

Study finds that providing housing and support benefits homeless

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Being supported to find a home and then receiving ongoing specialized support services are the key combination in significantly improving the well-being of people who have experienced homelessness, researchers say.

These are the findings of a University of Otago-led study of health, income, and justice outcomes for 387 people in the first five years after they were housed in a Housing First program. The results have just been [published](#) in the *International Journal on Homelessness*.

Those in the study were supported into housing between 2014 and 2017 by The People's Project, based in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, which focuses on facilitating access to permanent housing and specialist support without preconditions.

The researchers looked at which health, justice, welfare, and other services participants had engaged with over five years. They used information from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), a large-scale database containing microdata about people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The researchers then built a detailed overview of this group's interactions and outcomes, before and after being housed, looking at indicators of people's physical and [mental health](#), including justice system interactions, income, and employment. The information is anonymized so individuals cannot be identified.

Lead researcher Professor Nevil Pierse, the Co-Director of the He Kāinga Oranga Housing and Health Research Program at the University of Otago, Wellington, says there's been a dramatic improvement in both the physical and mental health of those housed through The People's Project.

"In the fifth year after this group of people was first housed, the number of hospitalizations continued to fall significantly, by 44%.

"There were considerable reductions in the number of mental health beds required: mental health inpatient unit bed nights reduced by 63% and mental health residential unit bed nights reduced by 73%.

"Meanwhile, the number of prescriptions filled rose. Together, these results indicated improved management of ongoing conditions, and reduced reliance on emergency or acute services. This is better for individuals' quality of life and lessens the burden on our health care system."

There was also a big drop in the number of interactions with Police and court including a 43% reduction in criminal charges. Incomes also grew, as did the number of months people paid tax.

The People's Project was set up in Kirikiriroa Hamilton in 2014 as a response to growing visible homelessness in the city. There is a second service in Tauranga.

The People's Project Hamilton manager Dr. Carole McMinn and General Manager Kerry Hawkes, who were both involved in the research, are delighted to see that the exceptional five-year results not only sustained, but also improved upon, earlier two-year results.

Hawkes comments, "From our experience, we see every day that the Housing First approach works, and that many people's lives improve over time with consistent specialist support. This research confirms our understanding."

More information: Jenny Ombler et al, Five-Year Post-Housing Outcomes for a Housing First Cohort in Aotearoa, New Zealand, *International Journal on Homelessness* (2024). [DOI: 10.5206/ijoh.2023.3.16747](https://doi.org/10.5206/ijoh.2023.3.16747)

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