Spotlight on CAB clients needing emergency accommodation

He taonga rongonui te aroha ki te tangata
Goodwill towards others is a precious treasure

Introduction

In New Zealand we have a well-established commitment to providing a safety net for people whose income or circumstances place them at risk of not having the necessities of life. It reassures us to know that if we, or others in our community, ever find ourselves without shelter and the means to keep fed and warm, we will get help with these things, either from government or from social agencies funded by government.

This report shines a spotlight on one particular area where Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) are finding that the safety net isn’t always there. In a growing number of cases, we at the CAB are unable to find emergency accommodation for those people who come to us in urgent need of a roof over their head. There is just nothing available. This leaves these clients, many of whom are families with children, in desperate situations.

In the year ended June 2015 CABs across New Zealand received just over 3000 enquiries about emergency accommodation. This is our fastest growing area of enquiry and one that causes considerable concern amongst CAB volunteers. These enquiries stand out because clients are often distressed and because there are so few possibilities we can explore with them. At the CAB we are accustomed to helping people weigh up their options for responding to all manner of situations and problems, but when people come to us in sudden and urgent need of a place to live, options can be few and far between.

As well as the severe lack of emergency accommodation, CABs come up against the lack of a consistent and coordinated response from those government agencies which have contact with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. From where we stand, there seems to be no government agency that is tasked with the responsibility for ensuring that people who have nowhere to stay – including families with children – can put a roof over their head for the night.

We feel a responsibility to speak out about what we are seeing in our service. This spotlight report is informed by the situations of CAB clients who come to us in urgent and sudden need of accommodation, and by the difficulties experienced by CAB volunteers as they exhaust all the possibilities in an environment where emergency accommodation
is becoming harder and harder to find. Many of those who come to us about emergency accommodation are living in situations of homelessness as defined by Statistics New Zealand. Of great concern to us is the fact that some of the most vulnerable people in our society, children and pregnant women, are being left without shelter, even after having sought help from several government agencies.

Sitting behind the growing need for emergency accommodation are the bigger issues of housing affordability and availability in general, both for buyers and renters. In the long term, the best way to prevent homelessness is to ensure that everyone has access to stable, healthy and affordable housing. While we acknowledge this bigger picture, our focus in this report is on the present need for more emergency accommodation. In the short term, solutions must be found quickly to deal with what seems to us to be a growing number of people, including families with children, who need immediate access to shelter. Our hope is that readers of this report will help us find these solutions.

About the report

The body of this report is based on in-depth textual analysis of just over 2000 CAB client enquiries about emergency accommodation received in the year ended 25 September 2014. An internal paper presenting the results of our analysis was sent to all Citizens Advice Bureaux for comment in April 2015. This spotlight report includes extracts from bureaux responses – we have called these bureau observations.

The report highlights the situations of clients who come to the CAB in need of emergency accommodation. It is based solely on information from CAB client enquiries and feedback from CABs and is therefore limited to what we are seeing in our service. At the time of release, November 2015, CABs are still seeing clients who are in the situations highlighted by this report.

All the client situations described in the report are drawn from CAB client enquiry write-ups. Identifying details have been removed, leaving the essence of the client’s situation and experience. As much as possible, we have allowed the client situations to speak for themselves and to stand as stark illustrations of the desperation experienced by far too many people.

To set the detailed analysis in a larger context, the report begins with a brief overview of five years of CAB data from client enquiries in the subject category Emergency Accommodation. We focus on the number of enquiries received, and ethnicity and age of clients.

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1 We use the term *emergency accommodation* to refer to temporary accommodation which can be made available at very short notice to people whose need is immediate and urgent.
1. The big picture - five years of CAB enquiries about emergency accommodation

CAB enquiry data gathered from July 2010 to June 2015 reveal an increasing number of enquiries about emergency accommodation and show that a disproportionately high number of these enquiries come to us from Māori and from people under the age of 30.

1.1 Increasing number of enquiries about emergency accommodation

In the five years to June 2015, CABs received a total of just over 10,000 enquiries about emergency accommodation. The number of enquiries in this area increased each year, going from around 1,500 in 2010/11, to over 3,000 in 2014/15 - a one hundred percent increase over five years. In no other area do we see such a large percentage increase in client enquiries.

