare was what made a house a home for them, but they were missing having their own individual spaces and being able to fully use their lounge to be together.

Their house had not undergone any maintenance or repairs in 20 years. Their 12-year-old disabled mokopuna disliked the old lino in the hallway and had to be carried down it. He was also sleeping in the lounge with his mother because it was warm. What the whānau wanted was to free up a bedroom for this mokopuna. The house repairs programme replaced the lino in the hallway with carpet, which gave their disabled mokopuna freedom to be able to do things on his own and made him more independent.

Experiencing the warmth and comfort of their home as a result of all the repairs was an incentive for the whānau to work harder, and this enabled them to save an extra bit of money. With this money they converted half of their shed into a sleepout, put in a new hot water cylinder outside (which made extra cupboard space inside), and installed solar panels to save additional money. This additional sleeping space freed up a room inside their house and their mokopuna got his own bedroom. Overall, the grandparents were happy they could leave a house they were proud of to their mokopuna when it is their time to pass.

Aria (kuia) also explained the importance of their knowledge of te reo Māori:

It's important for us to speak Māori whenever and wherever we can to normalise it for our kids. I would be speaking away in Māori [and] next thing you know [the head builder] would respond in Māori; so would some of his workers.

Maia (māmā) said she was grateful for how hard the builders were working on her home, and she and her whānau felt safe in their hands. She compared them with people they had had in their house previously to fix problems, who “would leave their shoes on and their mess behind”:

But no matter how busy [the builder] was he would always stop to have a chat; explain to me where they were at. He made me feel comfortable, the tikanga he displayed. What an amazing guy, we love him so much . . . Every day he would lay tarpaulins down so they could move around the house in their boots. Every day they would pack everything away, sweep the area and sometimes even vacuum.

The builders also made themselves available for other work whānau chose to fund themselves, and about two-thirds of the whānau had gone on to do more work on their homes. For example, Hōhepa (pāpā) said the critical repair work rewiring their house had enabled his whānau to save for other home modifications they needed:

We are so grateful for all the work that has been done; there would have been no way we could save enough money to re-wire our home. We have managed to save enough money to purchase a compliant fire and a heat pump unit to send the warmth throughout the house.

The frustrations raised by some participants about the repair process were often regarding things out of the control of the building company. When the houses were in rural locations, the contractors often had to come from outside the region and were at times hampered by accommodation issues (which had, no doubt, been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic). In addition, “most . . . were young family men, keen to get back home to their whānau” (Māhina, māmā). This meant they were travelling long hours to get in and out of localities in a day. These trips were sometimes stalled when the weather caused slippages that made the road impassable.

### Whānau Tuarua

For Whānau Tuarua, a home was them all being together. They had three dwellings on their property. The main house was the homestead that Tania (kuia, the interview participant) had been raised in since she was six months old, the second was a shed converted into a home for her daughter and whānau, and the back house was the house she built for her whānau to grow up in; it was now the homestead where she was raising her three mokopuna. The whānau felt like they had no way of getting their whare fixed until they had a meeting with their health worker, who then referred them on to the house repairs programme.

The whare had not been touched in quite some time. They had been running all their power off one multiplug in the hallway to the bedrooms, but now with the renovations they have sockets throughout the house. They also had a new front door put in as they had had no lock for 20 years on the door and a glass panel had been covered with cardboard for the last 15 years. They received a new bathroom that they were over the moon about. They felt like they had the “flashiest” bathroom ever. They also received guttering around the whole house as the house has never had guttering and would always flood.

After the repairs they felt like they were living in a safer home, and they were all a lot happier and felt like their Dad, who had passed away, would be so proud of what they had done to the house. They were very grateful for the work and were thinking more about their plans for building a papakāinga for extended whānau.

Delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain issues (including increasing costs) also meant work was often delayed, and COVID-19 and the flu also affected contractors. Delays left a few whānau feeling frustrated, especially when they felt there was a lack of communication. For example, two participants said that subcontractors arrived unannounced at their doorstep or would not arrive at pre-arranged times. A few participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the length of time the repair work took and the inconvenience it caused them. And one participant was not happy with their bathroom renovation, although the building company disputed their description of the faults with the repairs that had been undertaken.

