**Public perspectives of housing insecurity and homelessness in Auckland**

**October 2025**

# Focus groups findings report

housing first auckland

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# Acknowledgements

## Honouring our participants

We extend our deepest gratitude to the 26 Auckland community members who showed up with open hearts and generous spirits to share their experiences, opinions, and ideas. Your authentic voices, diverse perspectives, and thoughtful contributions have created something truly powerful - a roadmap for meaningful change.

By sharing your stories (including some courageous sharing of lived experiences) and insights so openly, you have paved the way for designing a public campaign that truly resonates and connects with people. Thank you for your courage, your time, and your commitment. Together, we can make Auckland a city where everyone has a place to call 'home'.

## Special thanks to our key partner

Housing First Auckland Backbone extends our sincere gratitude to **Auckland City Council** for providing the funding that made this groundbreaking research possible. This funding demonstrates the council's commitment to understanding and addressing housing insecurity and homelessness in our community.

We particularly acknowledge **Ron Suyker**, Regional Partnerships Lead (Homelessness), Community Wellbeing, Auckland Council, for embracing the critical importance of this work and supporting our funding application to council. Ron's advocacy and shared vision helped bring this first-of-its-kind research to fruition in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Thanks also to **Rachel Foster**, Specialist Advisor, Community Impact Unit - Community Wellbeing, Auckland Council, for her support in arranging the venue for the focus groups, enabling us to conduct the research in an accessible and welcoming environment.

## Research design, focus group facilitator and report

Felicity Beadle
Strategic Lead, Housing First Auckland

## Project support

Big mihi to the Housing First Auckland Backbone team and Amanda Kelly (Community Housing Aotearoa) for your input to support and provide peer review of this work.

## Report design

Wise Group design team

# Executive summary

## Overview

Housing First Auckland Backbone conducted groundbreaking qualitative research, as part of wider public baseline research, to understand Auckland public awareness and attitudes toward homelessness and housing insecurity. Three age-segmented focus groups (18-34 years, 35-50 years, and 50+ years) involving 26 diverse participants revealed sophisticated public understanding of housing issues as systemic challenges requiring comprehensive solutions.

## Key insights by age group

### 18-34 Years (6 participants)

**Three most important insights**

1. **Personal housing anxiety** This group experiences daily anxiety about their own housing security, with many believing home ownership is impossible and considering leaving New Zealand due to housing pressures.

2. **Systemic understanding** Despite being the youngest group, they demonstrate mature comprehension of structural inequalities, identifying capitalism, government policy decisions, and cultural shifts away from community support as primary causes.

3. **Active community support** Many already provide direct assistance to friends experiencing housing insecurity, offering couches, spare rooms, and emotional support through existing networks.

### 35-50 Years (9 participants)

**Three most important insights**

4. **Professional and lived experience intersection** This group combined sector knowledge with personal experiences of homelessness, creating nuanced understanding of both system failures and individual pathways leading to housing insecurity and homelessness.

5. **Family and community-focused concern** Rather than personal anxiety, they express protective feelings toward family members and members of the community who are navigating housing challenges. They demonstrate strong community responsibility.

6. **Solution-oriented pragmatism** They emphasise the need for individualised support combining housing with mental health and addiction services, while calling for simplified "one door" service delivery approaches.

### 50+ Years (11 participants)

**Three most important insights**

7. **Historical perspective and political frustration** With decades of observation, they express anger and frustration at long-standing policy failures across multiple governments and systematic political inaction.

8. **Extensive civic networks** This group possesses the strongest established community connections, professional networks, and civic engagement experience, representing significant mobilisation potential.

9. **Evidence-based solutions** They advocate for adopting proven international models (citing Finland and France) and emphasise the need for bipartisan political commitment with long-term planning horizons.

# Cross-demographic patterns

## Universal systemic understanding

All groups reject individual blame narratives, instead identifying housing issues as systemic failures requiring structural solutions. Participants across ages recognise interconnections between housing, mental health, addiction, and economic security.

## Preference for authentic voices

Every group prioritises personal storytelling from people with lived experience over statistics or sector messaging, viewing authentic narratives as more powerful for building public empathy and understanding.

## Collaborative solution and message framing

Participants consistently prefer inclusive, non-judgmental language, emphasising shared responsibility rather than political blame or partisan messaging.

## Community engagement readiness

All groups demonstrate high willingness to participate in advocacy, storytelling, and direct action, with many already providing informal support to people experiencing housing challenges.

# Key areas of difference

## Communication preferences

Younger participants favour social media and creative approaches including street posters and humour, while older groups prefer traditional media, data-driven messaging, and professional networks. Middle-aged participants bridge both approaches.

## Housing security concerns

The 18-34 year group experiences personal housing anxiety affecting life decisions, while older groups focus on family/community concerns and systemic reform rather than personal security.

## Political engagement styles

Younger participants emphasise grassroots organising and direct action, middle-aged participants prefer community-level advocacy, and older participants favour established political channels and accountability mechanisms.

## Solution complexity

Younger groups seek broad systemic change and cultural shifts, middle-aged participants emphasise a need for coordinated services and community tolerance, while older groups call for comprehensive political reform with implementation of evidence-based solutions (drawing inspiration and learning from global examples).

# Opportunities for community engagement

### Multi-generational storytelling platform

Create opportunities for people with lived experience to share authentic stories across age groups, leveraging the universal preference for personal narratives over statistics.

### Tiered engagement strategy

Develop age-appropriate engagement pathways: social media campaigns and peer support for younger participants, community organising/mobilising and family advocacy for middle-aged groups, and political accountability, professional and community network mobilisation for older participants.

### Collaboration

Harness the 50+ group's extensive professional networks and civic connections to build organisational partnerships, while engaging younger people in creative awareness campaigns and middle-aged participants in direct community collaboration.

### Accessible information hub

Address the common need for practical guidance on "how to help" by creating fully accessible resources explaining where to direct people in need, how to engage in advocacy, and how to support community members experiencing housing challenges.

### Community tolerance building

All groups identified stigma reduction as crucial, presenting opportunities for neighbourhood-level education campaigns that humanise housing issues and normalise social housing within communities.

# Strategic implications

The focus group research reveals a segment of the Auckland public has a sophisticated understanding of housing insecurity and homelessness issues. This segment is engaged and ready for meaningful participation in addressing housing insecurity.

The findings provide valuable information for scoping and planning any potential future campaign. A successful public campaign will require adequate resourcing to develop and deliver multi-channel communication strategies that respect generational preferences while leveraging shared values of community responsibility, authentic storytelling, and systemic solutions.

By combining the energy of younger people and their direct support networks, the knowledge, family and local community connections of middle-aged people, and the civic experience, political, and community networks of older people, we can unlock significant untapped potential for comprehensive community mobilisation around housing issues.

# Introduction

Housing First Auckland Backbone, through the support of a one-off funding grant from Auckland Council, embarked on comprehensive baseline research to better understand the Auckland public's perceptions and opinions surrounding homelessness and housing insecurity. This groundbreaking research represents the first study of its kind conducted in Auckland and in Aotearoa New Zealand, marking a significant milestone in understanding public attitudes towards this critical issue.

