

Housing New Zealand Trial of Warrant of Fitness – Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the housing Warrant of Fitness?

The housing Warrant of Fitness scheme is being developed by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to set minimum acceptable health and safety standards. It will be trialled on Housing New Zealand (HNZ) properties.

2. Why is it being developed?

The Government is developing the housing Warrant of Fitness to help ensure healthier and safer living environments for people living in properties, particularly those on lower incomes.

Cold and damp homes contribute to cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases such as asthma, flu and bronchitis, and infectious diseases like meningitis and gastro enteritis. Cold and damp homes also contribute to overcrowded sleeping conditions, which are a risk factor for infectious diseases such as rheumatic fever in children. There are also risks associated with hazards; it is estimated that around 30 per cent of home injuries are caused by environmental factors such as slippery surfaces, paths, steps and stairs as well as poor lighting and maintenance.

The Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group Report on Solutions to Child Poverty identified that poor quality and inadequately insulated housing is endangering the health of children. It recommended that a Warrant of Fitness be implemented to set minimum health and safety standards for accommodation.

Trialling the Warrant of Fitness allows the Government to lead by example in improving quality. HNZ makes up 15 per cent of total rental stock in New Zealand and houses some of the most vulnerable tenants.

3. Will the Warrant of Fitness be rolled out to the private sector or community housing providers?

At this stage no decisions have been made. The purpose of the trial is to see how a housing Warrant of Fitness could work.

4. What will the Warrant of Fitness criteria be?

Criteria for the Warrant of Fitness trial with Housing New Zealand will be grouped into three areas:

1. Insulated and dry: including ceiling and under floor insulation, ventilation and no obvious leaks in the roof or cladding;
2. Safe and secure: including for example smoke alarms, handrails on stairs;

3. Essential amenities: including for example functioning power points, food preparation facilities, and a functioning bath/shower and toilet.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has established a Technical Advisory Group made up of experts, who will help refine how the criteria will be measured.

The Warrant of Fitness is not about how a house looks but how it functions, so the programme does not take into account factors such as how new the kitchen or bathroom is.

5. When and how will the Housing New Zealand Warrant of Fitness trial be rolled out?

Housing New Zealand will trial the WOF criteria on a sample of 500 properties, with results available from July 2014. If the trial is successful, the intention is that Housing New Zealand properties will have full Warrant of Fitness inspections in three-year cycles from mid 2015, that is, one third of the portfolio will be surveyed each year.

6. Who will make up the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and how will it work?

The TAG will include technical experts with a range of expertise including building quality and performance, health and safety aspects of housing, and retrofitting housing.

The TAG will provide technical advice to Housing New Zealand and MBIE on the development of the Warrant of Fitness tool and assessment measures.

7. Is the intention to make Warrant of Fitness results available to Housing New Zealand tenants?

Yes. Warrant of Fitness results for the 500 trial properties will be available to tenants later this year. Results for the remaining properties will become available when the 3 yearly full Warrant of Fitness inspections commence.

8. How much will the Warrant of Fitness cost to implement?

The Warrant of Fitness trial will be implemented as part of Housing New Zealand's property management and maintenance functions, and is expected to cost \$500,000 from existing HNZ and MBIE baselines.