All but one of the participants who raised issues about the repairs process were positive about the outcomes, as Tui (māmā) explained:

Don't get me wrong, any repairs to our home are so much appreciated. Any little improvement makes a huge impact on the quality of our lives . . . I really do appreciate the work that has been done.

### *Improved health and wellbeing following critical repairs*

The majority of participants said that the critical repairs to their houses had a huge impact on whānau stress levels and the atmosphere in their home. Participants reported that their relationships with one another had improved, that they did not argue as much and that they laughed more. Although life was still difficult for many, they said that not having to worry about the state of their house, and their house now being warm, meant they were able to look at the world more positively. Some commented that their tamariki and mokopuna still complained, but that at least now it was not about the house. Others said that adults and children, especially those with respiratory conditions, were now healthier and less likely to be hospitalised. As Kiri (māmā) explained, “Our whare is now a healthy one for our tamariki and it would not have been possible without this support.”

Homes were made warmer by the addition of insulation and sometimes heating (e.g., wood burner, heat pump). Underfloor insulation made a huge difference for one whānau, with Eru (koro) commenting, “The grand-mokos come in in their dressing gowns and go, ‘Oh man, it's hot in here.’” Hine (māmā), who suffered from an autoimmune disease that affected her lungs, said that the renovations to her house had changed the lives of her whānau: “My house is now a home. It is warm.

It is welcoming, it's homely. I'm unashamed. I can host people again . . . It's changed our lives. And it has made our family whole again" (see also the Whānau Tuatoru box below). Other participants said they would not have made it through the winter if it had not been for the repairs. Manaia (māmā) explained:

Last winter was brutal; we would not have made it through with our old fireplace. We were warm, which made us happy. It took a while to get used to not hearing the whistling wind through the windows because we couldn't close them properly. We can laugh about it now.

Bathroom repairs led to exclamations of delight from whānau as they sang the praises of revived water pressure. Anahera (kuia) explained that she had been without a bathroom for the nine years since her husband died. After the repairs to her house she said, "The only original part of my bathroom is this [towel rail]." Another participant, Ero (koro), said of their new bathroom: "It's a pleasure to have a shower now. The pressure is brilliant; it's almost like having a massage." Maia (māmā) and her whānau also celebrated their new shower as it was "like a water blaster now", and their home was now so warm in winter that they sometimes had to open the windows to cool down a bit. For Hariata (māmā), her joy was her new kitchen as her whānau had not been able to afford to renovate it themselves:

It's been an absolute stinker of a year; my whānau have suffered, as have others. But when I look at my beautiful kitchen I just think wow and burst into tears. I used to love to bake, even in my old kitchen, and now I can't stop baking. My kids are complaining that they are getting too fat and so is my husband, complaining I mean.

When the repairs had been done, participants talked about them with pride and satisfaction. They said their bathroom "feels safer", their home "feels warmer", and their whānau is happier. Participants described their repaired houses in ways that reflected the warmth and safety their homes now provided for whānau members who lived there, and as the pride and joy of the whānau. Rāwiri (pāpā), for example, explained the joy his koro was taking in their new roof, saying he would often bring his chair out onto the back lawn and just stare up at the roof, smiling. Hana said, "Our house is now a home, a papakāinga . . . whakaruruhau, a place for our whānau to come

### Whānau Tuatoru

Those living in the home of Whānau Tuatoru included Mum, Dad, their five children and Mum's mother. Mum had been diagnosed with an incurable autoimmune disorder that affected her lungs. She had her mother move in to be her carer, and this made the house crowded. Mum had also recently had to leave her whānau and home as the condition of the mould in the house had started to threaten her life.

The house repairs programme replaced walls, installed a new bathroom, and removed the mould in the house. This made the air in the home dry, warm, and clean. As a result, Mum was able to return home. The repairs also made the home more homely, and the parents reported a huge difference in the children, who were able to run freely without worrying about their health. The kids have asthma, and Mum has not had to take any of them to the hospital since the repairs were completed.