This trend is geographically widespread, with bureaux across the whole country seeing an increase in enquiries about emergency accommodation over the five years. Numbers of enquiries are greatest in the north but, perhaps not surprisingly given that the Christchurch earthquakes occurred in this period, it is in the south that we see the largest percentage increase in enquiries about emergency accommodation (158% over five years).

Bureau observations

Volunteers are dealing with these enquiries with increasing frequency and frustration is building, as solutions can be found in fewer and fewer cases.

1.2 Disproportionately high number of enquiries from Māori

Most of the people who contacted the CAB about emergency accommodation over the five year period belonged to one of three ethnic groups: New Zealander/NZ European (48%); Māori (31%) and Pacific Peoples (10%).

When we compare this with the ethnic spread of the total CAB client population, it becomes apparent that we receive a disproportionately high number of enquiries about emergency accommodation from Māori. Over the five year period just over 11% of all CAB enquiries were from Māori whereas in the category Emergency Accommodation 31% of enquiries came from clients who identified as Māori.

In contrast, for New Zealander/NZ European and Pacific Peoples the percentage of enquiries about emergency accommodation was much closer to the percentage of all CAB enquiries from these groups: 52% and 8% respectively.

1.3 Disproportionately high number of enquiries from people under 30

Emergency accommodation is one of the areas of enquiry with the highest proportion of enquiries from younger clients. Around 30% of those who contacted the CAB about emergency accommodation over the five year period were aged under 30. This is
substantially higher than what we see when we compare with the total CAB client population for the same period of time, where 18% of enquiries come from that age group.

It should be noted that, as we only collect demographic data from the person who approaches the CAB for advice, our data does not include the many other family members who are often affected when a client needs emergency accommodation. However, we know from our detailed analysis that many enquiries about emergency accommodation involve families with young children.
2.0 What do we see when we zoom in?

This section presents nine key themes identified through an in-depth analysis of CAB client enquiries:

1. Homelessness in all its forms
2. Moving in with family or friends is not always the answer
3. Children living in cars, garages and crowded conditions
4. People caught in cycles of homelessness
5. Vulnerable people waiting for social housing
6. How quickly people can go from being adequately housed to facing homelessness
7. Referrals to CAB from Housing New Zealand and Work and Income even when no emergency accommodation is available
8. People who have nowhere else to go are being asked to leave Housing New Zealand properties
9. Far too few options for people who need emergency accommodation

2.1 Homelessness in all its forms

Homelessness takes many forms. It is defined by Statistics New Zealand as “living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing: are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household or living in uninhabitable housing.”

CAB enquiries about emergency accommodation reveal the range of living arrangements people can be forced into when they no longer have access to housing that is safe, secure, affordable or habitable. We see the many forms that homelessness can take in this country.

At one end of the spectrum we see people living in extremely precarious situations:

- sleeping rough
- in a car or van
- in a garage, shed or sleep-out
- sofa-surfing

Client lost his flat and has been looking for another place. Is living on the streets.
Client and her partner needed to find accommodation urgently as they are sleeping in their car.
Client called wanting emergency accommodation for herself and her children -

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they have been sleeping in a sleep-out but it is very cold and they need to find somewhere else.

Client is looking for accommodation urgently. She and her young child are doing the rounds of the relatives, sleeping on the floor.

At the other end of the homelessness spectrum, we see people in temporary living arrangements that might be tolerable in the short term but are untenable in the long term:

- sharing with family or friends, often in crowded conditions
- in a backpackers or similar
- in a caravan or similar
- in emergency accommodation but having to leave

Client and her children have been asked to leave her father’s place because it has become too crowded.

Client is looking for housing. Is living in backpacker’s accommodation with her two children.

Client is living in a caravan with her children. She is desperate to find a better place to live as her children are becoming unwell.

Client is looking for emergency accommodation. She and her children are currently in emergency accommodation but have to leave in two days.

**Bureau observations**

- We have had young guys come in and ask to leave a pack for the day and then collect it at closing. In discussion with them they say they are heading off to sleep out in the bush.

