

H A R T

Health and Ageing Research Team



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How Neighbourhoods Support Ageing Well:

Results from the New Zealand Health Work and Retirement longitudinal study.

MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI



Research related to
understanding the
status and
determinants of health
and wellbeing for older
adults in Aotearoa New
Zealand

Founders: Profs Fiona Alpass and Christine Stephens

SoP members: Profs Mary Breheny, Jo Taylor, A/Prof Rosie Gibson, Dr Shanika Koreshi, Dr Saramarie Kuroko, Paul Chankay

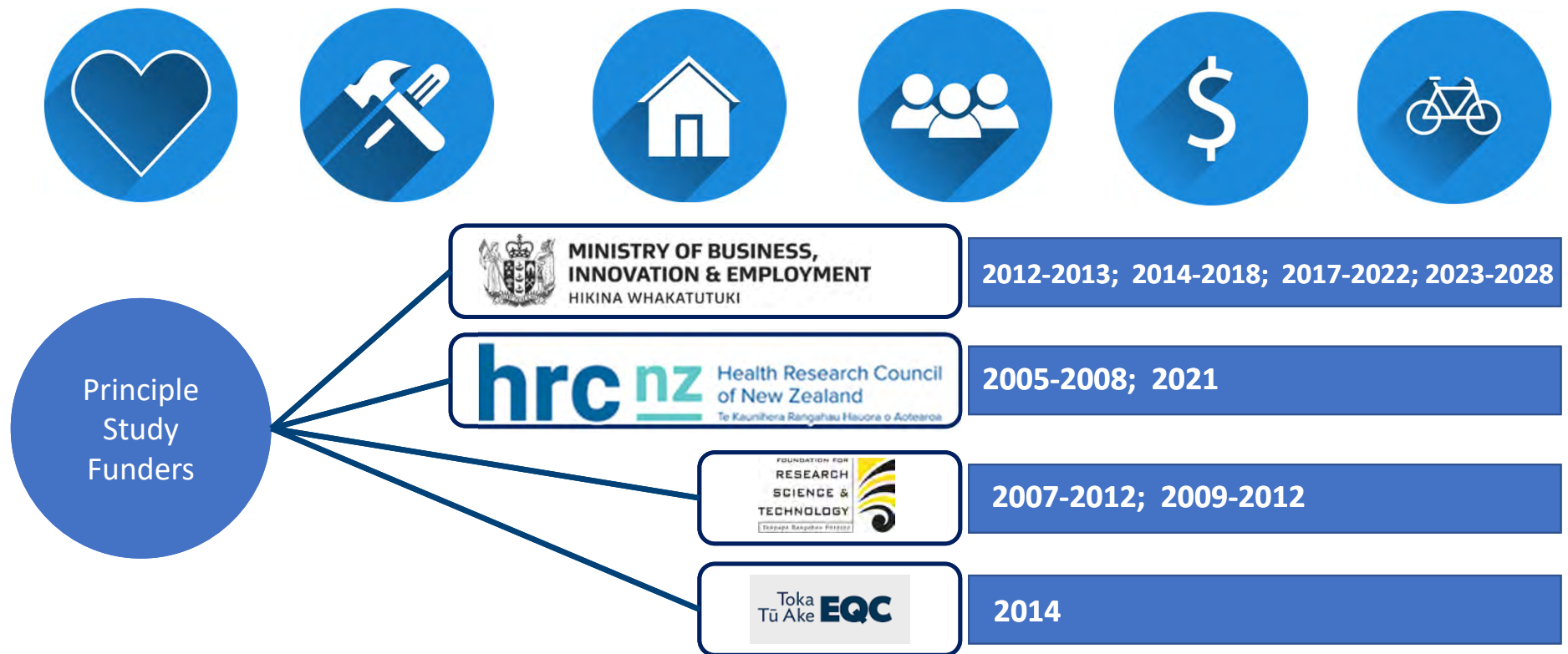
MU members: Prof Matthew Parsons, A/Prof Polly Yeung, A/Prof Andy Towers