The whānau have continued to improve their home with good, second-hand carpet throughout. They plan to continue to improve their home when they can and hope to be able to make it more energy-efficient by adding solar panels, having their hot water run on gas and, if possible, installing an HRV system to provide clean air and heat in their home.



to,” while Manaia (māmā) expressed her surprise at the feeling of pride her whānau now felt in their repaired home: “I can’t believe what a difference the repairs have made to us as a family, to how we feel about our house, the pride we have in our home.”

Some participants, like Hine (māmā) above, talked about how the house repairs had made them more willing to have visitors, with Pania (māmā) adding that people who came to visit her renovated house “do not want to leave”. Their ability to host also meant that tamariki and rangatahi could now have friends over to their home, when prior to the repairs “my kids didn’t want to stay in the house”.

Relationships that enabled whānau to accept the offer of help with house repairs continued once repairs had been carried out, and participants were grateful for what they often saw as the extraordinary lengths their health worker went to:

I just can’t find the words to express my happiness for all the work that has been done on our home. [She] is still in contact with me now. It was her, all her work; that’s why our home is warm, because of [her]. She never gave up, always thought of us; drop pyjamas off, food off, stop in for a yak. Who does that? (Maia, māmā)

Many of the participants, like those featured in the Whānau Tuatahi box above, thought of their home as a whānau home that would be passed down through the generations. The repairs had helped ensure that this would be possible. Aroha (māmā), whose whānau had inherited their house from their grandmother, explained the importance of this for them:

Our whānau are everything to us; life is tough, but we have a home for our tamariki, mokopuna. It is warm and loving, just how our tīpuna left it, and just how we will leave it for our future whānau.

## Discussion

These two small qualitative studies have provided some insight into the impact of critical house repair work on whānau health, wellbeing, and feelings of being at home. When a whānau-owned home is in a state of disrepair, whānau may not know where to start fixing things up or not have the finances to even contemplate changes for the better. The disrepair may also come from many years of whānau having to make trade-offs, spending money on priorities other than repairs. The resulting need for critical repairs can immobilise whānau. Walking alongside whānau and strengthening relationships

as well as repairing their homes shifted them out of this state. It also increased their confidence for undertaking further repairs and renovations that then increased the production and retention of warmth in their homes. The fulfilment of the critical repair commitments made to whānau potentially increased their trust in social and health support agencies, as experienced by Māori renters involved in the Ministry of Health’s Healthy Homes Initiative (Carter et al., 2018).

The homes that whānau owned were often inhabited by many whānau members, spanning two or three generations. Being able to house whānau “is an important step to supporting their wellbeing and enabling them to have a sense of home” (Cram, 2020, p. 19). When their houses were repaired, the whānau in these studies unsurprisingly reported improvements in the physical and mental health of all whānau members, leading to the affirmation that illness or disability impacts the collective and not just those who are ill or tangata whaikaha (Golics et al., 2013).

The critical repairs also increased whānau confidence that their home would have longevity and be able to house future generations of their whānau. The importance of homesteads has recently been showcased in a series on Whakaata Māori entitled *Homesteads*. The producer and director of this series, Kimiora Kaire-Melbourne is quoted as saying, “Our marae are the tūrangawaewae of hapū, but homesteads are the tūrangawaewae of whānau” (Whakaata Māori, 2022). Shoring up the survival of these homesteads is therefore shoring up the continuing vitality of whanaungatanga, whereby whānau are what makes a home and having a house to return to, live in, host visitors in, and gather together in is the foundation—the mauri— of whānau homemaking.

The affection that whānau had for the Māori tradespeople who repaired their homes was an important characteristic of the house repairs programme. Applying the term Kaupapa Māori to the repairs and renovation work they undertook is appropriate given that in many ways whānau described their work as being by, for, and with Māori, and giving effect to Kaupapa Māori principles (Walker et al., 2006). For example, the tradespeople were non-judgemental about the repairs a house needed and respected the right of Māori to be able to access funded repairs. These are part of the Kaupapa Māori principles of *timo rangatiratanga* and *kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga*.