## Research approach

The research employed a dual methodology to capture both breadth and depth of public understanding. IPSOS was commissioned to conduct independent quantitative research, providing statistically representative data across Auckland's diverse population. Complementing this, qualitative research through focus groups was conducted directly by the Housing First Auckland Backbone, enabling deeper exploration of attitudes, beliefs, and personal perspectives that surveys alone cannot capture.

Focus groups were conducted at the Ellen Melville Centre in the Auckland CBD on 7, 8 and 9 July 2025, bringing together members of the public across a wide range of ages, ethnicities, and living situations in Auckland.

## Focus Group objectives

The qualitative component of this research was designed to:

▶ **Assess baseline knowledge** of housing insecurity and homelessness issues, including understanding of causes and current responses

▶ **Explore emotional responses** and attitudes toward people experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness

▶ **Identify knowledge gaps and misconceptions** that need to be addressed through public education

▶ **Test messaging effectiveness** for different target audiences and demographic groups

▶ **Identify language preferences**, including terminology that resonates versus language that creates barriers or negative reactions

▶ **Determine appetite for involvement and engagement,** and identify what is needed to motivate increased public participation

▶ **Identify trusted information sources** and preferred communication channels for different demographic groups

## Strategic intent

By establishing this foundational understanding of where the Auckland public stands on issues of homelessness and housing security, Housing First Auckland Backbone aims to inform future public engagement, communications and advocacy strategies. Insights from the research will help inform the crafting of messages that resonate with different demographic groups, identify opportunities for meaningful public participation, and develop evidence-based approaches to building community support to achieve upstream systems change.

# Methodology

## Research design and approach

This research employed a qualitative focus group methodology to explore public perspectives on housing insecurity and homelessness. The study was designed by Housing First Auckland Backbone as part of a broader public research initiative examining public awareness, attitudes, and engagement with housing and homelessness issues across Auckland. A trauma-informed approach was adopted throughout the research process, recognising that discussions of housing insecurity may trigger emotional responses among participants.

## Participant recruitment and selection

Participants were recruited through a multi-channel approach designed to reach diverse community members across different age groups. As there was zero budget for advertising and promotions, recruitment strategies relied on promotion through tertiary provider networks, social media and online platforms, community organisations, and sector partners. Promotional materials directed interested individuals to a registration form that enabled screening to ensure diverse representation.

Over 160 registrations of interest to join the focus groups were received. Registration information was reviewed, and then invitations to RSVP were selected based on diverse representation across gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic location across Auckland.

## Group structure and composition

The study included three focus groups with the aim of having six - 10 participants in each group, organised by age demographics: 18-34 years, 35-50 years, and 50+ years. This age-based segmentation was designed to capture generational differences in perspectives on housing and homelessness issues while maintaining manageable group sizes for meaningful and open discussion.

## Data collection procedures

Each focus group session lasted 90 minutes to allow sufficient time for manaakitanga, relationship building, and comprehensive topic exploration without participant fatigue. Sessions commenced with kai and informal whakawhanaungatanga, with participants invited to share something special about their home or community as a focused warm-up activity.

The discussions followed a semi-structured format using a predetermined set of open questions and probes that were developed by the facilitator and reviewed by members of the Housing First Backbone team. Topics covered included baseline understanding of housing and homelessness issues, personal experiences with housing insecurity, potential solutions and engagement strategies, responses to different communication approaches and motivations for engagement on housing and homelessness matters. Refer to the Appendix for the full set of questions and probes. *Note: depending on depth of discussion, not all probes were used in each group.*

All sessions were audio recorded using the Otter app with automatic transcription capabilities. Felicity Beadle, Housing First Auckland Backbone Strategic Lead, served as the moderator for all groups and was supported at each group by a member from the Housing First Auckland Backbone team. Felicity, a trained focus group facilitator with extensive experience moderating focus groups in NGO and commercial settings, brought both methodological expertise and contextual knowledge while maintaining neutrality on policy matters during each group discussion.

## Ethical considerations

The research incorporated several ethical safeguards to protect participants wellbeing and ensure informed participation. Clear privacy protocols were explained and

established at the beginning of each session, with participants required to sign informed consent forms outlining data usage and confidentiality measures.

Each participant received a $50 gift voucher as koha for their time and contribution to the research..

The facilitator had access to information about housing support services and mental health resources and support to provide to participants if needed during or after the sessions.

All participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

The research employed inclusive, non-stigmatising language throughout all materials and discussions.

## Data analysis

Anonymised transcripts of focus group audio recordings were reviewed for accuracy and privacy. An AI tool was used for structured coding and initial thematic analysis of each group, with themes and categories corresponding to the preset research probes and included in the facilitation guide. AI-generated thematic analysis was systematically reviewed by the Focus Group Facilitator, cross-checked against the original transcripts for accuracy, and updated where necessary to ensure themes authentically reflected participant discussions.

Relevant verbatim quotes were selected as supporting evidence for key themes and findings.

## Limitations

This research presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings:

The sample size of 26 participants across the three focus groups, while appropriate for qualitative research, limits the universality of findings to the broader Auckland population.

Participants self-selected to join these focus groups, indicating an active interest in housing insecurity and homelessness. Consequently, findings may not represent the broader Auckland population, particularly those with limited awareness of or engagement with housing issues.

The age-based segmentation, while providing insights into generational perspectives, may have prevented the observation of intergenerational dialogue that occurs in natural community settings.

The recruitment approach, while designed to reach diverse participants, may have introduced selection bias toward individuals who are more engaged with community issues or comfortable participating in group discussions.

Additionally, the 90-minute session length, while designed to prevent fatigue, may have limited the depth of exploration possible for complex topics.

The focus on Auckland participants means findings may not be applicable to other New Zealand regions with different housing markets, housing issues and community characteristics.

This focus group research, while valuable, did not specifically capture kaupapa Māori perspectives on housing solutions or explore Te Tiriti-based approaches. The research included Māori participants but did not explore Māori-specific experiences of housing insecurity and structural discrimination, whānau-based and iwi-led housing models, cultural dimensions of home and belonging from te ao Māori perspectives, mana-enhancing, culturally safe housing pathways, and Te Tiriti obligations in housing policy and service delivery. Given the housing and homelessness crisis disproportionately affects Māori communities, further research is required to explore kaupapa Māori perspectives and ensure these are integrated into responses to scope any future public campaign.

It is also recommended, given that Pacific peoples are over-represented in housing insecurity and homelessness data across Auckland, that research is scoped and conducted specifically with Pacific peoples to explore their perspectives and include them in design and responses when developing any future public campaign.

# 18-34 Years Focus Group

## Participant demographics

This focus group included six participants representing diverse backgrounds and experiences across the Auckland region.

### Participant composition

The group achieved balanced gender representation with two participants identifying as male, two as female, and two as non-binary. Participants represented multiple ethnic communities, including NZ Pākehā, Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Cook Island, European, and Other European backgrounds.

### Lived experience and accessibility

The research prioritised inclusive participation. This small group included participants with diverse lived experiences, including one participant who is blind and one participant with prior lived experience of homelessness. This representation ensured that perspectives from whaikaha and those who have experienced homelessness were incorporated into the research findings.

### Geographic distribution

Participants resided across various Auckland suburbs including North Shore, Auckland Central, Freemans Bay, Onehunga, and Mount Albert, providing geographic diversity across different urban environments and communities.