- We have many enquiries about emergency housing. The need in our community is high and many families are living with two or three other families in one house.
2.2 Moving in with family or friends is not always the answer

Many clients come to the CAB asking about emergency accommodation because a temporary sharing arrangement with family or friends has become untenable. Moving in with family or friends may work for a time, but it is not a permanent solution. The stresses that can ensue make this arrangement much less secure and less sustainable than some other types of temporary accommodation (such as living in a campground). When relationships break down as a result, people not only lose the roof over their head but also the support networks they need in difficult times. CAB enquiries reveal the downsides of moving in with family or friends:

It can result in overcrowding:

- Client is seeking emergency accommodation for a family of five who are staying with her. At present nine children and three adults are living under one roof.
- Client and three children have to leave their present place in a few days. There are ten people living in a two-bedroomed house and this is putting too much pressure on the host family.
- Couple with two children are living with relatives. There are 26 people at the address.

It can lead to frayed tempers and conflict, sometimes ending in the guests being forced to leave at short notice:

- Couple with one child and another on the way had been living with family but because of a dispute had been asked to leave. Spent last night in their car.
- Family evicted from their accommodation with relatives following a fracas. Last night the wife and children slept at the YWCA while the husband slept in his car.
- Couple with two children in desperate need of accommodation. Family member they were staying with had forced them to leave after arguments. All four of them spent last night in the car.

It offers absolutely no security of tenure:

- Client and her two children are living with a family member. They have been told to move out to make room for other guests.
- Couple and their children have been turned out of their accommodation. They had an informal arrangement with family members which has turned sour.
- Client and his young son have been boarding with a friend. The friend has ‘kicked them out’ without reimbursing the board paid in advance.
- Client and her child had been living with a family member but were asked to leave this morning. They have nowhere to go.
Where the host is in rental accommodation, the host’s tenure may be placed in jeopardy:

Client and her children have to leave her cousin’s rented accommodation as the latter is in breach of his tenancy agreement with Housing New Zealand. Client had been given two weeks to find another place but had not managed to do so. Now very desperate.

Client and her children have been staying with a friend but the landlord has said she has to leave.

Client has had family members staying but has now been warned by Housing New Zealand that he may be evicted if they do not leave.

Families can be forced to split up. Sometimes a parent ends up roughing it:

Client and family have had to leave their accommodation and are now split up, staying with different family members.

Father living in a shed on a friend’s property. Mother living with family members so that their children can continue to go to school.

Client is in a desperate situation. His family has nowhere to live. His wife and child are staying with a friend while he sleeps ‘rough’.

Client and her child had been living with a relative, in already overcrowded accommodation and had been asked to leave. Her child had been able to stay last night with the relative, while the client slept in her car.
2.3 Children living in cars, garages and extremely crowded conditions

Of particular concern is the fact that CAB enquiries reveal children to be living in vehicles, in garages and in extremely crowded conditions, as seen in the examples below:

Children living in cars:
- Mother and four children sleeping in her car. The children are falling ill.
- Parents and six children are living in their van.
- Father has been sleeping in his car with his five children.
- Mother living in her car with two preschool children and a new born baby. Has no other family.
- Young father living in car with his infant son. Does not want to take his son to a lodge.

Children living in garages and sleep-outs:
- Couple and their toddler are living in a cold sleep-out with no toilet or kitchen.
- Couple with two children under three are living in a garage.
- Client and her four children have been living in a garage but are about to be evicted.
- Couple and six children are living in the garage of a family member’s property.

Children living in extremely crowded conditions:
- Family of six is living in one room and have no kitchen.
- Client has four young children. The five of them are boarding with twelve other people in a house which is mouldy, damp and cold.
- Couple and two children are living in one room in a shared flat.
- Client and her two young children are sharing a room in a lodge. One child has to sleep on the floor.
- Couple with three children are living in a small house with another family. There are fifteen people living in the house.

Bureau observations

We need to remember that many times when people become homeless what they are losing is a place to bring up their kids, house their belongings and have their pets.
2.4 People caught in cycles of homelessness

CAB enquiries reveal people who are drifting from one precarious living situation to another, caught in a cycle of homelessness:

Client has nowhere to live after having been forced to leave the home of a family member. She slept in the car last night, has no money and no bank account.