The tradespeople recognised the validity and legitimacy of Māori cultural heritage, giving effect

to the Kaupapa Māori principle of *taonga tuku iho*. The head of the building company spoke te reo Māori, and he and the other tradespeople were often related to whānau. Their initial meetings with whānau therefore occurred within the context of Māori terms of engagement, where making tribal and other connections through whakawhanaungatanga set the context for them being together. Much like groups coming together on a marae, or people meeting in a café for a research interview, these rituals of encounter both introduce people to one another and make them akin to whānau for the kaupapa they have come together for (Irwin, 1994). From these initial introductions, whānau described the builders as courteous and tidy in their work, and the builders themselves reported how often they were fed or offered food by whānau. In this way, both the tradespeople and the whānau gave effect to the *whānau* principle of Kaupapa Māori.

Even in the context of builders and other tradespeople striving to maintain good relationships and undertake important critical repairs for whānau, not everything worked well for all the whānau involved. In response to communication issues, the dispute that arose between one whānau and the building company, the complexity of whānau situations, and the long travelling times for tradespeople, the building company has made changes in their processes. They were also considering having a project manager on-site when the building work was in a location at a distance from their offices. These changes have been about strengthening in-time communication and ensuring good relationships.

### Limitations

While the findings from these two small studies may not be generalisable, they may resonate with whānau that feel hesitant about engaging with a house repairs programme. Whānau may be encouraged to engage when they learn about the experiences of other whānau. This approach has been used widely by Te Puni Kōkiri (2023), for example, in its videos with whānau about critical house repairs. Small participant numbers, especially the small number of Māori men interviewed, precluded a gender analysis. While an age analysis was not conducted for the same reasons, many participants spoke about post-repair health improvements among young whānau members. A fuller exploration of how the positive impacts of house repairs differ for whānau members of different ages and genders is a topic for future research.

### Conclusion

The Māori owner-occupied homes in these studies required critical repairs because they had not been regularly maintained or repaired. Many whānau were spending their money on living costs, while the loss of the handyman in some whānau meant that maintenance and repairs had come to a halt. The investment in repairing their homes provided a return for whānau in terms of their health and wellbeing. Savings also accrued to government agencies, particularly health agencies, as the need for whānau to access services declined with their increasing wellness (Grimes et al., 2012; Keall et al., 2016). In addition, repairing a whānau home is an intergenerational intervention that can secure the relational ties of a whānau to those who have passed and to those yet to come, that is, those past and future inhabitants and visitors for whom the house is a home and a place they are welcome in.

### Acknowledgements

Fiona coordinated and oversaw the studies and interviewed some of the whānau in Study 1. Sarah interviewed some of the whānau in Study 1. Morehu interviewed the whānau in Study 2 and three of the whānau in Study 1. Ana introduced the researchers to participants, provided programme information, and supported report writing. Study 1 was funded by the Hawke's Bay District Health Board, while Study 2 was funded by the Wharariki Trust.

This research was completed as part of the Affordable Homes for Generation research programme, funded by the Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities National Science Challenge (Kay Saville-Smith and Fiona Cram, lead investigators). The house repairs described were funded by Te Puni Kōkiri and Hawke's Bay District Health Board and delivered by Wharariki Trust in collaboration with Manzis Builders. Many thanks to Tepora Emery, Bev James, and Kay Saville-Smith for their review of an earlier version of this paper.

### Glossary

Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand
hapū	subtribe
hui	meeting
kaitiakitanga	guardianship
kaupapa	agenda
Kaupapa Māori	Māori agenda; lit. "a Māori way"
kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga	intervening for the wellbeing of whānau

koro/koroua	grandfather
kuia	grandmother
māmā	mother
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
marae	often used to describe the complex of buildings around a wharenuī or meeting house
mauri	life principle, vital essence
moko/mokopuna	grandchild/ren
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
pāpā	father
papakāinga	village
rangatahi	youth
tamariki	children
tāne	men
tangata whaikaha	disabled
taonga	treasure
taonga tuku iho	heirloom, something handed down
te reo Māori	the Māori language
te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document
tikanga	custom
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
tīpuna	ancestors
tūrangaawae	place where one has whakapapa rights of residence
wāhine	women
Whakaata Māori	Māori Television
whakapapa	genealogy
whakaruruhau	safe shelter
whakawhanaungatanga	process of establishing relationships
whānau	Māori kinship collective
Whānau Tuarua	Second Whānau
Whānau Tuatahi	First Whānau
Whānau Tuatoru	Third Whānau
whanaungatanga	kinship relationships
whare	house
whenua	ancestral land

