



Warm Families: the facts

Warm Families is a Canterbury community project which will improve the health and wellness of low-income families and individuals by turning their damp, cold homes into energy efficient, warm, dry and healthy homes.

What makes Warm Families different from other insulation projects?

Warm Families aims to bring together key Canterbury organisations in the energy, environmental and health sectors, to jointly tackle a long-standing Canterbury problem – cold, damp homes. By working together we can improve the lives of a greater number of low-income Cantabrians and create healthy, sustainable indoor living conditions.

Our combined efforts, alongside tremendous support from the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, have made this Canterbury's largest community project focused on tackling ill health by improving home living conditions.

Most previous initiatives tackling cold homes in New Zealand have focused solely on insulation. Warm Families will not only upgrade insulation in homes but will also upgrade heating. We will install a clean, efficient heater in the home's living area if one doesn't already exist.

Warm Families targets low-income households where an occupant either suffers from a chronic health condition or is over 65 years old. By turning their damp, cold homes into energy efficient, warm, dry and healthy homes, we can enhance people's health and in turn improve their lives.

How big is Warm Families?

Given the clear benefits of Warm Families to the Canterbury community, a number of key Canterbury organisations have been quick to get behind the project. Nine organisations have expressed strong interest in participating in and funding the project, and we expect the size of the project to grow over time.

Warm Families has secured about \$250,000 in local funding for this financial year. Combined with EECA funding, Warm Families will spend more than \$1 million on insulation and heating this year to June 2009. After that, we anticipate even more will be spent, with an aim to spend up to \$5 million per year installing insulation and efficient heating in the homes of low-income Cantabrians who suffer illness.

The Warm Families project will result in improved warmth in more than 2,000 homes and help up to 10,000 people lead warmer, healthier lives.

What homes and people will be targeted to benefit from Warm Families?

We will initially focus on those people whose health will improve the most from a warmer, drier home. This includes people who are eligible for a flu vaccine – i.e. those who are either over 65 or who suffer from a chronic health condition. Community service card holders will also be some of the first people to benefit from Warm Families.

Warm Families has established a pilot project of 100 homes where a child under twelve suffers from a chronic respiratory condition. As the project increases in size, we will widen the range of homes eligible to participate in the project.



How did Warm Families start?

Warm Families was borne from an initiative started by electricity lines companies MainPower and Orion, the Canterbury District Health Board, and the Community Energy Action Charitable Trust, who sought to insulate the homes of 100 children suffering from asthma. Other organisations have since signalled their interest, including the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority which is providing crucial government funding assistance.

What health benefits result from a warm home?

Two studies by the Wellington School of Medicine & Health Sciences^{1,2} have shown that installing insulation in New Zealand can significantly reduce respiratory illnesses and have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. People living in warmer homes require less GP visits, tend to have fewer hospital admissions and less sick days off school and work. International research has also concluded similar findings.

How will homes and people be selected to participate?

Canterbury primary health organisations (PHOs) will work with their local GPs to identify community service card holders who are eligible for the free flu vaccine, i.e. those who are either over 65 or who suffer from a chronic medical condition. Their homes will then be assessed to see if insulation and heating levels can be improved, and if so these people will become eligible for the project.

Analysis of flu vaccine data indicates that several thousand households could benefit from insulation and heating, however the criteria can be widened if funding is available to insulate more homes.

What areas of Canterbury will be targeted?

The project will initially focus on Christchurch and North Canterbury. As Warm Families develops over time, other Canterbury areas will be added.

Who is involved in Warm Families?

The following organisations have expressed an interest in the project: Energy Efficiency Conservation Authority, Canterbury District Health Board, Christchurch City Council, Community Energy Action, Environment Canterbury, MainPower, Meridian Energy, Orion, and Partnership Health Canterbury.

Other local organisations will also be approached as the project develops.



¹ Effect of insulating existing homes on health inequality: cluster randomised study in the community. Howden-Chapman P, Matheson A, Crane J et al BMJ 2007;334: 460

² Howden-Chapman P, et al. Effects of improved home heating on asthma in community dwelling children: randomized controlled trial., BMJ 2008; 337; a1411