

Warrant of Fitness' for rental houses will soon be available

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The Housing and Health Research Programme/He Kainga Oranga at the University of Otago, Wellington and the New Zealand Green Building Council are co-operating to develop a new test that could pass or fail houses with a 'Warrant of Fitness' (WoF) type assessment.



This will establish a minimum standard for rental accommodation and encourage improved housing performance over time. The WoF is targeted to be ready later this year.

University of Otago Wellington researcher Dr Julie Bennett says substandard housing is a major problem in New Zealand, with little recognition of the important aspects of housing quality that affect people's health and safety.

National leadership at a political and agency level will be needed to make the WoF a reality, Dr Bennett says.

The two organisations are planning to create the WoF by merging the basic elements of their respective housing assessment tools, the Healthy Housing Index (HHI) and Homestar and then make this available to local councils, central government, landlords, tenants and homeowners.

Leigh Featherstone, Director of Homestar at the New Zealand Green Building Council, says the basic pass/fail Warrant of Fitness would confirm whether the home meets 'fit for purpose' health and safety standards. The homeowner could then use the full Healthy Home Index or Homestar tools that provide options and priorities to improve the home's health, comfort, safety, water use and energy efficiency.

Ideally the WoF would be phased in, starting with rental properties with the greatest need for improvement. The team is working with a wide range of stakeholders and is considering the practicalities and implementation costs. A local pilot may be used to help evaluate the WoF's costs and benefits, and identify all intended and unintended consequences.

“While there are costs of implementing such a system, the costs of inaction are considerably greater, and are already being borne on a day-to-day basis by many individuals and whānau,” Dr Bennett says.

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