



New Zealand Council Of  
Christian Social Services

## Briefing to the Incoming Government Working together with the most vulnerable to grow robust communities

The unprecedented events of the international financial meltdown define the context of the incoming government. We face the prospect of social meltdown that parallels the financial crisis. Both globally and in this country it is those who have the least wealth who are most immediately vulnerable to the consequences of an economic downturn.

Now more than ever it is vitally important in our social, economic and political decision making to recognise that we must look after one another. Jesus' message *Aroha tetahi ki tetahi* to "love your neighbour as yourself" is a message to those in political leadership as much as it is to those in everyday life.

NZCCSS calls on the incoming government to join with social service organisations to support and protect the most vulnerable amongst us – our children, our older people, those who are homeless and those in poverty. It is the duty of government to work with communities to grow a stronger future for us all. The medium and long term social costs of not supporting the most vulnerable will far exceed any short term fiscal cost of acting now to look after each other.

### Who we are

Every day of every week, the members of the **New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)** - the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support Services Inc and the Methodist and Salvation Army churches - provide essential services through collectively serving and working in communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

### Let Us Look After Each Other

*Aroha tetahi ki tetahi*



We believe a just and compassionate society can be achieved by more action to:

- Support community-based organisations to grow the spirit of *aroha tetahi ki tetahi* - looking after each other.
- Support families and communities in nurturing and protecting our children as *taonga*.
- Provide older people with a range of choices for their homes, support and lifestyle.
- Utilise our nation's prosperity responsibly to eliminate poverty.
- Enable access to good, affordable housing for everyone.

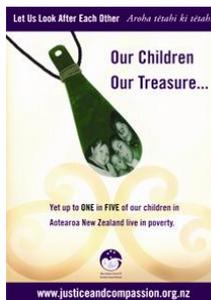
There are clear policy priorities that arise out of these key areas of concern and we urge the incoming government to put these policies into practice.

## Supporting Communities “We Together – growing communities”



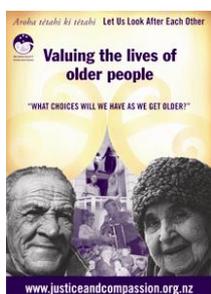
- A well supported community sector is critical to maintaining social cohesion that will help us avoid the worst of the social impact from the international financial crisis. Our member organisations are part of and trusted by the communities they work with. Government policy will be most successful when government agencies work alongside and collaborate with community organizations to achieve strong communities.
- In doing this it is important that the independence of community organizations is maintained and that they remain answerable to their communities rather than become defacto arms of government. Similarly Government policy initiatives must deliver outcomes for Maori that are consistent with its commitments under the Treaty of Waitangi.
- Christian social service agencies know from their practical experience what social service initiatives will be effective in growing strong and inclusive New Zealand communities.

## Supporting our Children our Treasure



- High rates of child harm and death are of great concern and NZCCSS members are closely involved and care and protection of our children and young people. An overarching policy for children and families is needed with an operational policy to guide service development and NZCCSS has undertaken some groundwork on such a policy structure.
- Our members are part of the community they service, clients have a stronger sense of trust and this allows families to receive help who might otherwise evade statutory agencies or simply not access support. The Pathway to Partnership full funding plan is recognition of the need to properly fund this work. This, or a very similar funding regime, is essential to ensuring the vital work of community organizations.
- Flexible, time-generous social work that mentors people through change is the key to achieving positive outcomes. Stopping violence programmes and parenting courses are important tools but good social work is the catalyst for change that must be resourced. We urge Government to fund outcomes and not programmes and NZCCSS can provide practice based advice about social services that are really effective in improving child safety.

## Valuing the Lives of Older People



- The fact that more people are living longer and healthier lives is a reason for celebration. People aged over 65 make huge contributions to maintaining our social fabric through their life skills and experience. Christian social services work with older people across the whole service spectrum at hundreds of locations around the country.
- Government must provide leadership in the sector and help achieve a more cohesive services for older people sector. More information about, and better coordination of, support services needs to be available to older people and those who support them.
- There is a lack of suitable and affordable rental accommodation of older people. There are little in the way of support services to assist older people to modify and maintain their homes to better suit their changing needs. NZCCSS looks to work with Government to plan and develop more initiatives to meet these needs.