External Research Orgs: Dr Brendan Stevenson, A/Prof Natasha Tassell-Matamua

External University collaborators: UoA, UoO, VuW, TWWoA, USC, UNSW, Avondale University

New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement (NZHWR) study

Longitudinal study of the health, work and retirement context of New Zealanders aged 55+

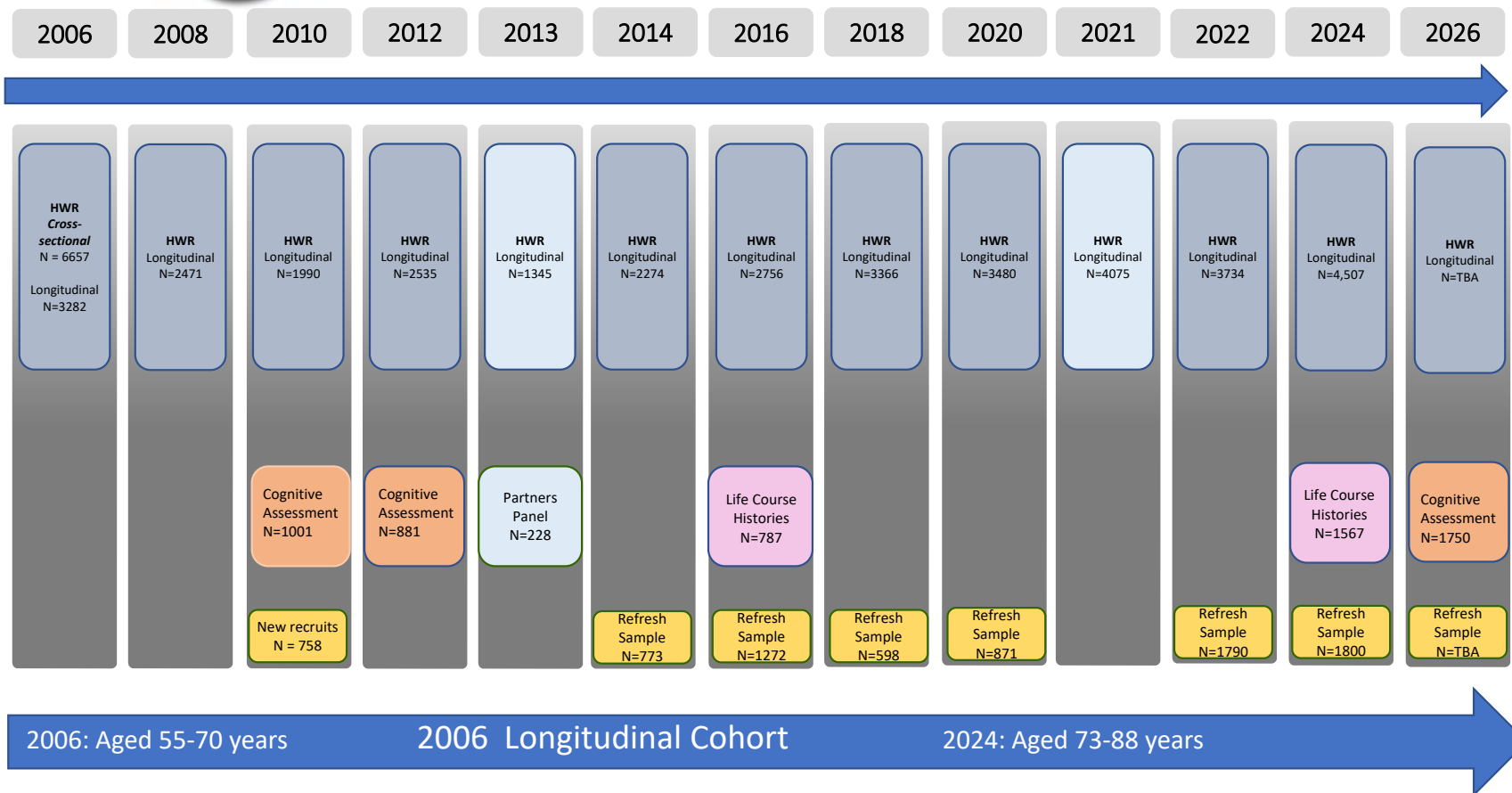


New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement (NZHWR) Longitudinal Study 2006-2026