### Summary

The diverse composition of this focus group enabled rich and lively discussion drawing from varied cultural perspectives, lived experiences, and geographic contexts. While the sample size of six participants limits the ability to draw generalisations, the demographic diversity strengthens the depth and breadth of insights gathered.

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# Demographic context

The six participants represented a diverse cross-section of young adults navigating Auckland's housing landscape. They demonstrated varying levels of housing security, from those living in family homes to those with direct experience of homelessness. Participants included university students, young working professionals, and individuals involved in community advocacy work.

## Key characteristics:

- Participants had current or previous experience of a mix of housing situations: family homes, independent living, transitional arrangements, couch surfing and street homelessness

- They had varied exposure to housing insecurity and/or homelessness through personal experience, work, or social networks

- Participants demonstrated a strong community orientation and awareness of social issues

- Many were or had previously been actively engaged with friends and family facing housing challenges

## Supporting evidence:

*"I think I'm very lucky to live in a beautiful, warm house. I live with my family, my parents, my twin sister... I have a room that I spent a lot of time designing just the way I like it"*

**- representing those with current housing security**

*"I've been homeless twice in my life... I was on the street. I didn't know how to seek help... I try and put myself through Uni, I don't even know what a student allowance was"*

**- representing lived experience perspective**

# Issue perception

Participants demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of housing issues, viewing them as systemic rather than individual failures. Housing issues weighed heavily for this group, with the majority thinking about housing insecurity - either for themself or their friends - daily. They were aware that homelessness encompassed multiple forms beyond street homelessness, including couch surfing and inadequate housing situations.

## Key perceptions:

► Housing issues are seen as interconnected with economic security, accessibility, and social services

► They recognised housing as a pipeline issue, not just an endpoint crisis

► They had a sound understanding of structural barriers facing marginalised communities

## Supporting evidence:

*"Just a level of insecurity that's it's really difficult to escape from... it's not just housing, right? Like, it's economic security as well. So yeah, like that intersection"*

**- common perspective on systemic nature**

*"I think there's a lot of people who are homeless, who just don't know where to seek help... I didn't even know that there was a student village"*

**- highlighting navigation barriers**

*"In the disability community, very regularly, when you see someone trying to find an accessible place to live, which is really, really, really hard"*

**- representing intersectional understanding**

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# Emotional landscape

The emotional responses range from personal anxiety about future security to systemic frustration and despair. Even those currently housed express deep concerns about their long-term prospects of staying in Aotearoa New Zealand due to the pressures of the housing market.

## Key emotions:

Future anxiety and hopelessness about housing prospects

Frustration with government responses and policy decisions, particularly the cuts to support for housing in emergency circumstances

Empathy and solidarity with those experiencing housing insecurity

Sense of intergenerational inequality
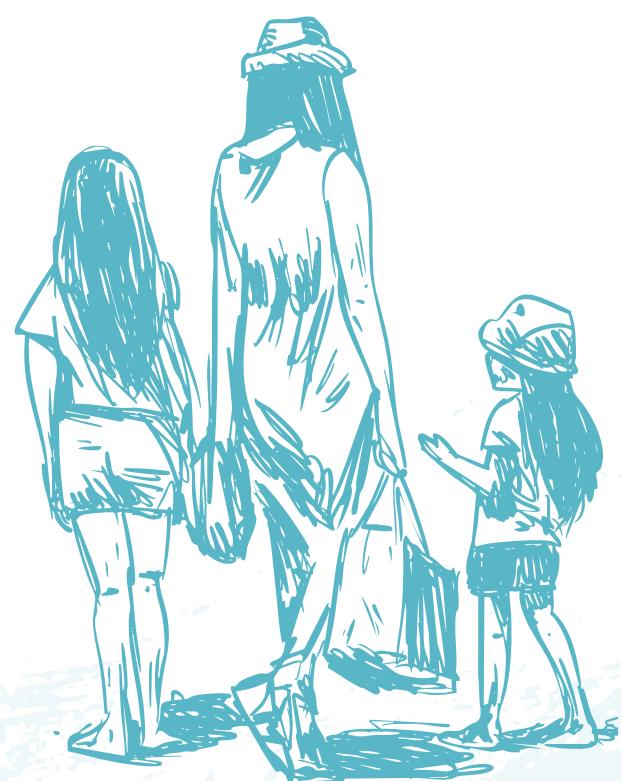
## Supporting evidence:

*"It seems impossible to buy a house... like there's no future, there's no future in New Zealand... There's no stability in the future"*

**- common sentiment about housing prospects**

*"Homelessness is tragic and preventable, like it doesn't have to be this way, and I think how much of homelessness is due to higher powers politically, that it feels almost, like, hopeless as an individual"*

**- representing systemic frustration**

## Causal attributions

Participants identify multiple interconnected causes to the problem of housing insecurity and homelessness, with a strong emphasis on systemic and political factors rather than individual responsibility. They demonstrated a clear and mature understanding of structural inequalities and policy impacts.

### Key causes identified:

► Economic inequality and capitalism

► Economic recession and difficulty in finding paid employment

► Government policy decisions, including the cancellation of public housing and cuts to social services

► Cultural shifts away from community support and caring for one another

► Discrimination and marginalisation of vulnerable groups

### Supporting evidence:

*"Capitalism was the first word that popped into my head... the inequality of wealth and how that's just maintained by... the system is set up in a way that benefits certain people"*

**- common structural analysis**

*"I think, the like, it's been there under both types of government... But now, the like, I think the emergency housing cutbacks are like the most flagrant examples"*

**- representing policy critique**

*"Shifting culture, shifting culture, shifting culture... you know, there's that saying it takes a village to raise a person... we're no longer caring for each other. We're solely 'our stuff'"*

**- unique cultural perspective**

# Solution preferences

Participants favour comprehensive, systemic solutions over individual interventions. They emphasised the need for increased public housing, restoration of social services that have been the subject of recent significant funding cuts, and cultural change toward more community and neighbourly support for those struggling with housing insecurity.

## Key solution preferences:

▶ Considerable expansion of affordable public housing, including accessible options

▶ Restoration and expansion of social services

▶ Cultural shift toward community care and responsibility to address the issue

▶ Community role to reduce stigma

▶ Guaranteed basic income or similar economic security measures

## Supporting evidence:

*"Building more of that and making it that like public housing, as is the case in some places in Europe is like something that you can, you don't need to be in, like, this great degree of hardship even to start to normalise"*
**- representing public housing advocacy**

*"We literally just need more affordable housing. And we can do that like the budget is entirely made up over and over again, with new priorities, we kind of just need to decide it (housing) is a priority"*
**- common pragmatic perspective**

## Engagement potential

This age group shows high engagement potential, with many already actively involved in supporting friends who are struggling with homelessness and community members who are navigating housing insecurity. They demonstrated a willingness to participate in advocacy, storytelling, and direct action.

### Key engagement approaches:

▶ Personal storytelling - providing a platform for people with lived experience to share their stories

▶ Community mobilising and collective action

▶ Direct support for friends and community members

▶ Political advocacy and voting for politicians who have housing as a priority in their manifesto



## Supporting evidence:

*"A mic... I think of the (Council) Roaming Dogs campaign... Here's a camera - Tell us what happened"*

**- advocating for storytelling platforms**

*"I think, like getting to know your neighbours and getting to know potentially, or like, unhoused neighbours as well, and just like treating people with, like, dignity, like respect and being non-judgmental"*

**- representing a community engagement approach**

*"I keep one bedroom free... some will crash on my couch, come back again and then again"*

**- demonstrating direct support to help address the issue**

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# Communication needs

Participants were clear about how best to reach them and what would motivate them to be further engaged. They prefer authentic, story-driven communication through multiple channels, with a strong emphasis on lived experience voices and community-centered messaging.