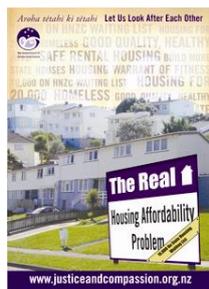
- NZCCSS member agencies are held up as models of good employers in the aged care sector, yet they struggle to compete with the government sector that is better resourced to pay higher wages. We look to work with government to agree on a sustainable funding path for the whole aged care sector into the future. While attention is focused on aged residential care ITO issues, NZCCSS looks to build on current progress on the whole range of workforce training and recruitment issues across the whole aged care sector.
- Poverty among older people in NZ is low and maintaining current levels of NZ Super and access to low or no-cost transport and health services is vital to continuing to protect older people from the worst aspects of poverty.

## Poverty Hurts Us All



- Long term persistent poverty is entrenched within New Zealand. Worst affected are single parents caring for their children while on benefits, other carers and those too sick or disabled to do paid work.
- It is people who will lift the economy out of crisis and the response to the international credit crisis and consequent economic downturn should not be to retrench but to invest not just in physical but also in social infrastructure.
- There are around 200,000 children in poverty and issues of child poverty and support for families should be a priority for the incoming government. Paid work is only one path out of poverty and is not an option for hundreds of thousands of people, who for very good reasons are not part of the paid workforce. Current benefit levels are not sufficient to sustain an acceptable quality of life. The best way to encourage people into employment is to create incentives for participation in paid work through increasing benefit payments to those who are taking steps to improve their skills and work readiness.
- The social costs of leaving one sixth of our population in poverty become economic and fiscal costs that multiply over generations. Our members already work together with people in poverty to help them improve their situation.

## Affordable Housing for everyone



- The highest priority in housing policy must be given to those who are in greatest need, the homeless, people on low incomes, with disabilities and those with mental health problems.
- Economic downturn is an ideal time for government to act to support investment in the construction and renovation of housing, particularly for those most disadvantaged. The community housing sector in New Zealand is still very small and it is an ideal time to invest in building capacity in this sector to meet the huge need for low cost housing.
- Increasingly unaffordable housing is forcing individuals and families into homelessness. NZCCSS agencies have proven success and are best positioned to work with Government to develop strategies and resource the work to help end homelessness in New Zealand.
- Income related rents are a major contributor to keeping people out of poverty and in secure tenancies.
- The thousands of low income households who must rent in the private market are left with inadequate support. We wish to work with government to develop processes to support landlords and tenants into more stable tenancy arrangements.
- The evidence shows that the social costs of poor quality housing are immense and a housing “warrant of fitness” would help improve the quality of rental housing.

**Who we are**

The **New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)** seeks to grow robust communities, neighbourhoods and a society which is able to offer every member support, dignity, shelter, freedom and opportunities to grow. A robust society is based on a commitment to collective responsibility and the common good, and an understanding of how our humanity is based on our relationships to each other and our communities.

Every day of every week, the members of NZCCSS - the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support Services Inc and the Methodist and Salvation Army churches - provide essential services through collectively serving and working in communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

We do not work in isolation. We are supported by our churches and their leaders. We recognise our obligations as partners to the Treaty of Waitangi and through our collective activity we do our best to put justice and compassion into action.

The Council undertakes research to provide an evidence base to inform its advocacy for poor and vulnerable people. This research and advocacy is grounded in the practical experiences of our Christian social service agency membership. We seek practical solutions to the issues experienced at flax-root level by our members in their communities.

## Supporting Communities “We Together – growing communities”



A well supported community sector is critical to maintaining social cohesion that will help us avoid the worst of the social impact from the international financial crisis. Problems like child safety, domestic violence, poor housing, unhealthy lifestyles, mental health issues and the worst affects of poverty can be mitigated by people working together in communities. But communities need support to achieve these changes.