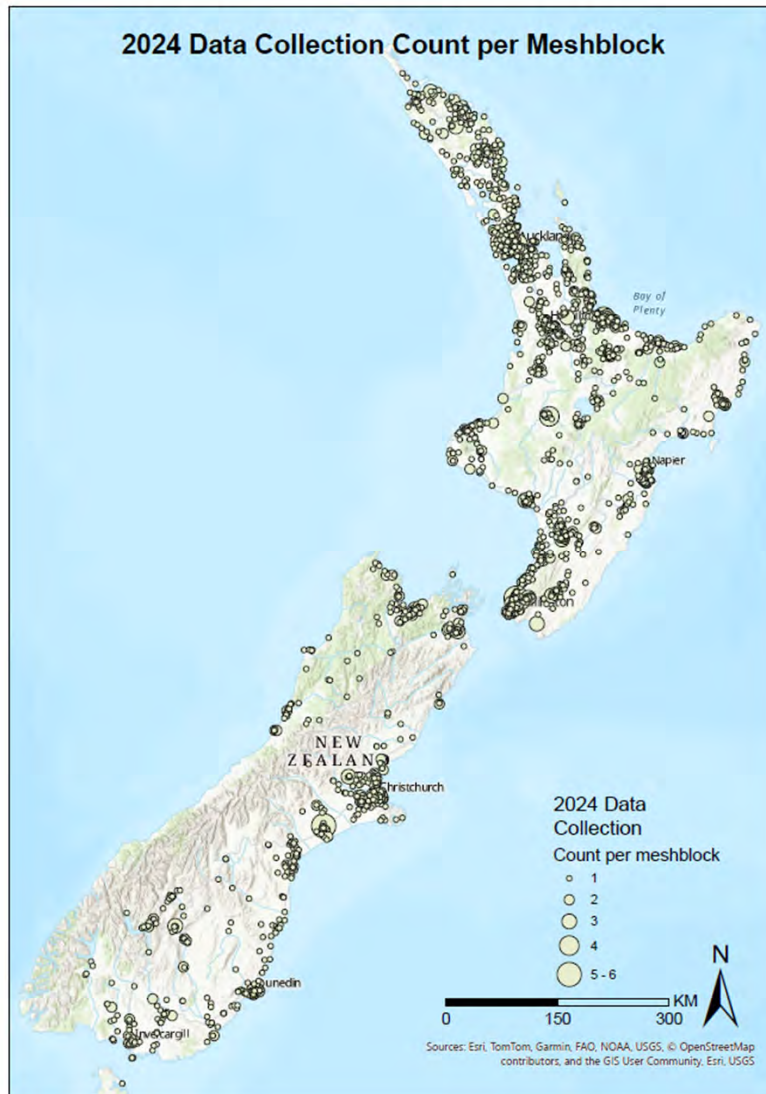




The Health, Work and Retirement Longitudinal Study



2024 Data Collection Count per Meshblock



Housing, Neighbourhoods, and Wellbeing

- 95% of New Zealanders aged over 65 currently live in private homes.
- Preparing for an ageing population requires as much attention to our houses, streets and neighbourhoods as it does to retirement villages and hospital beds.
- Housing has recently emerged as an important health related factor



Annear, M., Wright, R. K., & Naper, Sarah. (2026). New Zealand will be 'super-aged' within a decade. Are our cities ready?
<https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.5acrwtg6h>

