

***** Embargoed until 6am on Thursday, 4 June 2015 *****

Study to help improve NZ's housing for children

Wellington-based researcher Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman has just received a \$5 million programme grant from the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC) to help improve New Zealand's housing stock – particularly rental properties – for the sake of our children's health.

Professor Howden-Chapman from the **University of Otago, Wellington**, has led two previous HRC-funded *He Kainga Oranga*/housing and health research programmes, both of which have received widespread international acclaim, fundamentally changing how the relationship between housing and health is seen. The study team's achievements include proving the link between meningococcal disease and household overcrowding, and showing that uninsulated houses negatively impact on school attendance, sickness and hospitalisation. The insulation and heating studies that formed part of these programmes were rated outstanding examples of housing intervention studies in the *American Journal of Public Health* and in a Cochrane Review.

This latest *He Kainga Oranga* programme to receive HRC funding will focus on children and involve six studies related to, but extending on, the previous housing community trials. The studies will include trials to insulate and warm newborn babies' homes and provide them with feather duvets; provide wrap-around housing and welfare services for children who have been hospitalised; and examine the indoor air quality and possible health effects on children living in housing located next to arterial roads.

The programme will also trial the effects of a rental warrant of fitness (RWoF) that prescribes minimum housing standards for existing properties.

Professor Howden-Chapman says that children spend more time inside their homes than adults and are particularly vulnerable to prolonged exposure to poor housing.

"Rental housing is on average of lower quality than social housing or owner-occupied housing. Moreover, 49 per cent of children living in households below the poverty line live in private rental dwellings," says Professor Howden-Chapman.

This study aims to establish the effect of implementing a RWoF on tenant health, particularly the health of children, and to determine the effect of a RWoF on housing supply and affordability.

Professor Howden-Chapman, who last year became the first woman and social scientist to receive the \$500,000 Prime Minister's Science Prize, is one of five researchers to receive up to nearly \$5 million each for programmes in the HRC's 2015 funding round.

HRC Chief Executive Professor Kathryn McPherson says that the work of Professor Howden-Chapman and her team has had a tangible effect on the health of our homes and environment. She says the team's previous HRC-funded work provided the rationale for the EECA Warm-Up NZ: Heat Smart Programme, which has been evaluated as having delivered more than \$1.5 billion of health benefits to New Zealand.

"This new research programme should significantly benefit New Zealanders by informing critical changes to policy and practice in health and housing," says Professor McPherson.

Other programmes funded this year include cutting-edge research at the intersection of biomedical, clinical and public health, with an emphasis on musculoskeletal conditions, respiratory health, infectious and inflammatory disease – all of which result in considerable burden for people and the health system.

HRC programme recipients for 2015

To view lay summaries of the recipients' programmes, go to www.hrc.govt.nz/funding-opportunities/recipients and filter for 'Researcher initiated proposals', 'Programmes', '2015'. Please note: this link will be live as of 6am on Thursday, 4 June 2015.

Professor Richard Beasley, Medical Research Institute of New Zealand
RCT of an ICS/LABA reliever therapy regimen in mild asthma
60 months, \$4,977,780
Telephone: (04) 805 0230

Professor Antony Braithwaite, University of Otago, Dunedin
p53 and variants in inflammatory disease and cancer
60 months, \$4,901,862
Telephone: (03) 479 7165

Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman, University of Otago, Wellington
He Kainga Oranga: Translating housing research to practice for children's health
60 months, \$4,943,710
Telephone: (04) 398 6047

Professor Anthony Kettle, University of Otago, Christchurch
Neutrophil oxidants in infection and inflammation
60 months, \$4,830,673
Telephone: (03) 364 0577

Professor Ian Reid, the University of Auckland
Mechanisms and management of musculoskeletal disease

60 months, \$4,999,768
Telephone: (09) 373 7599 ext 86259

-Ends-

For more information about the research programmes, please contact the researchers direct. Contact telephone numbers are above.

For information about how the HRC functions, please contact Dr Tania Pocock, HRC Acting Chief Executive, telephone: (09) 303 5209 or email: tpocock@hrc.govt.nz; or Kristine Scherp, HRC Manager, Communications, telephone: (09) 303 5202 or email: kscherp@hrc.govt.nz.