Community organisations play a vital role in making community aspirations a reality. These organisations include iwi/Maori providers, Pasifica groups, community based trusts, and Christian and other providers of social services. They are organisations that are part of and trusted by the communities they work with.

### ***What needs to happen and how NZCCSS can help***

#### **Partnership between Community and Government**

Partnership between Community Organisations and Government facilitates the achievement of powerful social reform that is possible from motivated and empowered communities. This partnership must be two-way with government agencies working alongside and collaborating with community organizations.

Strong relationships and trust are at the heart of the relationships that exist between communities (and individual clients) and the community organizations that serve them. These relationships help overcome the social isolation that leads to child abuse, family violence and other social ills being practiced unnoticed within our communities. Well connected communities identify risks and get alongside the vulnerable to ensure appropriate support is put in place.

In order to achieve these results community organizations must be properly funded. Government contracts and grants must be streamlined and unnecessary compliance requirements removed. It is important that the independence of community organizations is maintained and that they remain answerable to their communities rather than become defacto arms of government.

#### **Treaty of Waitangi honoured through Outcomes**

The Treaty of Waitangi is the agreement upon which New Zealand is founded. The Treaty provides the basis for recognising that tangata whenua have the right to expect equal outcomes from government funded services as those achieved by other New Zealanders. This recognition allows for delivery of services by Maori for Maori that assists tangata whenua to meet their development potential. It also means that government agencies and community organisations delivering mainstream services must work together to achieve equitable outcomes for Maori as well as those achieved for the general population.

The Treaty of Waitangi, and the State’s and communities’ rights, responsibilities and commitments to it, must be acknowledged in statute and in policy. Government policy initiatives must deliver outcomes that are consistent with these commitments.

**How We Can Help**

NZCCSS can provide practical support and feedback in the development and roll out of effective policies that empower communities, increase social cohesion and promote positive development for New Zealand's vulnerable communities. Its network of experienced and trusted Christian social service agencies can provide a practice based response to what social service initiatives will be effective in growing strong and inclusive New Zealand communities.

## Supporting our Children our Treasure



NZCCSS is very concerned at the high rates of child harm and death in Aotearoa New Zealand. Its membership is closely involved with communities, families and statutory agencies (Child Youth and Family, Police etc.) in working for the care protection of our children and young people. From this long and close experience the following policies are proposed.

### ***What needs to happen and how NZCCSS can help***

#### **Structural Means to Assist Achieving Positive Results for Children and Families**

While there are many good agencies and activities in both the government and non-government sectors there is poor co-ordination between sectors and agencies

Both government sector and total sector coordination is required. It is vital that government sector agencies that have an impact on the well-being of children are held collectively accountable for their outcomes. These organisations include the Ministries of Social Development (MSD), Health, Education and Justice. These Ministries must work together and should have co-ordinated outcomes within their annual agreements with their Ministers that relate to the well being of children and young people.

In addition NZCCSS favours the creation of an overarching policy for children and families with an operational policy to guide service development. The Positive Aging Strategy and the Health Of Older People Strategy are an example of this type of framework. NZCCSS has undertaken some groundwork on such a policy structure and is happy to discuss this in detail with the appropriate Ministers.

#### **Key Role of Non-Government Service Providers**

NZCCSS represents a major block of non-government organizations (NGO) that provide services to children and families. NGOs have a very distinct and vital role in provision of services to support families. NGOs have no statutory powers and can operate proactively within their communities to reach people who are struggling before a crisis occurs. Because NGOs are part of the community, clients have a stronger sense of trust with NGOs and this allows families to receive help who might otherwise evade statutory agencies or simply not access support.

To truly turn around this country's disastrous record of child abuse and neglect and successfully stabilize the thousands of families in distress, NGOs must be supported to do this work. NGO support for families should operate in collaboration and co-ordination with the statutory work of Child, Youth and Family (CYF) but should not be seen simply as an outreach of CYF.