## Key communication preferences:

- This age group preferred personal stories and storytelling over statistical data (for public engagement)

- A multiple-channel approach is needed to reach this age group, including a mix of social media and traditional methods

- They prefer community values framing over individual rights language

- They stressed the need for communications, including any use of visual materials, to be fully accessible and to use non-academic language

## Supporting evidence

*"I think younger people are more aware about housing and how close everyone is to be homeless… So it's just the reality of life"*

**- indicating relevance to lived experience**

*"I think personal stories are really powerful… That's how humans share their human experiences throughout the entirety of human existence"*

**- common preference for narrative approach**

## Messaging preferences

The following messages were tested as an initial starting point with participants. The research was an opportunity to get some early-stage feedback on messages and phrases currently used within the sector.

- Everyone deserves a place to call home

- Housing is a human right

- Housing is everyone's business

- We can no longer ignore our country's housing crisis – change starts with our politicians

- Housing insecurity affects our entire community's health and prosperity

- Noone chooses to be homeless, we can all play a part in refusing to accept it

- The housing crisis requires immediate action from our politicians

- Together, we can solve homelessness. Let's make our voices heard and our votes count.

Participants had a lively discussion around the test messages and worked together to adapt them and agree on messages that resonated more strongly with them. They responded most positively to their adaptation of "Housing is a human right", landing on **"housing is a human need"** - regarding housing as a fundamental human need, essential for survival and flourishing in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. In their view framing housing as a "right" had legal connotations and did not appeal to them. They recommended tightening the message further to **"housing is human"** framing, rejecting overly bureaucratic language while embracing collective, humanistic approaches. They prefer **"end homelessness"** over "solve homelessness".

## Channel preferences:

- Social media (i.e., TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram) for digital natives

- Street posters and direct mail for non-social media users

- Community meetings and community-level platforms for storytelling

- Participants shared the potential to use humour and creative approaches, where appropriate

## Accessibility considerations

Participants stressed the need for communications, including any use of visual materials, to be fully accessible and to use non-academic language.

## Information needs

Younger participants want authentic personal stories from those experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness.

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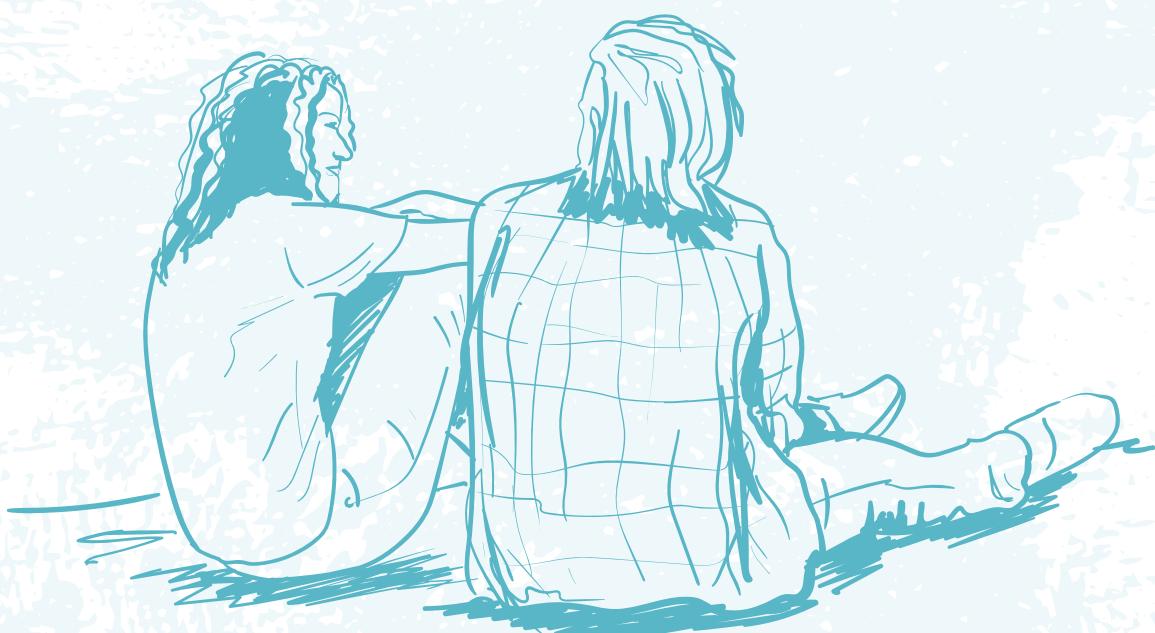
# 35-50 Years Focus Group

## Participant demographics

This focus group included nine participants representing diverse backgrounds and experiences across the Auckland region, with particular emphasis on inclusive participation and accessibility.

### Participant composition

The group achieved balanced gender representation with four participants identifying as male and five as female. Participants represented multiple ethnic communities, including NZ European, Māori, Samoan, Latin American, Indian, and Other European backgrounds, reflecting Auckland's multicultural diversity.

### Accessibility

The research prioritised inclusive participation and accessibility as core values. This group included participants with diverse backgrounds and circumstances, including two deaf participants who were supported by New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreters throughout the session.

### Lived experience

While the housing situation of participants was not sought during the process of wide public recruitment and invitation to join the group, participants attending represented a range of housing situations, including one person currently experiencing street homelessness and one person living in a caravan. This diversity ensured that multiple perspectives were meaningfully incorporated into the research findings.

### Geographic distribution

Participants resided across various Auckland suburbs including Auckland Central, North Shore, Sandringham, New Lynn, Mount Wellington, Glen Innes, Drury, West Auckland, and Manurewa. This provided comprehensive geographic diversity across different urban environments, communities, and socioeconomic areas throughout the greater Auckland region.

### Summary

The diverse composition of this focus group enabled rich discussion drawing from varied cultural perspectives, lived experiences, professional knowledge, and geographic contexts. The inclusion of deaf participants with interpreter support, people currently experiencing homelessness, and individuals with both personal and professional insights (gained through previous work experience) into housing systems created a uniquely comprehensive discussion. While the sample size of nine participants limits the ability to draw generalisations, the demographic diversity, accessibility provisions, and range of lived experiences significantly strengthen the depth, authenticity, and breadth of insights gathered.

# Demographic context

The nine participants represent a diverse cross-section of middle-aged adults from across Auckland with varied life experiences and housing situations. This group includes individuals with previous work experience in housing and social services, people currently experiencing homelessness (one person living on the streets and one person living in a caravan), and community members concerned about housing issues affecting their neighbourhoods and families.