Client had been sleeping in her car and is now temporarily living with a family member. The place is overcrowded and she is sleeping on a couch.

Client and her baby had been living in her car and are now sleeping in a friend’s hallway.

Couple and their child had been living with friends but it became untenable. Now they are living in a car.

When they come to the CAB for help, options are so limited that when we are able to find something it is often equally insecure, or marginally less so. This doesn't break the cycle, it simply exchanges one form of homelessness for another:

Young couple had been living in their car for two weeks after being evicted by a family member. Options identified were boarding houses and a caravan park.

Client is expecting a baby very soon. She is sleeping on a friend’s couch. Best options were Women’s Refuge and a holiday park.

Client is homeless. Options identified were boarding houses and a camping ground.

Client spent last night in a Shelter and didn’t want to go back. Best options were boarding houses and a camping ground.

CAB interviewers dealing with cases like these often feel like they are shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Bureau observations

In our community we have next to nothing in the way of emergency accommodation. There is Women's Refuge, the Salvation Army have some possibilities for the elderly and the Council has flats for over 55’s which might be available. Other than that we are left with providing clients with the options of short-term accommodation in boarding houses (these are not suitable for everyone and some have questionable tenancy agreements); camping grounds and calling on friends or family - none of which are ideal. Community groups have been asking for some form of emergency housing but to date nothing has happened.
2.5 Vulnerable people waiting for social housing

Part of the problem is that there is insufficient social housing for all who need it. Bureaux see people who are unable to get to the top of the social housing register, despite being in dire need. They come to us desperate for somewhere to live while they wait.³

Enquiries reveal that living in a precarious situation does not necessarily get people off the social housing register:

Client is living on the streets. Has been on the social housing waiting list for about three months.

Client is five months pregnant and living in a vehicle. There is no social housing available for at least a month.

Client is living in a garage. Is on the social housing waiting list but looking for emergency accommodation until a place becomes available.

Once again, these cases can involve children:

Couple with a five-year-old have been living in a car since they applied for social housing six months ago.

Client is living in her car with her two children. She is on the waiting list for social housing.

Client has been told that her children will be taken from her unless she can find appropriate accommodation for them. She has been on a high priority list for social housing for five months.

Client is two months away from having her second child. She is living in a leaky garage and is on the waiting list for social housing.

Client and four children are living in a sleep-out. They have been on the waiting list for social housing for some time.

Enquiries also reveal that much can go wrong in the time between going on the social housing register and obtaining a home. CABs see people whose lives are in danger of falling apart as they wait for social housing:

Young mother had been living with family but is now sleeping on the streets. Has her name down for social housing but may need to wait for a month.

Client qualifies for a Housing New Zealand home but may have to wait for over six months. He is a sole parent. Has been staying with family but they have asked him to leave.

Client has been on the waiting list for social housing for a number of years. She

³ All of the client stories in this section are from enquiries that came to us after 14.4.14 when responsibility for managing applications for social housing was moved to the Ministry of Social Development.
has two young children and another on the way. They are ‘sofa surfing’. The situation is becoming unbearable and her children are constantly ill.

Client, his wife and family are sleeping in their car. They are on the high priority list for social housing.
2.6 From being adequately housed to facing homelessness

One of the most common reasons why people come to us in need of emergency accommodation is because they have to leave the accommodation they are in - either because of a breakdown in relationships, including in a flatting situation, or because their tenancy has ended. Once this happens, people often struggle to find another place to live:

**Bureau observations**

We are particularly worried about: people who have suddenly been evicted from their rental properties; young people whose family relationships have broken down resulting in them leaving home; women with children who are in violent situations and who leave in a hurry.

