New Zealand has lost its way on housing, says leading researcher

Over the past twenty-five years, the quality and affordability of New Zealand housing has declined drastically, says the University of Otago's Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman in a new BWB Text. Short-sighted and discriminatory housing policies have resulted in a society in which the poor and needy are suffering – in terms of both their physical and mental wellbeing. As recent research demonstrates the role of housing in burgeoning levels of inequality – and why an increasingly unequal society is something both rich and poor should care about – *Home Truths: Confronting New Zealand's Housing Crisis* is a timely reminder of what New Zealand society has lost.

Charting the gradual withdrawal of government involvement in the provision of housing services and the growing gulf between homeowners enjoying a property boom and renters who cannot afford to purchase their own home, Howden-Chapman calls for urgent and robust regulation of New Zealand's private rental market. Noting that in the 2014 General Health Survey, almost half of New Zealanders living in rental housing reported that their houses were damp or mouldy, Howden-Chapman reminds us that 'the fundamental qualities of housing – that it be dry, warm and safe – should not be determined by a household's income'.

Drawing on her expertise as Director of He Kainga Oranga, the University of Otago's Housing and Health Research Programme, Howden-Chapman points out the illogicality of the current government introducing a requirement that rental housing must be insulated – but only up to the standards of thirty-five years ago. Instead of such lukewarm gestures, says Howden-Chapman, what is needed is a strong and standardised Rental Housing Warrant of Fitness.

Furthermore, asserts Howden-Chapman, the New Zealand government can no longer afford to pass responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens onto the market, resulting in sluggish construction rates and a lack of affordable homes. 'There is an urgent need for subsidised, high-quality and well-maintained new housing to meet the undersupply for people on low incomes.'

Citing successful models from Europe and Scandinavia, Howden-Chapman's new Text shows a variety of ways forward in confronting the ticking timebomb of New Zealand's inadequate, unaffordable and internationally inferior housing stock. Rigorously researched and passionately argued, this book is crucial reading for all those who believe that governments should implement robust, long-term strategic plans that have at their heart a concern for the wellbeing of all New Zealand's citizens – regardless of whether they're landlords or tenants.

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For more information please contact:
Hannah August
+64 4 473 8128 | hannah.august@bwb.co.nz

Bridget Williams Books
PO Box 12474 | Wellington 6144 | New Zealand
+64 4 473 8128 | info@bwb.co.nz | www.bwb.co.nz

Home Truths

Confronting New Zealand's Housing Crisis

Philippa Howden-Chapman

Housing affordability. Unhealthy homes. Wealth inequality. Environmental sustainability. Social mobility. The state of New Zealand housing is central to major issues confronting this country. In this wide-ranging BWB Text, leading international housing researcher Philippa Howden-Chapman reveals how New Zealand has lost its way on housing. Once a world leader in housing policy, we have neglected our heritage to the point that we are now faced with some of the worst housing in the developed world. New Zealand needs to change course and this succinct introduction, drawing on two decades of award-winning research, maps a new landscape for twenty-first century homes.

Author information

Philippa Howden-Chapman is a professor of public health at the University of Otago, Wellington, where she teaches public policy. She is director of He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme and the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities. In 2014, researchers in He Kainga Oranga were awarded the Prime Minister's Science Team Prize. She is currently the chair of the WHO Housing and Health Guideline Development Group, was a member of the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty and is a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand.



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Philippa Howden-Chapman is available for interview.

For interviews and review copies, please contact Hannah August: 04 473 8128; hannah.august@bwb.co.nz

For more information please contact:
Hannah August
+64 4 473 8128 | hannah.august@bwb.co.nz

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PO Box 12474 | Wellington 6144 | New Zealand
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