## Key characteristics:

- Mix of housing situations: owned homes, rental properties, caravan living, and street homelessness

- Some participants had professional experience in relevant sectors, i.e., prior experience in housing and current employment with Auckland City Council

- Strong community connections and family responsibilities

- Diverse ethnic backgrounds with specific community concerns

- Direct experience with housing challenges across the spectrum

## Supporting evidence:

*"My background? So I came from prior working in Kāinga Ora and then Ministry of Housing, and I was dealing with, I was, I was an advisor for Auckland... I was a funding provider"*

**- representing professional sector prior experience**

*"I'm homeless. Everyone's a team out there (on the streets)"*

**- representing lived experience of homelessness**

*"I live in a caravan there, and have done for about a decade now. I have four different places I move around to, and I'm learning about different communities"*

**- representing lived experience of homelessness and transient living**

# Issue perception

Participants demonstrate a sophisticated, nuanced understanding of housing issues rooted in both professional knowledge and lived experience. They perceive housing problems as deeply interconnected with mental health, addiction, trauma, and systemic barriers, viewing homelessness as a complex issue, often requiring individualised approaches. The conversation touched on the impact of landlords, the lack of affordable housing, and the challenges of navigating the system.

## Key perceptions:

▶ Housing insecurity is seen as interconnected with trauma, addiction, and mental health

▶ Participants demonstrated unprompted recognition of systemic barriers and bureaucratic failures, including a lack of affordable housing

▶ Understanding of housing as both a security and acceptance issue for those who may be judged or face discrimination

▶ Participants shared opinions and beliefs that there are diverse pathways into homelessness, including choice vs. circumstance

## Supporting evidence:

*"Hard for getting accepted for housing for people who actually haven't been in housing before... they look at you in a different way and ask you why, more questions behind why you didn't get into housing before"*

**- highlighting systemic barriers from lived experience**

*"I think the system is just so hard for people to get through. That's one of the reasons why people end up in those scenarios... if you try to go to talk to people whose job it is to help you, and you don't end up coming away with the help you want, you might just stop asking for help"*

**- common perspective on system navigation**

# Emotional landscape

The emotional responses from participants were characterised by frustration with systems, empathy for those experiencing hardship, and a sense of responsibility to help. Unlike younger participants, this age group shows less personal anxiety about their own housing security and more concern for family members and community members facing housing distress.

## Key emotions:

▶ Frustration with bureaucratic systems and government responses

▶ Deep empathy and a desire to help those experiencing homelessness

▶ Protective feelings toward family members navigating housing challenges

▶ Sense of community responsibility and obligation to act

## Supporting evidence:

*"I think about it a lot, because especially in the last year, she's (a family member) basically constantly in a battle with MSD and, you know, Oranga Tamariki as well as Housing New Zealand, and she's constantly, sort of like fighting to be able to keep her house"*

**- representing family concern**

*"I see things, but I just don't know what to do... I see her (a woman experiencing homelessness) sleeping at the bus stop... she's outside in the winter time. And I really don't know how it works"*

**- expressing helplessness and desire to help**

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# Causal attributions

Participants identify multiple interconnected causes with a strong emphasis on the cost of living, government funding cuts, and systemic design flaws. They demonstrated sophisticated understanding of how individual circumstances intersect with structural factors.

## Key causes identified:

▶ Cost of living increases impacting people's ability to retain housing

▶ Reduced government funding for social housing

▶ Systemic barriers and bureaucratic complexity

▶ Trauma, addiction, and mental health issues as both cause and consequence

▶ Market failures, investment priorities and systems designed to favour wealth accumulation by treating housing as an investment

## Supporting evidence:

*"Cost of living, and of course, less government funding at the moment for social housing... the government at the moment is not funding social housing as much as Labour did. So the funding stopped and then, but the cost living, cost of living is high"*

**- common structural analysis**

*"It feels a lot like the system is designed to fail... someone like (\*politician) who owns like 12 properties... the property value that they've got still goes up....And that's sort of why... that system is designed not necessarily to put you into it"*

**- representing system critique**

\*anonymised for report

# Solution preferences

Participants emphasised the importance of addressing underlying issues like trauma and addiction while also calling for systemic reforms, community-based solutions, and modernising voting systems to ensure all community members can participate in elections that determine housing policies.

## Key solution preferences:

► Individualised support combining housing with mental health, addiction, and life skills services

► Increased investment in social housing and support organisations

► Simplified, coordinated service delivery with "one (entry) door" approaches

► Increased community awareness and collaboration to build greater community tolerance to reduce stigma around social housing and homelessness

► Improved voting accessibility and democratic participation

## Supporting evidence:

*"I think probably we'll have to start first with the people... some people, even if they receive a house, but they don't know money management. They don't know how to pay the bills... more money needs to be, kind of probably funding put into, let's say, Auckland City Mission"*

**- representing a comprehensive support approach**

*"What we need is more tolerance towards one another and less, ...less stereotyping of people who live in or need to live in, like Kāinga Ora housing... we should all accept that... there's nothing to fear from these, you know, so-called social housing"*

**- common perspective on stigma reduction**
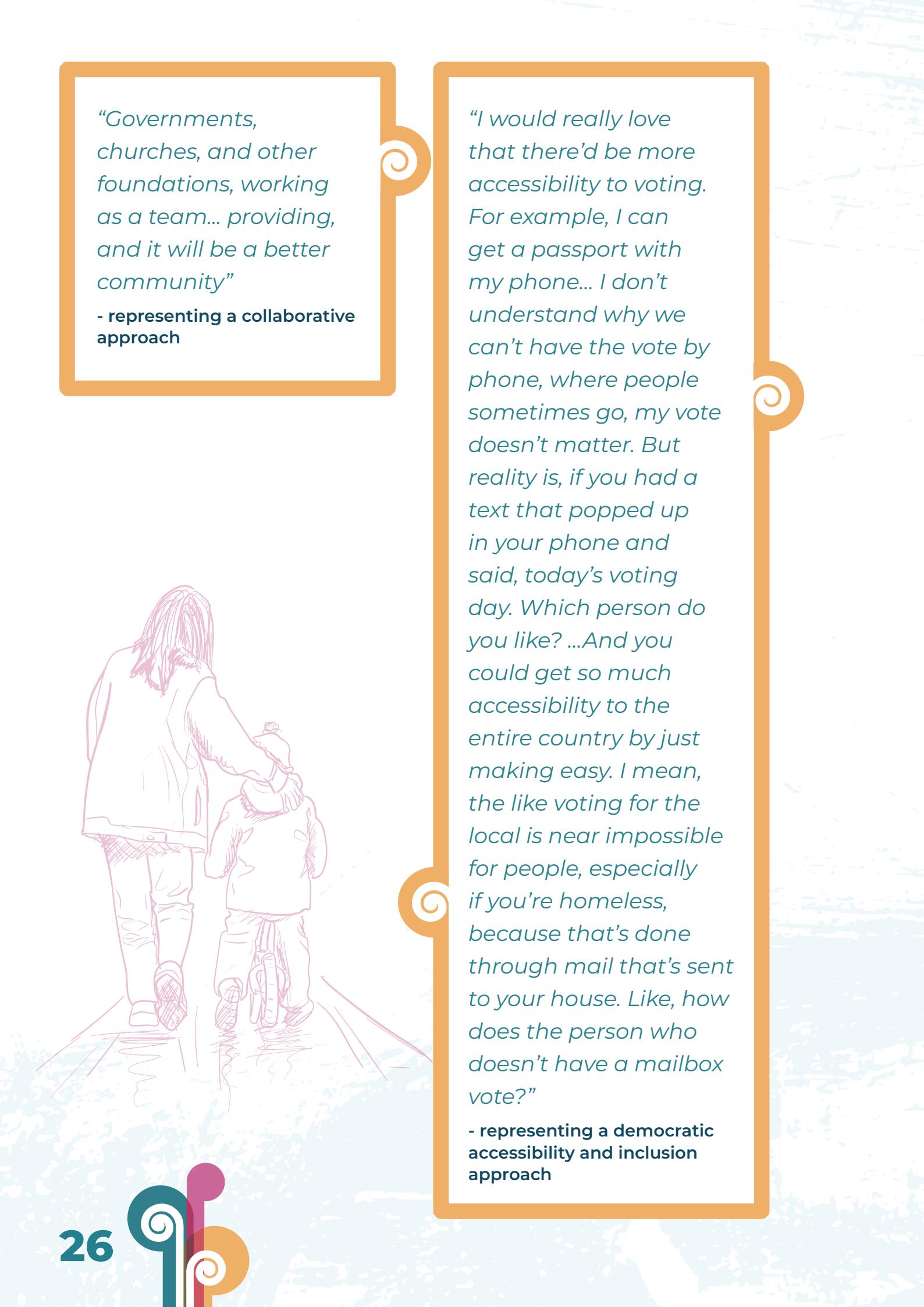
*"Governments, churches, and other foundations, working as a team... providing, and it will be a better community"*