The work of NGOs is only starting to receive support via the Pathway to Partnership full funding plan after years of funding neglect. The continuation of this, or a very similar funding regime, is essential to ensuring the vital work of NGOs in supporting children and families is maintained and grown.

### **Good Social Work, Not Packaged Programmes**

There is both international and New Zealand research that provides evidence to show what creates positive outcomes for struggling families. This evidence demonstrates that flexible, time-generous social work that mentors people through change is the key to achieving these positive outcomes.

'Programmatic responses' such as parenting courses and stopping violence programmes are important tools to support this process. However, it is social work that is the catalyst for change and it is this work that should be resourced. The history of the last decade has been of government funding programmatic responses and failing to support community based social work. This is the equivalent to funding reading recovery without funding core teaching.

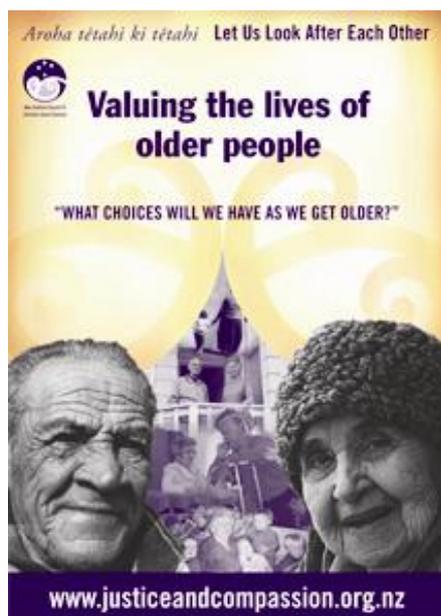
### **Outcomes Based Funding**

The move within MSD to outcomes based funding is supported. This should be based on the government defining what outcomes it wants to achieve for families and children, allowing providers to indicate how they will use funding resources to achieve those outcomes (including clear outcome measures) and allowing flexible use of resources by providers to achieve the outcomes. This empowers the NGO sector to use its trust-based relationships within communities in innovative and socially entrepreneurial ways. It is the antidote to the failed highly programmatic emphasis of the last decade. The focus of accountability should be on what is achieved for the funding i.e. on outcomes not on how the funding is spent on inputs.

### **How We Can Help**

NZCCSS can provide practical support and feedback in the development and roll out of effective policies that reduce child harm and deaths and increase hope and encourage positive development in New Zealander families. Its network of experienced and trusted Christian social service agencies can provide a practice based response to what social service initiatives will be effective in improving child safety in New Zealander.

## Valuing the Lives of Older People



Our ageing society is an amazing social achievement. The fact that more people are living longer and healthier lives is a reason for celebration. People aged over 65 make huge contributions to maintaining our social fabric through their life skills and experience, as workers, grandparents, caregivers and active members of the community. Government policy needs to focus on older people and what works for them.

Christian social services have a long tradition of supporting older people, developing innovative responses to needs and seeking to work in partnership with government to plan for future services. NZCCSS member organizations work as community-based, not-for-profit agencies driven by the core values of compassion and justice for older people. All the resources of our organizations are invested in improving the lives of the older people we work with.

Our knowledge and experience is comprehensive because Christian social services for older people cover the whole service spectrum at hundreds of locations around the country. They are meeting a wide range of care and support needs, from informal social support, drop-in centres, through formal day care, home support, residential aged care, rental housing and retirement villages.

### ***What needs to happen and how NZCCSS can help***

#### **Social inclusion and a continuum of care and support across all areas of need**

Good support networks are the lifeblood of vibrant communities and help to reduce loneliness and social isolation for older people. Christian social services and their associated church communities are doing this work every day. We look to work with government to ensure that more information about, and better coordination of, support services is available to older people and those who support them.

Government must provide leadership in the sector through the Ministry of Health towards the goal of a seamless continuum of care and support. NZCCSS actively supports sector forums such as the Health of Older People Forum that involve consumers, unions, providers and funders of services. This is one way that the Ministry can demonstrate leadership and help achieve a more cohesive services for older people sector.