10-year trajectories of physical, mental and social health

Cumulative Mortality

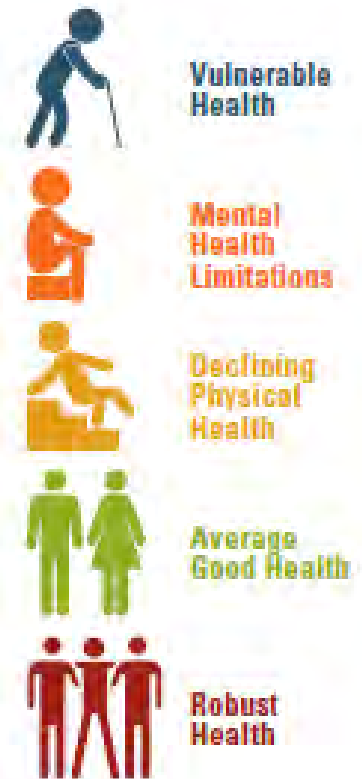
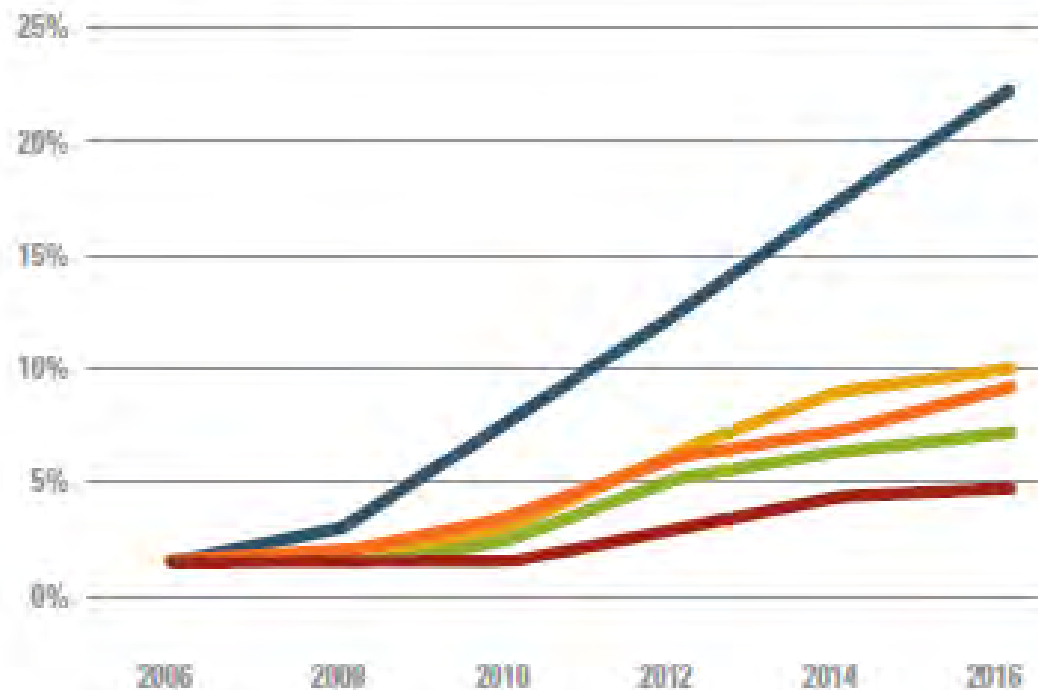
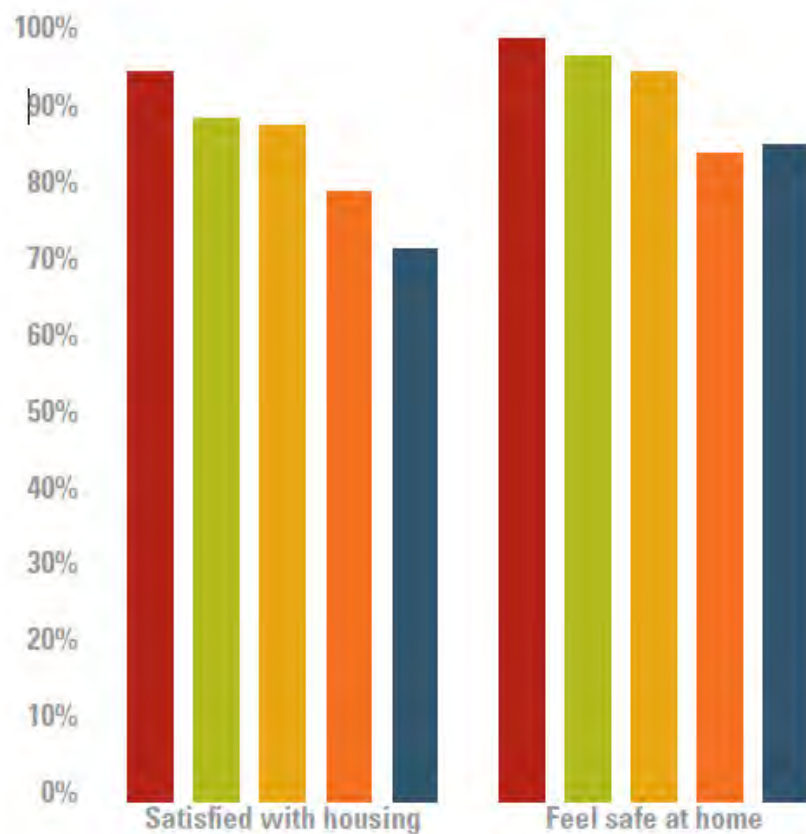