**- representing a collaborative approach**

*"I would really love that there'd be more accessibility to voting. For example, I can get a passport with my phone... I don't understand why we can't have the vote by phone, where people sometimes go, my vote doesn't matter. But reality is, if you had a text that popped up in your phone and said, today's voting day. Which person do you like? ...And you could get so much accessibility to the entire country by just making easy. I mean, the like voting for the local is near impossible for people, especially if you're homeless, because that's done through mail that's sent to your house. Like, how does the person who doesn't have a mailbox vote?"*

**- representing a democratic accessibility and inclusion approach**

## Engagement potential

This age group shows high engagement potential through existing community networks, professional connections, and a genuine desire to support others. They demonstrate a willingness to participate in advocacy, storytelling, and direct community action.

### Key engagement approaches:

▶ Community organising to build collective power and take action to create change, working through local boards and established networks

▶ Professional advocacy using sector knowledge and connections

▶ Public getting involved and directly supporting individuals experiencing housing challenges, with good information and guidance on how to help, e.g. online channels for reporting concerns and finding information

▶ Providing different perspectives through storytelling and sharing lived experiences to build empathy

### Supporting evidence:

*"I was actually part of a community centre... we were talking about: what are the issues in the area? And then we were actually looking at how we can actually raise it with the council, and at different avenues, and also with our local MP"*

**- representing community organising and action**

*"Give homeless people a voice to kind of say their story... once you go on a personal level and you talk, like, human to human, your perception changes. And I think that empathy grows"*

**- advocating for storytelling platforms**

*"I just don't know how to help... I see things, but I just don't know what to do"*

**- indicating engagement potential with the right information and guidance**

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# Communication needs

When it comes to reaching and motivating this age group to become actively engaged in changing the narrative, participants require factual, data-driven communication combined with authentic personal stories. They value and need accessible information to help them understand how to help others and engage in community action to create change. Raising awareness through the media was seen as an important strategy.

## Key communication preferences:

- ▶ Data-driven messaging with clear facts and statistics
- ▶ Personal stories from people with lived experience
- ▶ Accessible information about how to help and where to go for support
- ▶ Multiple channel approach, including traditional and digital methods

## Supporting evidence:

*"If you have solid data behind that... One in every 1000 is suffering from homelessness and the housing crisis requires immediate action - that will catch everyone's attention"*

**- common preference for factual approach**

*"By hearing your (person in the group currently experiencing homelessness) story, you'll probably have more impact. And they'll be like, okay. So they actually listen"*

**- emphasising authentic voices over sector messaging**

## Messaging preferences

The following messages were tested with participants of each focus group:

- Everyone deserves a place to call home
- Housing is a human right
- Housing is everyone's business
- We can no longer ignore our country's housing crisis – change starts with our politicians
- Housing insecurity affects our entire community's health and prosperity
- No one chooses to be homeless, we can all play a part in refusing to accept it
- The housing crisis requires immediate action from our politicians
- Together, we can solve homelessness. Let's make our voices heard and our votes count.

Participants responded positively to inclusive, non-judgmental language like **"Everyone deserves a place to call home"** and **"No one chooses to be homeless. We can all play a part in refusing to accept it."** They rejected overly political messaging that singles out or attacks politicians (i.e., "We can no longer ignore our country's housing crisis – change starts with our politicians" and "The housing crisis requires immediate action from our politicians"), preferring collaborative framing that emphasises shared responsibility.

## Channel preferences

- Social media (Facebook for community reach, LinkedIn for professional networks)
- Email and text messaging for direct information sharing
- Traditional methods, including billboards for broad visibility
- Community meetings and local board engagement
- Professional networks and workplace channels

## Accessibility considerations

Like the younger group, this group also emphasised the importance of accessible communication formats and inclusive approaches, particularly noting the needs of deaf community members and people with different language backgrounds.

## Information needs

Participants want practical information about:

- how to help,
- where to direct people in need, and
- how to engage in advocacy.

They want accessible research and clear data to better understand the scope and causes of housing issues and homelessness, which is key to supporting their advocacy efforts.

At the conclusion of the focus group, participants requested two actions:

1. to receive a copy of the focus group report, and
2. to receive ongoing communications about any public engagement and campaign work that is developed as many were interested in staying connected so they can be part of future advocacy efforts.

# 50+ Years Age Group

## Participant demographics

This focus group included 11 participants representing diverse backgrounds and experiences across the Auckland region, bringing a range of professional expertise, community leadership, and inclusive participation to the discussion.

## Participant composition

The group achieved gender representation with three participants identifying as male and eight as female. Participants represented multiple ethnic communities, including NZ European, Māori, Fijian, Indian, Chinese, and Other European backgrounds, reflecting Auckland's multicultural diversity and providing culturally specific insights into housing challenges affecting different communities.

## Lived experience

The group included a participant who had experienced recent transitions through housing insecurity, navigating eight months without housing before securing social housing.

## Geographic distribution

Participants resided across various Auckland suburbs including Ponsonby, Onehunga, Henderson, Auckland CBD, Howick, and Mangere Bridge. This provided comprehensive geographic diversity across different urban environments, communities, and socioeconomic areas throughout the greater Auckland region.

## Professional and community expertise

The group included participants with significant professional experience relevant to housing support services (prior working experience), local council roles, and community programme coordinators. Many participants held active community leadership roles, including involvement in residents' groups, faith-based organisations, and volunteer services.

## Community connections and civic engagement

Participants demonstrated extensive civic engagement and community connections, with several organising community events, serving on committees, participating in church and cultural organisations, and maintaining long-term involvement in neighbourhood and advocacy activities. This civic engagement brought additional depth to discussions around community mobilisation, political advocacy, and grassroots organising and mobilising strategies.

## Summary

The diverse composition of this focus group provided the foundation for deep and rich discussion drawing from varied cultural perspectives, professional expertise, lived experiences, and extensive community connections and involvement. The participants' extensive professional networks, community leadership experience, and long-term Auckland residency provided a historical perspective and sophisticated understanding of systemic issues. While the sample size of 11 participants limits the ability to draw generalisations, the diversity and broad life experiences ensured a depth, authenticity, and breadth to the insights gathered.