#### **Housing modification and maintenance**

There is a huge amount of evidence that shows the current housing stock is not suitable for our ageing population. Reducing home ownership levels mean that more older people will need affordable rental housing solutions. There is a lack of suitable and affordable rental accommodation of older people. There are little in the way of support services to assist older people to modify and maintain their homes to better suit their changing needs. NZCCSS agencies already offer low-cost rental units and help with getting maintenance done. They would like to do more and look to work with government to plan and develop more initiatives to meet these needs.

#### **Care and support workforce across all settings**

Continuing and critical shortages of registered nurses and care and support workers characterize the services for older people sector. Considerable work is underway to address

the issues of ensuring the workforce is trained to meet the changing needs of the sector. Our member agencies are leaders in developing new models of service such as restorative care and support. NZCCSS is an active contributor to the work of the Care and Support Workforce Initiative. We believe that this initiative and the recently announced Minister's Aged Residential Care Workforce Action Group are important to achieving concrete progress in meeting workforce needs.

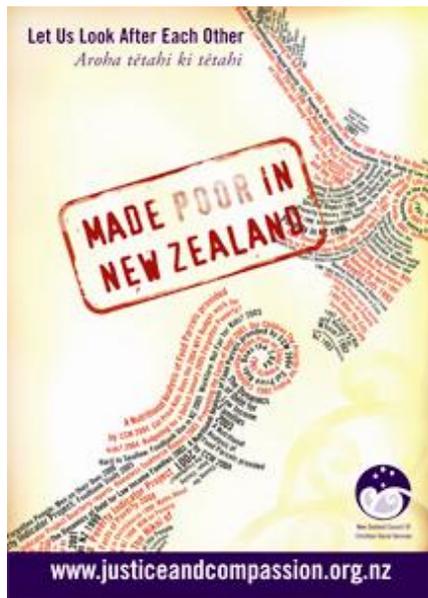
NZCCSS member agencies are held up as models of good employers in the aged care sector, yet they struggle to compete with the government sector that is better resourced to pay higher wages. We welcome the policy pledge from the National Party to increase funding for aged residential care and we look to work with government to agree on a sustainable funding path for the whole aged care sector into the future.

We note also that there is a policy commitment from the incoming government to support an industry specific aged care Industry Training Organisation (ITO). While there is clear pressure from some parts of the aged residential care sector for a separate ITO, NZCCSS in general supports the current ITO arrangements and believes that with some change in approach from the ITO, the specific needs of the aged residential care sector can be met within the current structure.

### **Poverty and NZ Superannuation**

Two-thirds of people are almost entirely dependent on NZ Superannuation and at its current level it helps to protect older people from the worst impacts of poverty. It is vital that the incoming government honour its commitment to keep NZ Super at or above its current level in relation to average wages. Access to health and transport services at low or no cost is another key element in preventing poverty and the current policies such as free off-peak travel and low cost access to PHOs are examples of this. It is this combination of poverty prevention measures that if maintained will continue to secure social wellbeing for older people into the future.

## Poverty Hurts Us All



Long term persistent poverty is entrenched within New Zealand society and over many years the gap between rich and poor New Zealanders has widened. Those worst affected are single parents caring for their children while on benefits, other carers, those too sick or disabled to work and people whose work skills do not match the skills required in the current economy.

The international credit crisis and the consequent economic downturn will impact strongly on the levels of employment in New Zealand. Current forecasts predict unemployment figures to double from the recent historic low levels. Many families will become dependent on unemployment and other benefits. This will not be through choice – rather it will be forced on people as a result of the economic recession.

Investment in social infrastructure means that it is people who will lift the economy out of crisis. The response to the international credit crisis and consequent economic downturn should not be to retrench but to invest in social infrastructure. For instance, the proposal to invest 40% of Kiwisaver funds within New Zealand should include a strong focus on social infrastructure such as social housing, transport and environmental protection.