CABs see how quickly people can go from being adequately housed to facing homelessness, especially in communities where affordable rental housing is hard to find:

- Client is looking for emergency accommodation as they have been asked to vacate their rental property but have not been able to find another place anywhere. Very worried as they have three children. They do not qualify for social housing as husband’s income is too high.
- Client’s lease came up for renewal but the rent was increased to an amount he could not afford so he and his young child moved into a garage. The landlord has asked them to leave today. They may have to sleep in the car tonight.
- Client has a few weeks left on her fixed tenancy and the tenancy cannot be renewed. Has been looking for a place to rent for a month but had no luck. She fears that she and the children will be forced to live in her car.
- Couple with three children. The house they have been renting is being sold. They can’t find anything they can afford on the husband’s wage.
- Family with four children seeking emergency housing assistance. Their rental property has been sold and the new owners wish to occupy it. They have been looking for almost 90 days and found nothing.
- Client had been ‘kicked out’ of the house she shared with her boyfriend and has nowhere to go. Tried everything but has not been able to find another place.
Bureau observations

Many properties are being sold and people are being given notice to leave (often with the incorrect amount of notice under the Residential Tenancies Act). With few other affordable properties available, families who have never before needed emergency accommodation are being forced into that situation. If landlords (or agents) are slow to transfer bonds, people looking for rentals need to come up with 4 weeks’ rent, usually at least $2000 for a 3 bdr house, in addition to the agent’s fee, rent-in-advance, moving costs etc which most people do not have.

In our area, rental accommodation is unaffordable even to those earning a reasonable wage - accommodation supplements do not meet the needs.
2.7 Referrals from Housing New Zealand and Work and Income

CABs across the country are concerned about cases where people who approach Housing New Zealand, Ministry of Social Development or Work and Income about emergency accommodation are referred on to CAB, without their situation having been addressed by these government agencies.¹

Some of these people are extremely vulnerable:

- Young woman under the age of twenty has been living in her car for two weeks. Had been to Work and Income to ask for help but was referred to the CAB.
- Due to have her baby any moment. Living in an overcrowded house. Sleeping in the lounge. She is on the waiting list for social housing. Housing New Zealand referred her to us for emergency housing in the meantime.
- Client and his wife are living in a sleep-out. His wife is very ill. Work and Income had referred him to the CAB for emergency housing.
- Client is currently living in a car. Referred from Housing New Zealand to see if CAB could get her temporary accommodation until social housing is available.
- Young couple needing emergency housing - she is pregnant. They have to leave their present accommodation tomorrow. Work and Income sent them to CAB.
- Client who is pregnant is living in a van with her two children. She is on the waiting list for social housing and had been told by MSD to contact CAB for emergency housing meanwhile.
- Pregnant mother came in looking for emergency housing. She had been referred to CAB by Work and Income.

Sometimes clients have been to both Housing New Zealand and Work and Income before being referred to us, which makes their situation increasingly stressful:

- Family of six is about to move into a small cold garage. Looking for emergency accommodation. They rang Housing New Zealand and Work and Income and were referred to CAB.
- Sole parent with two children referred to CAB by Work and Income for emergency housing as Housing New Zealand unable to help.
- Client is living in his car and looking for emergency accommodation. Both Housing New Zealand and Work and Income had referred him to CAB.
- Couple and their three children need to find another place to live by the end of the week. Housing New Zealand referred them to Work and Income, who in turn referred them to CAB.
- Young couple with three young children and another baby due. Had contacted

¹ All of the client stories in this section are from enquiries that came to us after 14.4.14 when responsibility for managing applications for social housing was moved to the Ministry of Social Development.
Housing New Zealand who referred them to Work and Income. Work and Income referred them to the CAB.

Often children are involved:

Client looking for emergency accommodation for himself and two small children. Had already tried one campground. Work and Income advised him to call CAB.

Requires emergency housing for herself and four children. Is on high priority waiting list. Housing New Zealand sent her to CAB for help as they have nothing available at the moment.

Client is looking for emergency accommodation for herself and her five children while she waits for social housing to be available. Work and Income referred her to CAB.

Client and her children are living in a caravan. She was referred to CAB by Housing New Zealand.

Couple with four children have been referred to us by Work and Income to ask about emergency housing.

Mother of five has to move out of her rental accommodation this weekend because the house has been sold. She has been looking for five months and is on the social housing waiting list but has found nothing suitable. Housing New Zealand has sent her to CAB. She is desperate and in tears.