# Demographic context

The 11 participants represent a diverse and experienced cross-section of older adults with varied professional backgrounds, cultural perspectives, community connections, and housing experiences spanning decades.

## Key characteristics:

▶ Mix of housing situations: owned homes, rental properties, shared housing, and social housing

▶ Extensive professional experience across council, community programmes, and church work

▶ Strong community leadership and volunteer involvement

▶ Diverse cultural backgrounds with specific insights into ethnic community needs

▶ Geographic spread across Auckland, with long-term residency providing a historical perspective
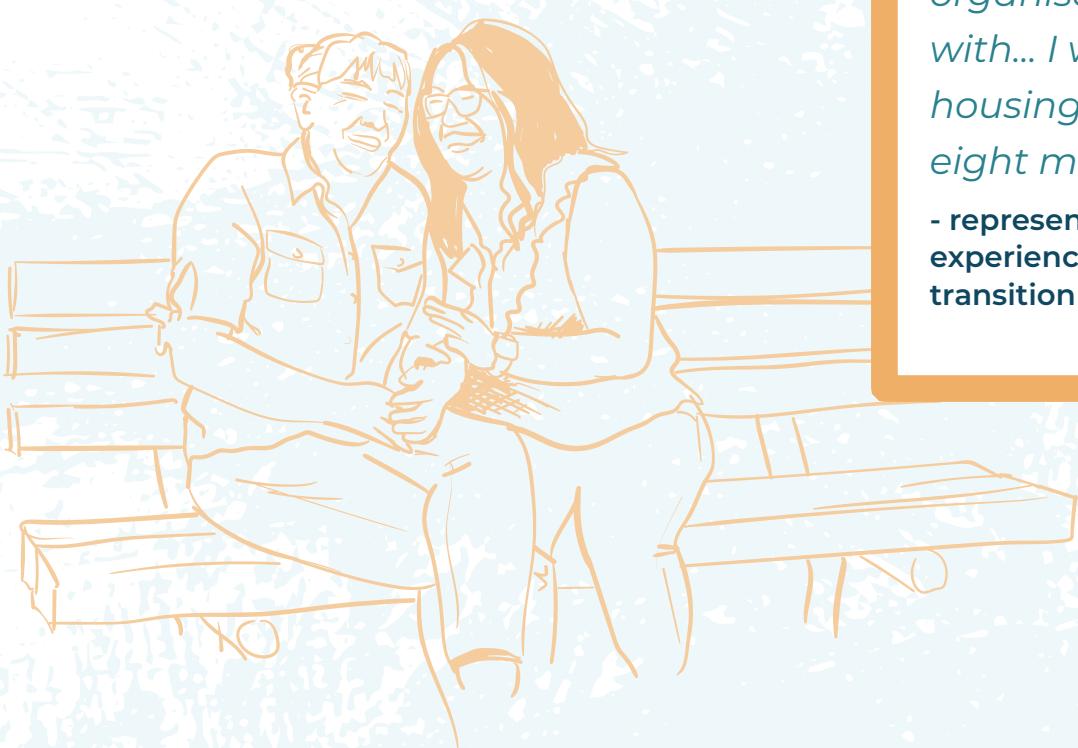
## Supporting evidence:

*"I work for Auckland Council... I lived predominantly out in the suburbs most of my life, but we then moved into the city about five years ago. I was looking for a greater sense of community"*

**- representing professional experience and intentional community engagement**

*"I currently live in a Kāinga Ora unit right in the middle of CBD, brand new unit, and they are amazing government organisation to deal with... I was without housing for almost eight months"*

**- representing lived experience of housing transition and homelessness**

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## Issue perception

Participants demonstrate sophisticated understanding rooted in professional knowledge, historical perspective, and direct observation of changing conditions over time. They perceive housing issues as systemic failures requiring political commitment, viewing homelessness as both visible street homelessness and broader housing insecurity affecting diverse populations.

### Key perceptions:

▶ Housing issues are seen as long-standing systemic problems requiring political will

▶ Recognition that homelessness affects diverse populations, including ethnic communities

▶ Strong understanding of complex interconnections between mental health, addiction, and housing

▶ Awareness of policy impacts and service system failures

### Supporting evidence:

*"The economic system, and the governments that we have got have done nothing sufficient to deal with the lack of affordable housing, and this is New Zealand's history for many decades"*

**- representing historical perspective on systemic nature**

*"We also try to get the support from the Asian community. We think this is not our problems... but I found we did have some homeless Asian people from Malay, from China, from Philippines. They just, they've become homeless"*

**- highlighting diverse populations affected**

# Emotional landscape

The emotional responses of this group were characterised by deep frustration with political inaction, professional indignation at system failures, and strong moral conviction about the unacceptability of homelessness. This group expresses anger at wasted resources. They demonstrated a determination to find solutions.

## Key emotions:

▶ Frustration and anger at political inaction and system failures

▶ Professional indignation at poor policy implementation

▶ Moral outrage at the persistence of homelessness

▶ Determination and willingness to contribute to solutions through experience and networks

## Supporting evidence:

*"Most of our politicians own two or three properties. So it's not in their interests... They might say they are, but they do nothing that makes real change happen... So it's bullshit, simple lies and a lack of commitment"*

**- representing strong frustration with political inaction**

*"I feel they've lost their heart, and it's become very heartless. I feel at the moment in the environment, it doesn't seem to matter that people can't put, you know, food on plates"*

**- representing emotional response to the current policy environment**

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# Causal attributions

Participants identify comprehensive systemic causes rooted in decades of policy failure, with sophisticated understanding of how economic systems, political decisions, and service delivery models create and perpetuate homelessness.

## Key causes identified:

▶ Long-standing policy failures and lack of political commitment across multiple governments

▶ An economic system that treats housing as an investment rather than a home

▶ Broken service delivery systems and inadequate wraparound support

▶ The cost of living crisis combined with reduced government funding to support those in crisis/need

▶ Systemic discrimination and barriers to accessing services

## Supporting evidence:

*"For a very long time, New Zealand has thought about housing as an investment as opposed to a home. So not having a capital gains tax actually does not help people... we need more public housing"*

**- representing economic system analysis**

*"The services are broken. Kāinga Ora...MSD is now running Kāinga Ora, so everything goes through WINZ... They don't talk to one another. WINZ don't talk to Kāinga Ora... it's broken"*

**- representing service system failure perspective**

# Solution preferences

Participants favour comprehensive systemic reform combining political commitment, increased housing supply, reformed service delivery, and wraparound support. They emphasise the need for bipartisan political commitment and evidence-based approaches.

## Key solution preferences:

▸ Bipartisan political commitment to ending homelessness

▸ Massive increase in social housing supply with proper long-term planning

▸ Reformed service delivery systems with better coordination

▸ Comprehensive wraparound services addressing underlying causes and improving community connections

▸ Easing the criteria for accessing housing services

▸ Adoption of and funding for evidence-based approaches, using proven international models

▸ Consider the role of family support and the community in addressing housing insecurity

## Supporting evidence:

*"What I read about the main barriers is that an over-reliance on things like emergency housing focuses on managing and not ending systemic systems that have created homelessness, and if you don't have strong political commitment from government you can't change it"*

**- representing systemic reform approach**

*"You must know what they do in Finland and what they do in France... So you know the information is there, isn't it? We're not having to meet something new because it's been known, shown and proven, so it's really about political will"*

**- advocating for evidence-based international approaches**

# Engagement potential

This age group shows exceptionally high engagement potential through established networks, professional connections, and strong civic participation practices. They demonstrate a willingness to participate in advocacy, political action, and community mobilising.