**References**

Arbury, E., & Cram, F. (2023). *Housing on Māori land, c.1870–2021* (Wai 2750). Waitangi Tribunal.  
 Boulton, A., Allport, T., Kaiwai, H., Harker, R., & Potaka Osborne, G. (2022). Māori perceptions

of “home”: Māori housing needs, wellbeing and policy. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 17(1), 44–55. <https://doi.org/kjh5>  
 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101. <https://doi.org/fswdcx>  
 Carter, M., Cording, J., Hooper, C., Potter, H., Waru, N., & Frost-Kruse, O. (2018). *Healthy Homes Initiative evaluation*. Allen & Clarke.  
 Cram, F. (2017). Kaupapa Māori health research. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health and social sciences* (pp. 1–18). Springer. <https://doi.org/m4b5>  
 Cram, F. (2020). *He mātou whare, he mātou kāinga hoki — a house that is a home for whānau Māori*. Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities National Science Challenge.  
 Cutts, D. B., Meyers, A. F., Black, M. M., Casey, P. H., Chilton, M., Cook, J. T., Geppert, J., De Cuba, S. E., Heeren, T., Coleman, S., Rose-Jacobs, R., & Frank, D. A. (2011). US housing insecurity and the health of very young children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), 1508–1514. <https://doi.org/fn4kkj>  
 Douglas, E. M. (1986). *Fading expectations: The crisis in Māori housing*. Board of Māori Affairs.  
 Dupuis, A., & Thorns, D. C. (1998). Home, home ownership and the search for ontological security. *Sociological Review*, 46(1), 24–47. <https://doi.org/cr8qkq>  
 Farha, L. (2021, April 28). *Visit to New Zealand: Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and on the right to non-discrimination in this context*. United Nations Human Rights Council.  
 Ferguson, G. (1995). *Background report for the Wai 60 claim*. Waitangi Tribunal.  
 Golics, C. J., Basra, M. K., Finlay, A. Y., & Salek, S. (2013). The impact of disease on family members: A critical aspect of medical care. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 106(10), 399–407. <https://doi.org/m4b6>  
 Grimes, A., Denne, T., Howden-Chapman, P., Arnold, R., Telford-Barnard, L., Preval, N., & Young, C. (2012). *Cost benefit analysis of the Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart Programme*. Ministry of Economic Development.  
 Hastings District Council. (2020, December 22). *One year on, Hastings place based housing plan is delivering results*. <https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/our-council/news/article/1885/-one-year-on-hastings-place-based-housing-plan-is-delivering-results>  
 Howden-Chapman, P. L., Keall, M., Conlon, F., & Chapman, R. (2015). Urban interventions: Understanding health co-benefits. *Urban Design and Planning*, 168(4), 196–203. <https://doi.org/m4b7>  
 Irwin, K. (1994). Māori research methods and processes: An exploration. *SITES*, 28, 25–43.  
 Johnson, A., Howden-Chapman, P., & Eaqub, S. (2018, February). *A stocktake of New Zealand's housing*. New Zealand Government. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/>