### ***What needs to happen and how NZCCSS can help***

#### **Supporting Families and Children is Vital to New Zealand's Prosperity**

All children should be given the best opportunities to succeed in life – this is an obvious imperative grounded in basic human rights and the theology of compassion. There are around 200,000 children living in poverty and NZCCSS believes that their poverty affects us all.

Poverty has a well documented negative impact on the education, and employment prospects for children. If our country is to succeed in a competitive world economy we cannot afford for 200,000 of our future adults not to achieve their potential as contributing citizens. Issues of child poverty and support for families should be a priority for the incoming government.

Paid work is only one path out of poverty and is not an option for hundreds of thousands of people, who for very good reasons are not part of the paid workforce. It is appropriate for Government to encourage people receiving benefits to participate in work-seeking and skill development activities. But full-time paid employment will not be an option for the many of people currently receiving benefits. Current benefit levels are not sufficient to sustain an acceptable quality of life in New Zealand. "After deducting housing costs – and even with Accommodation Supplement – the median equivalised disposable household income for beneficiary families with no earned income falls to below the very stringent 40% poverty line, where there is nothing in reserve" (Pockets of Significant Hardship and Poverty, MSD, 2007).

#### **Positive Support to Encourage Participation**

Because benefit levels are too low, NZCCSS believes the best way to encourage people into employment is to create incentives for participation in paid work through increasing benefit payments to those who are taking steps to improve their skills and work readiness, rather

than decreasing an already too low benefit. We welcome moves to raise the level amount that people can earn before their benefit is abated but this level should be set well above the current proposal of \$100. Other incentives could include access to family tax credits similar to the in-work tax credits from the Working for Families package and covering all costs involved with participation (travel, childcare, etc.) in training and work-seeking for people on core benefits.

Government should ensure that for families on low incomes the costs associated with children's participation in early childhood education, school, sport and cultural activities are paid for, including those families in receipt of benefits. This will encourage children's engagement with their education and their communities and promote positive outcomes in their later lives.

### **Social Costs of poverty exceed the fiscal costs of lifting people out of poverty**

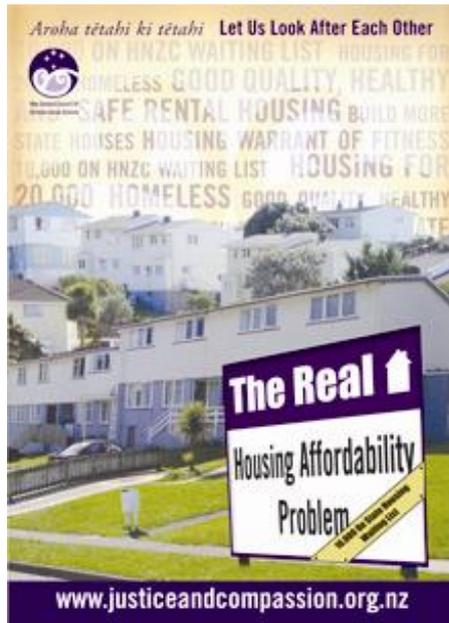
The immense social costs of decades of high poverty levels are now being felt in our health, education and justice systems. The fiscal cost of improving the situation of people receiving benefits has to be measured against the huge social costs of not acting. The social costs of leaving a sixth of our population in poverty become economic and fiscal costs that multiply over generations.

It is a compassionate and pragmatic response to ensure that all New Zealanders can have enough to eat, adequate housing, access to good education and healthcare. Extra support to encourage people to seek paid employment and improve the situation of their families will be a real incentive for people to strive to succeed. Children will live in homes with hope and direction. Subsequent generations will be less likely to be part of the 'long tail of disadvantage' and the ongoing cost of meeting the higher health and other needs of this group will be saved.

### **How We Can Help**

NZCCSS can provide practical support and feedback in the development and roll out of effective policies that reduce poverty and increase hope and encourage positive development for poor and vulnerable New Zealanders. Its network of experienced and trusted Christian social service agencies can provide a practice based response to what social service initiatives will be effective in improving the life outcomes of New Zealanders.