## Key engagement approaches:

- Political advocacy and accountability through established networks
- Community organising/mobilising using professional, community, and civic connections
- Public demonstrations and collective action (e.g,. hikoi, marches) to draw attention to the housing crisis
- Cross-sector collaboration through existing organisational relationships
- Educational campaigns tailored for specific ethnic communities

## Supporting evidence:

*"Maybe we should have a housing hikoi to Wellington... if we stand up and speak in public... we can get voices together... it's absolutely essential that we get a collective voice up"*

**- representing direct action approach**

*"I think it would be extremely valuable to ask Council, to our central government elected officials, as well as local, what's their stance on housing and not wait for every election"*

**- representing political accountability approach**

*"Do you collaborate say with Salvation Army or other organisations? So you've got a network, you've got an association all together"*

**- representing collaborative organisational approach**

# Communication needs

Participants prefer multi-channel approaches combining traditional media, digital platforms, and community networks. They emphasised the importance of data-driven messaging combined with personal stories and culturally appropriate communication.

## Key communication preferences:

▸ Multi-channel approach using traditional and digital media

▸ Data-driven messaging with clear statistics and evidence

▸ Public campaign using personal stories to humanise the issue and counter stigma

▸ Community-specific messaging for different groups

▸ Professional and organisational networks for information distribution

## Supporting evidence:

*"WeChat… I would also suggest events and also libraries. You know Chinese New Year."*

*"Churches, anything faith-based… If you're going to churches, you might as well go through schools too."*

*"Unions"*

**- representing culturally appropriate and community-based channels**

*"Having a personal face to homelessness and some kind of campaign that actually let people understand this was a person who had an incident… It could be you! Just to be more personal"*

**- emphasising the need for humanising approaches**

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## Messaging preferences

The following messages were consistently tested with participants in each of the three focus groups:

- Everyone deserves a place to call home
- Housing is a human right
- Housing is everyone's business
- We can no longer ignore our country's housing crisis – change starts with our politicians
- Housing insecurity affects our entire community's health and prosperity
- No one chooses to be homeless, we can all play a part in refusing to accept it
- The housing crisis requires immediate action from our politicians
- Together, we can solve homelessness. Let's make our voices heard and our votes count.

The 50+ age group responded positively to messages that focus on collective responsibility and action, such as **"Everyone deserves a place to call home"** and refined versions addressing homelessness directly. They strongly rejected messages they perceived as too political or partisan, preferring collaborative framing. Through discussion, they developed preferred messaging like **"Homelessness is not okay. We refuse to accept it."**

## Channel Preferences

Older participants wanted a multi-channel approach for engagement, calling for the use of:

- traditional media
- digital platforms, and
- community networks.

## Information and education needs

Participants want:

- readily accessible research data, and
- cost-benefit analyses

They emphasised the need to counter stigma through education about the diverse causes of homelessness.

## Creative engagement ideas

This group continued the discussion at the end of the Focus Group to offer several specific suggestions for engagement and campaign actions:

- QR codes for easy access to information and services
- Educational documentary series similar to the successful Australian programme
- National Homeless Day events for coordinated awareness
- Professional network campaigns through unions and industry associations
- Faith-based and cultural community engagement through existing leaders and groups

They highlighted the need to attract funding to develop and deliver a pubic campaign and suggested approaching donors like Stephen Tindall (Tindall Foundation) and Mark Todd (Ockham Residential).

At the conclusion of this focus group, participants shared, without any probing, that they had a sense of optimism, expressing confidence in the ability of real people to solve the problem. They conveyed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the discussion and share their perspectives and ideas to bring about change. They cited the safe and comfortable environment as being key to their open sharing and enjoyment of the discussion. The majority of participants indicated that they would like to receive ongoing communications so they can support any future public advocacy and campaign efforts.

# Appendix

## Focus Group format, questions and probes

**Open with karakia tīmatanga**

**Warm-up questions** *(20 minutes)*

1. **Whakawhanaungatanga/ Introduction round:** "Please share your first name and something you enjoy about your home, neighbourhood or community."

2. **General perception - housing:** "When you hear the phrase 'housing issues' what are the first few words or images that come to mind?"
   - ▸ **Probe:** "Why do those particular words/images come to mind for you?"

3. **Personal relevance - housing:** "How often do you notice or think about housing issues in your daily life?"
   - ▸ **Probe:** "What typically brings these issues to your attention?"

## Current awareness and understanding *(20 minutes)*

4. **Knowledge assessment:** "Why do you think homelessness is a serious issue?"

5. **Size of problem:** "Why do you think more people are experiencing homelessness now than 5 years ago?"

6. **Solutions and resources:** "Do you think homelessness can be solved?"
   - ▸ **Probe:** What do you think is needed to address housing insecurity and homelessness?

**Moderator notes***

## Personal experiences and connections *(20 minutes)*

7. **Relevance/proximity question:** "Has housing insecurity affected you, someone you know, or your community?"

   ▸ **Probe:** "How did that experience change your perspective, if at all?"

8. **Barriers discussion:** "What do you see as the biggest obstacles to addressing housing insecurity effectively?"

   ▸ **Probe:** "What misconceptions do you think exist about these issues?"

9. **Involvement question:** "What would it take for you to feel more comfortable talking about this issue with family and friends?"

10. **Political/voting:** How important to you is it that politicians value housing and address / prevent homelessness?

    ▸ **Probe:** What would help you and other members of the public to tell politicians what you expect from them in terms of housing and addressing homelessness?

## Moderator notes

Evolve or ignore this probe if participants have already shared personal experiences

Only include if the role of politicians has not already come up in the discussion

## Communications testing
*(15 minutes)*

**11. Message resonance:** "I'm going to share several statements about housing insecurity and homelessness. For each one, please tell me how it makes you feel and whether it motivates you to want to learn more or take action."

Example messages to test – select based on time:

i. "Everyone deserves a place to call home."

ii. "Housing is a human right"

iii. "Housing is everyone's business"

iv. "We can no longer ignore our country's housing crisis – change starts with our politicians"

v. "Housing insecurity affects our entire community's health and prosperity."

vi. "Noone chooses to be homeless, we can all play a part in refusing to accept it"

vii. "The housing crisis requires immediate action from our politicians."

viii. "Together, we can solve homelessness. Let's make our voices heard and our votes count."

**12. Information needs:** "What information would help you feel more knowledgeable about housing issues?"

**13. Call to action:** "What would motivate you to speak with others about housing and homelessness issues?

"What would motivate you to speak up about housing issues to decision-makers and politicians?"

## Moderator notes

Place messages printed on A4 sheets on the floor and invite participants to share their thoughts, likes and dislikes. Encourage them to make suggestions for improvements.

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## Action and engagement
*(10 minutes)*

**14. Communication channels:** "What would be the most effective way for organisations like us to reach you with information about housing issues?"

## Closing question (5 minutes)

**15. Missed topics:** "Is there anything important about housing or homelessness issues that we haven't discussed that you'd like to mention?"

**Karakia whakamutunga to close**

**Moderator notes**

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