Figure 1.2. Cumulative mortality from 2006 to 2016 across the ageing profiles.

Housing and Health



Percentage of those in each health profile who report satisfaction with housing and feeling safe at home



Physical,
Mental, and
Social Health
Trajectories
across 10 years
2006-2016

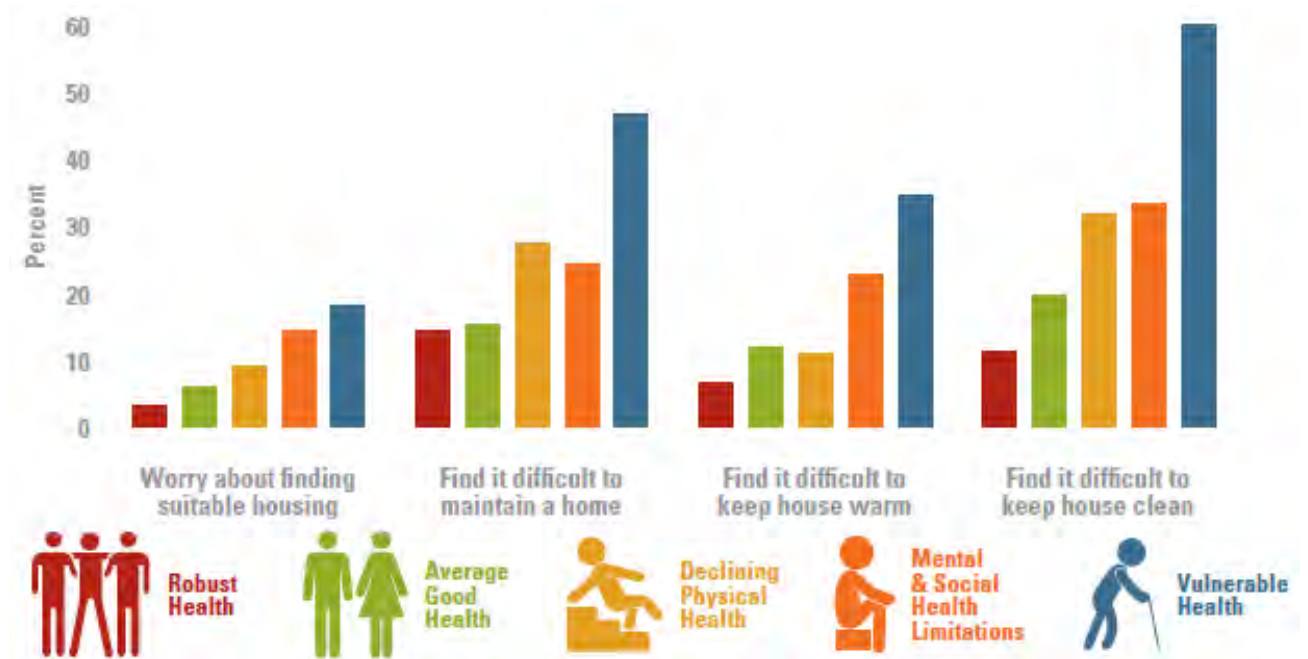
Housing and Health

Vulnerable and Mental Health

Limitations - most likely to be worried about finding a suitable place to live.

Vulnerable - most likely to report difficulties with their housing:

- 45.9% find their house difficult to maintain
- 33.8% are unable to keep their house warm
- 58.9% find their house difficult to clean.



Percentage of those in each health profile who report worry about finding suitable housing, and difficulties maintaining the home, keeping the house warm, or keeping the house clean.

Housing Tenure: Owning or Renting

- Only homeowners showed increases in quality of life and decreasing depression as they aged.
- Home ownership also protected against the harmful effects of emotional loneliness on quality of life in older age.



Szabo, A., Allen, J., Alpass, F., & Stephens, C. (2019). Loneliness, socio-economic status and quality of life in old age: the moderating role of housing tenure. *Ageing & Society*, 39 (5), 998-1021. doi:10.1017/S0144686X17001362.

Szabo, A., Allen, J., Alpass, F., & Stephens, C. (2018). Longitudinal trajectories of quality of life and depression by housing tenure status. *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 73, e165–e174. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbx028

Housing for older people in Aotearoa 2020

Report for the Retirement Commission



- Most people aged 75+ are well housed and satisfied with their housing.
- Problem housing and renting is more prevalent in those aged 65-74.
- Those with poor housing are more likely to experience poorer wellbeing.
- Importance of **neighbourhood** to wellbeing.
 - ❑ Better planning needed
 - ❑ Lack of home ownership and poor housing a growing problem.



Stephens, C., Birchall, M., & Thompson, J. (2021). *Diversity in housing experiences and their correlates for New Zealand adults aged 75+ and 65-74 years*. Report for the Commission for Financial Capability, New Zealand. <https://apo.org.au/node/316339>

