

Falling home ownership to hit older people hard

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A future in which older people are homeless or living in cars and garages lies ahead if nothing is done to avert the rapid decline in home ownership, says a Massey University expert in healthy ageing.

Older people are also predicted to suffer poorer physical and mental health as falling [home ownership](#) levels hit the next generation, says psychologist Professor Christine Stephens, co-author of a new report on ageing and [housing](#).

She is one of four researchers on the Health Work and Retirement longitudinal study (HWR), whose latest report has found that home ownership contributes to better quality of life over time, and promotes healthy ageing among older people in New Zealand.

Pressure on government to ease housing shortage

She is calling on the government to take urgent action to provide more social housing, as a new wave of older renters adds to the current pressures on housing. Older people are likely to be increasingly affected by the shortage of affordable housing as the ageing population grows alongside falling home ownership, she says. Almost 85 per cent of older adults were homeowners in 2014, but this percentage is predicted to fall drastically in future generations.

Professor Stephens, who is part of the Health in Ageing Research

(HART) project based at Massey's School of Psychology on the Manawātū campus, says the impact of rising house prices and rental shortages on older people is already being felt, even in places like Palmerston North. A local housing advice agency she is in contact with has reported a new trend of older, retired people unable to secure rental housing who are seeking help.

"Owning one's own home protects against the harmful effects of loneliness," say authors of the report, titled Home Ownership and Wellbeing Among Older New Zealanders, and which was funded by the Ministry of Business, Employment and Innovation.

Results from three waves (2010, 2012 and 2014) of the study shows the long-term impact of housing tenure on quality of life for the 3,301 New Zealanders surveyed, aged 50 to 90 years.

Less loneliness and depression for older homeowners

The report says homeowners report higher levels of quality of life and lower levels of depression than tenants. Quality of life increases over time for homeowners, while tenants have lower levels of quality of life, which remain low over time.

Home ownership equates with being wealthier, and therefore more financially secure, says Professor Stephens.

The findings support international literature on housing and healthy ageing which highlight the benefits of home ownership by promoting quality of life and reducing costs for [health care services](#).

"Homeowners generally experience a stronger sense of security and belonging. They are also more likely to engage with the community and participate in social activities. Consequently, increasing people's ability

to become homeowners or creating more opportunities for [older people](#) to get access to secure and stable housing will have both economic and social benefits," the report's authors say.

They also highlight "marked demographic differences in housing tenure based on ethnicity and socio-economic status" and recommend that policy should pay particular attention to the development of housing solutions for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Home ownership a lost dream

"For many, home ownership is an unreal aspiration now," says Professor Stephens. "So we need to look at how to create more secure, quality housing for people priced out of the market."

"Housing is one area where the government does have the power to intervene and come up with better housing options," she says.

The report has been distributed to the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Business, Employment and Innovation, as well as to a number of members of Parliament.

Provided by Massey University

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