## Affordable Housing for everyone



The highest priority in housing policy must be given to those who are in greatest need. Government policy must take account of the needs of those most impacted by the combination of high house prices, high interest rates, high debt levels and an uncertain economic outlook.

Christian social services are very involved in community housing. They support the homeless on the streets, run night shelters, emergency housing and refuges. Our members provide supported housing for the disabled and for people with mental health problems, as well as community housing and rental and license to occupy units for older people. Our experience in this work leads us to identify several areas of primary importance in housing policy.

### *What needs to happen and how NZCCSS can help*

#### **Right time for Government investment in growing the stock of low cost housing**

The current economic downturn is an ideal time for government to act to support investment in the construction and renovation of housing, particularly for those most disadvantaged. As many as 30,000 jobs in the construction industry are threatened by the decline in consent applications for new housing. The community housing sector in New Zealand is still very small and it is an ideal time to invest in building capacity in this sector to meet the huge need for low cost housing. NZCCSS welcomes the commitment to increasing the Housing Innovation Fund investment to \$20 million, but we point out that this is still well short of the amount needed to build a sustainable third sector housing scene. Investment of government funds into a comprehensive package of measures to increase the supply of affordable houses will achieve the double benefit of keeping people in work and providing better housing for those who need it.

We note the National Party's policy commitment through New Gateway Housing to make crown land available for affordable housing and the policy to allow state housing tenants to purchase their house. However, there is urgent need to grow the social housing stock. We urge the government to actively explore with the community housing sector opportunities for establishing a Housing Investment Fund and options for public private partnerships to grow the supply of affordable housing. NZCCSS member agencies have experience in community housing and supported living, and are ideally placed to support quality partnerships in housing provision.

#### **Homelessness**

Increasingly unaffordable housing is forcing individuals and families into homelessness. It is estimated that there are around 20,000 people who move between temporary and insecure accommodation, live in emergency or temporary housing or are on the streets. This is not a "lifestyle choice" for these people and is particularly damaging for their the children. NZCCSS agencies have proven success and are best positioned to work with Government to develop strategies and resource the work to help end homelessness in New Zealand.

#### **Rental affordability/availability**

Income related rents are a major contributor to keeping people out of poverty and in secure tenancies. We welcome the National Government's commitment to retaining this policy for

state housing. Recent research interviews with families under stress conducted by NZCCSS showed the importance of income related rents in state housing in stabilizing the circumstances of such families.

However, the thousands of low income households who must rent in the private market are left with inadequate support and the current structure of the Accommodation Supplement is not meeting their needs. We urge the new Government to move quickly to release the results of the review of the Accommodation Supplement and explore ways that the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on the Accommodation Supplement can be best utilized to help those in greatest need.

Modernising legislation and improving protection for tenants is essential and NZCCSS supports the intent of the Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill that was introduced into Parliament this year. Our agencies work on a daily basis with families who are victims of unfair practices by landlords. Similarly, as providers of housing NZCCSS agencies also understand the issues property owners face in managing difficult tenants. We wish to work with government to develop processes to support landlords and tenants into more stable tenancy arrangements.

### **Housing Quality - Ensuring Healthy and Safe Rental Housing**

There is overwhelming evidence to support the case for ensuring that all housing is of a minimum standard and NZCCSS believes a rental housing “warrant of fitness” would help improve the quality of rental housing. The social costs of poor housing are immense and in times of pressure on government health and social welfare budgets, improvements in housing quality will help reduce the need for expensive health treatments caused by poor quality housing.

### **How We Can Help**

NZCCSS can provide practical support and feedback in the development and roll out of effective policies that will increase all New Zealanders access to good quality housing. Its network of experienced and trusted Christian social service agencies work with those most affected by poor quality housing and they are well-placed to support the development of robust guidelines on rental housing quality, on community housing and on supporting New Zealand’s homeless people and families.