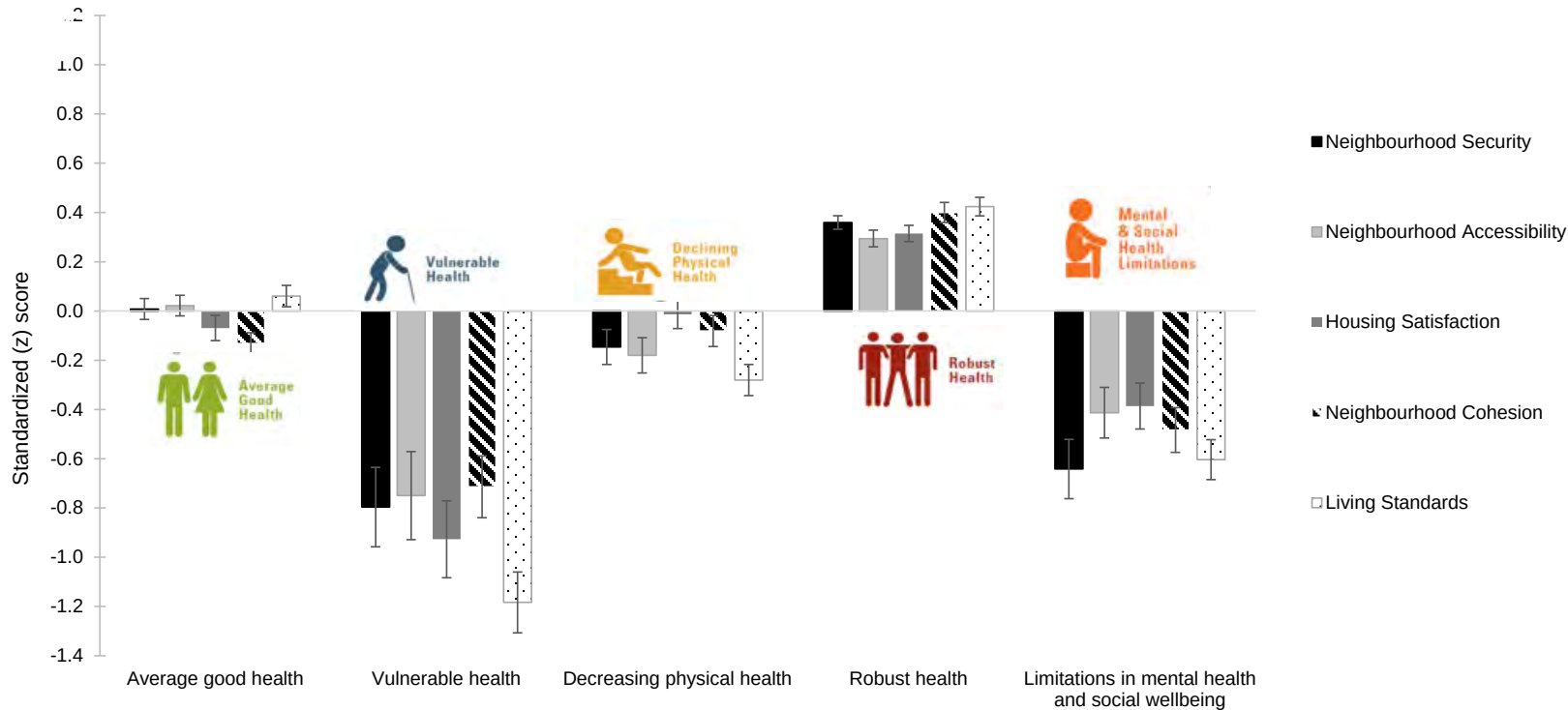
Housing, Neighbourhood, and Wellbeing

A key determinant of health and quality of life
(Shaw, 2004)

- ❑ quality of dwellings and physical features of the home
- ❑ tenure types
- ❑ housing environments and neighbourhoods



Housing, Neighbourhood, and Health



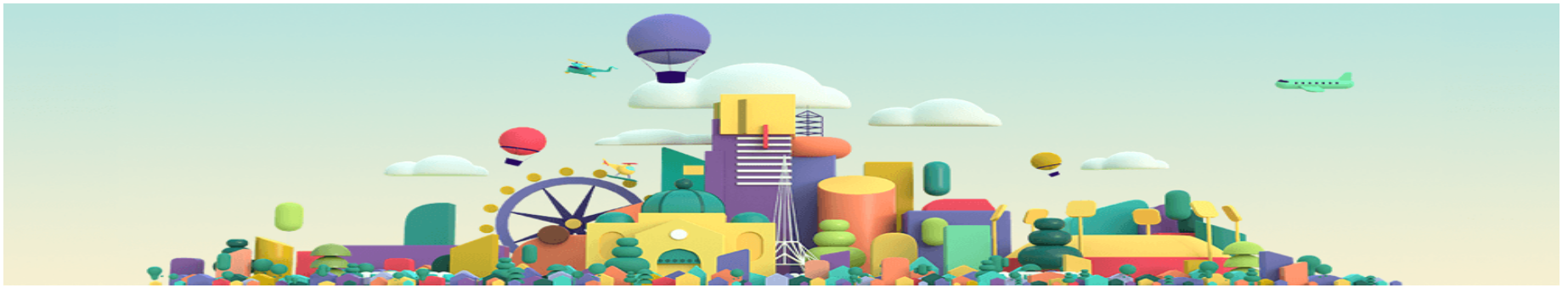
Differences across health profiles in housing and neighbourhood resources.