Client is very distressed. She and her two children will be homeless as of tomorrow. Work and Income said they could not help, and referred her to CAB.

**Bureau observations**

We have sound relationships with the two Community Link offices in our area but are concerned about clients who have visited Work and Income or Housing New Zealand, not received assistance and then been told to see the CAB for emergency accommodation. This creates an expectation that we provide emergency accommodation, whereas our main role is to talk though possible alternatives and/or contact emergency housing providers.

We have a good relationship with Work and Income but still have a problem with them referring clients to us for emergency accommodation – they refer clients to us seemingly implying that we ‘have’ emergency accommodation only for clients to be told when they arrive, with their hopes high, that we do not. The local office of Housing New Zealand also refers clients here for emergency accommodation although numbers have declined recently.
Some clients are not clear about why they have been referred to CAB. Some come to us with high hopes, when the reality is that often there is just no emergency accommodation to be found. Worse still, some come to the CAB under the misapprehension that we are a provider of emergency accommodation:

Client had been to Work and Income and had been given the impression that CAB would find her emergency housing immediately.

Client and her children are about to lose their accommodation. Have been advised by Housing New Zealand to ring CAB re. emergency accommodation. Very confused about the process.

Client who is 6 months pregnant had been told by Work and Income to contact CAB for emergency accommodation. She was upset when she realised that we would not be able to find her a place to live.

Client was told to ring us by Housing New Zealand, as we might be able to find him housing. He has been a priority on the waiting list for eight months.

Referrals like these raise real issues about the role and responsibility of government agencies.

**Bureau observations**

Work and Income refers clients to us who have no place to go or are sleeping in their cars. Few options are available for us to suggest to them.

The government must take ownership. In addition to the obvious long term need (i.e. for government to adequately resource organisations to offer sufficient emergency accommodation services to meet demand), in the short term, the government needs to task its relevant agencies with dealing with emergency accommodation enquiries.
2.8 Forced to leave a Housing New Zealand property with nowhere to go

CABs also see clients who, for various reasons, are being required to leave a Housing New Zealand property but have nowhere else to go. Once again this raises the question about the role and responsibility of government, particularly where a government agency seems to be contributing to homelessness.

Client has been informed by Housing New Zealand that she has to move out of her accommodation tomorrow. Housing New Zealand suggested she contact CAB.

Client had been evicted by Housing New Zealand and was having difficulty finding another place to rent as a result of a Tenancy tribunal ruling against him. Now looking for emergency accommodation.

Client had been living with her mother who was a tenant of Housing New Zealand. Mother had died recently and Housing New Zealand has given the client notice to vacate.

Client and his mother have been told to leave their Housing New Zealand property after the death of the client’s father, who was the named tenant. They have to be out this week but have had no luck finding a private rental.

Client and her family live in a Housing New Zealand property. Her husband has left them and as he was the only person named on the tenancy agreement, the client and her children have been told by Housing New Zealand that they must vacate the property.

Client and her children are living with a friend in a Housing New Zealand property rented by the client’s friend. Housing New Zealand has asked her to leave by the end of the week.

Couple with three children have been given notice to leave their Housing New Zealand property this week following a tribunal ruling. They need accommodation urgently.

Whatever the reasons may be for these types of situations, it is in nobody’s interests for people to end up with nowhere to live.

Bureau observations

Realistically, where will clients find housing when they have been evicted from Housing New Zealand accommodation and cannot compete in the private market?

Some of our clients do not have references, and some have been evicted from Housing New Zealand homes. These people in particular find it hard to find new accommodation.
2.9 Far too few options for people who need emergency accommodation

CAB volunteers are trained to help our clients explore all the options for responding to a particular situation or problem but when people come to us in sudden and urgent need of housing, the options are depressingly few and far between. Some communities have no emergency accommodation at all, even though their need is great. In those that do, demand outstrips supply and certain groups (families, fathers with children) are often poorly catered for.

**Bureau observations**

The need in our community is high but there is very little on offer, especially for men. Two options closed recently and a third is expected to close within the next couple of months. We recently had a number of youths evicted from a camping ground - they were squatting in some of the rooms - where are they now?