- files/2018-02/A%20Stocktake%20Of%20New%20Zealand%27s%20Housing.pdf
- Keall, M. D., Piersie, N., Howden-Chapman, P., Guria, J., Cunningham, C. W., & Baker, M. G. (2016). Cost-benefit analysis of fall injuries prevented by a programme of home modifications: A cluster randomised controlled trial. *Injury Prevention*, 23(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/f9nc5f>
- Keil, M., & Elizabeth, V. (2017). Gendered and cultural moral rationalities: Pacific mothers' pursuit of child support money. *Women's Studies Journal*, 31(1), 34–47.
- Livesey, B. T. (2010). *He kāinga hou ki te hau kāinga: Housing development on multiply-owned ancestral land in a high-growth area of New Zealand* [Master's thesis, Erasmus University]. EUR Thesis Repository. [hdl.handle.net/2105/11559](http://hdl.handle.net/2105/11559)
- Māori Party. (2016, May 26). *Māori Party continues to support housing solutions* [Press release]. <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA1605/S00516/maori-party-continues-to-support-housing-solutions.htm>
- Māori Women's Housing Research Project. (1991). *For the sake of decent shelter*. Ministry of Women's Affairs.
- New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2012). *Housing affordability inquiry*.
- Public Works Act 1981. <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1981/0035/latest/DLM45427.html>
- Saville-Smith, K., & James, B. (2018). *Where the heart is*. SuperSeniors. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181026001123/www.superseniors.ms.govt.nz/about-superseniors/ageing-population/housing/housing.html>
- Saville-Smith, K., & Wehipeihana, N. (2007, March). *An assessment of the Rural Housing programme 2001–2005/06: A synthesis of evaluation findings*. CRESA/Housing New Zealand Corporation
- Smith, G. H. (2012). Kaupapa Māori: The dangers of domestication. Interview with Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 47(2), 10–20.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2014, May 6). *Te Kupenga 2013 (English)*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/te-kupenga-2013-english/>
- Statistics New Zealand. (2016, June 9). *Māori and Pacific peoples' home-ownership falls in cities* [Press release]. [https://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/housing/maori-and-pacific-mr.aspx](https://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/housing/maori-and-pacific-mr.aspx)
- Stats NZ. (2018). *New Zealand General Social Survey 2018*. <https://statsnz.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p20045coll2/id/817/>
- Stats NZ. (2020, November 9). *Te Kupenga: 2018 (final) — English*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/te-kupenga-2018-final-english>
- Stats NZ. (2021a, August 26). *It's about wellbeing — people and place are important for Māori housing*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/its-about-wellbeing-people-and-place-are-important-for-maori-housing/>
- Stats NZ. (2021b, August 26). *Te pā harakeke: Māori housing and wellbeing 2021*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/te-pa-harakeke-maori-housing-and-wellbeing-2021>
- Superu [Social Policy and Evaluation Unit]. (2017). *Families and whānau status report 2017*.
- Superu [Social Policy and Evaluation Unit]. (2018). *Families and whānau status report 2018*.
- Taki, M. (1996). *Kaupapa Maori and contemporary iwi resistance* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Auckland.
- Te Puni Kōkiri. (2016). *The whānau outcomes framework: Empowering whānau into the future*.
- Te Puni Kōkiri. (2023). *Repairs to whānau-owned homes*. <https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/nga-putea-me-nga-ratonga/maori-housing-support/repairs-to-whanau-owned-homes>
- Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga | Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. (2021). *MAIHI Ka Ora: The national Māori housing strategy*.
- Thomson, H., Thomas, S., Sellstrom, E., & Petticrew, M. (2013). Housing improvements for health and associated socio-economic outcomes. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, (2), Article CD008657. <https://doi.org/f226k9>
- Toomey, E., Finn, J., France-Hudson, B., & Ruru, J. (2017). *Revised legal frameworks for ownership and use of multi-dwelling units*. Report ER 23. Branz.
- Waitangi Tribunal. (2010). *Tauranga Moana 1886–2006. Report on the post-raupatu claims* (WAI 215, Vol. 1).
- Waldegrave, C., King, P., Walker, T., & Fitzgerald, E. (2006). *Māori housing experiences: Emerging trends and issues*. Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Walker, S., Eketone, A., & Gibbs, A. (2006). An exploration of Kaupapa Maori research, its principles, processes and applications. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9(4), 331–344. <https://doi.org/bx82s2>
- Whakaata Māori. (2022, October 3). *Homesteads: Maintaining ties to the whenua*. <https://www.whakaatamaori.co.nz/media-releases/homesteads-maintaining-ties-to-the-whenua>
- Work and Income | Te Hiranga Tangata. (2023). *Home repairs and maintenance*. <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/house-maintenance.html>