Y axis displays z scores ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). Error bars indicate standard error of the standardized mean.

Stephens, C., Szabó, Á., Allen, J., & Alpass, F. (2019). A Capabilities Approach to unequal trajectories of healthy ageing: The importance of the environment. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 31(9) 1527–1548. doi: 10.1177/0898264318779474

Housing, Neighbourhood, Intrinsic Capacity and Health

- Intrinsic capacity was negatively related to changes in physical and mental health over two years.
- Environment: Perceptions of greater neighborhood accessibility and more trust among neighbours were associated with better mental health two years later.
- Interaction: The impact of low intrinsic capacity on physical health was greater for those with less access to facilities.



Stephens, C., Allen, J., Keating, N., Szabó, Á., & Alpass, F. (2020). Neighborhood environments and intrinsic capacity interact to affect the health-related quality of life of older people in New Zealand. *Maturitas* doi: 10.1016/j.maturitas.2020.05.008

Neighbourhood Liveability and Quality of Life

- Housing and Neighbourhood perceptions contributed significantly to Quality of Life (above SES, health, age, chronic conditions, gender, marital status)
- There were significant interactions between rurality and housing satisfaction; and distance to health care and perceptions of neighbourhood accessibility.



Stephens, C., Szabo, A., Allen, J., & Alpass, F. (2019). Liveable environments and the quality of life of older people: An ecological perspective. *The Gerontologist*, 59 (4), 675–685, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gny043>.

Which Factors Predict Loneliness?

- Marital Status
- Health
- Family and Private-Restricted Social Networks
- Housing Satisfaction
- Neighbourhood Accessibility
- Neighbourhood Security
- Neighbourhood Social Cohesion



Stephens, C. & Phillips, H. (2022) Older people's neighbourhood perceptions are related to social and emotional loneliness and mediated by social network type. *The Gerontologist*, 62 (9), 1336-1346, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnac087>

Neighbourhood qualities are related to better mental health, quality of life and loneliness over 6 years.

■ Outcomes in 2022:

- ❑ Mental Health
- ❑ Quality of Life
- ❑ Loneliness

■ Predictors in 2016:

- ❑ Neighbourhood Accessibility*
- ❑ Safety
- ❑ Social Cohesion*

■ Pathways:

- ❑ Social Engagement
- ❑ Social Support



Photo by [Emily-Jo Sutcliffe](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Stephens, C., & Bakhshandeh Bavarsad, M. (2025). Neighborhood qualities are related to better mental health, quality of life, and loneliness over 6 years: pathways through social engagement and social support to aging well. *The Gerontologist*, 65(6), gnaf095.

Conclusions:



- Housing and Neighbourhood satisfaction, accessibility, security and social cohesion are significantly linked to Physical, Social, and Mental Health, Quality of Life, and Loneliness among older people.
- Housing and Neighbourhoods are a practical achievable focus for policy change.
- Planning concepts such as the “15 minute neighbourhood” are helpful.
- Councils can engage with the Age Friendly Cities movement

illustration by NZ artist, Sylvia Huege de Serville

The New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement study has been supported by:

- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2023-2028)
- The Health Research Council of New Zealand (2021) – *impacts of COVID-19 pandemic*
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2017-2023)
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2014-2018)
- EQC Biennial Grants Programme (2014) – *impacts of the Canterbury Earthquake Series*
- Ministry of Science and Innovation (2012-2013)
- The New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science, & Technology (2007-2013)
- The Health Research Council of New Zealand (2005-2008)

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