The Night Shelter Trust in our community was recently wound up. Last year the City Council funded a Homeless Coordinator. She started making progress but then she left and funding stopped.

We need something better than the current options which are really only "camping grounds" - expensive and not a desirable place for families.

As these and earlier examples show, sometimes we just can’t find anything for the client:

Client had phoned earlier today and was given a list of emergency housing. Client called back to say that they are all full.

Client came in seeking emergency accommodation for her family of five. We tried all the options in our area, including marae and motor camps but there was nothing available.

Client looking for emergency accommodation after living rough for over three days. We were unable to find anything for him.

Client and his young child need emergency accommodation. We went through the list of options. Client had already been to most of these and found they were full or did not take children. We tried three other organisations, two had no places and one promised to call the client if anything was found.

Client was looking for emergency housing. Housing New Zealand had suggested she contact CAB. There is no emergency housing in our area. Client had looked for private rentals but found nothing suitable.

Client was referred to us by Housing New Zealand. Has to be out of her current accommodation by tomorrow morning. Did not want to go to the local caravan park as she had had a bad experience there. We tried other options but found nothing for her.
Sometimes what is on offer does not provide a safe and secure environment. CABs report clients saying they would rather sleep rough than go to local overnight accommodation or a boarding house:

**Bureau observations**

Clients have experienced violence in emergency housing so sometimes prefer to sleep rough.

It is not uncommon to hear that the client has no intention of heading to local overnight accommodation as it is full of drugs, abuse and the like.

Lodges in our area are not safe places for families and children or women alone. They get 'cleaned up' once in a while, but it never lasts long.

Many of our current options do little to break cycles of homelessness. Nor do they create the best conditions for people to address related issues such as unemployment, ill health and addiction. There is concern among bureaux that some of these second-rate options are taking advantage of the assistance that Work and Income provides:

**Bureau observations**

We are concerned that the local caravan park is sometimes refusing to refund bonds when this is not justified. When this happens to people who have been granted a Work and Income advance to pay bond, they are put at a disadvantage if they do happen to secure a private rental as they are unable to get another advance.

What we need instead are many more places that offer an environment that is safe, restorative and helps break or prevent cycles of homelessness:

**Bureau observations**

What people need is a safe, warm environment with support workers able to work with them towards being housed.

We need places that are safe for both individuals and families, where the necessary services are provided and well-connected staff can work with the families to find appropriate housing.
3.0 What do we need to do?

What CABs are seeing paints a disturbing picture of vulnerable children, families and individuals who are being left without the safety net of somewhere warm and safe to sleep for the night, sometimes after having asked for help from a government agency. As a country, we must be able to do better than this. Our organisation is deeply concerned that, based on what we are experiencing, things appear to be getting worse.

We acknowledge the complexities in this area – the bigger picture of the lack of availability of affordable housing, including social housing, as well as the fact that some evictions happen because people have breached tenancy agreements. To address these issues, we urge Government to redouble its efforts to increase our stock of affordable housing, reduce the waiting times for social housing and support existing tenants to remain housed. In the short term, we see a number of steps that could be taken immediately to strengthen our safety net and address some of the issues raised in this report. We are in the process of engaging with Government on the recommendations below.

Recommendations:

1. That Work and Income take responsibility for finding emergency accommodation for people who ask for help because they have nowhere suitable to live and no access to shelter. That, where there is no emergency accommodation available, Work and Income have access to funding to pay for other suitable temporary accommodation. This funding should be sufficient to provide temporary accommodation until adequate safe, secure and permanent housing can be accessed.

2. That Work and Income and the Social Housing Assessment division of the Ministry of Social Development collaborate to ensure that people who are on the social housing register have suitable temporary accommodation while they wait for social housing.

3. That when Housing New Zealand wishes tenants or other residents to leave a Housing New Zealand property these people are supported (in collaboration with other government agencies) to find alternative accommodation that is safe, stable and affordable.

4. That one government agency be made responsible for an Emergency Accommodation Strategy. This would include co-ordinating the roles that different government agencies play; ensuring that government agencies are not themselves the drivers of homelessness but are part of the solution; monitoring the effectiveness of this strategy in preventing homelessness.