

## Graduate Women New Zealand – Mid-fellowship Report

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Dear GWNZ,

As a recipient of a PhD Fellowship, awarded in 2024, I would like to thank you for your support, and it is my pleasure to provide an update on the progress of my doctoral studies.

I am a second-year PhD student in Public Health in He Kāinga Oranga - Housing and Health Research Programme at the University of Otago, Wellington. My PhD aims to demonstrate the links between housing and health using the Healthy Homes Initiative (HHI) as a case study. The HHI provides housing interventions to support health, primarily for low-income Māori and Pacific families with children who are at risk of housing-related illness. These interventions include improvements to the quality of the home such as provision of heaters, insulation and mould removal, as well as education on healthy housing and even referrals to other services. Using referral data from the HHI, my aim is to evaluate the impact of housing improvements on health and other social indicators using quantitative methods.

As of March 2025, the primary milestone of my PhD has been the release of the Healthy Homes Initiative five-year outcomes evaluation report, prepared in conjunction with Te Whatu Ora | Health New Zealand. This report<sup>1</sup>, released in November 2024, is an update to the 2022 three-year outcomes evaluation report<sup>2</sup>. In the five years following a HHI housing intervention, families experienced significant health and social benefits. These included a reduction in hospitalisations of 18.6% as well as a 5% reduction in school absences. In the 2022 report, analyses showed a reduction in hospitalisations by 19.8% after three years. These important results show that not only is the HHI improving health for families, but the benefits also appear to be continuing long-term.

As of March 2025, my current focus has been preparing the work completed for the five-year outcomes evaluation report to submit to an academic journal. This work also includes a follow-up period of five years but features an updated and more complex analysis suitable for peer review. This will form the first chapter of my PhD. Upon completion of this paper, I will undertake an evaluation of the Pacific Healthy Homes Initiative, an extension to the HHI programme which has a focus on Pacific peoples<sup>3</sup>. Finally, I intend to finish quarter two of 2025 with a piece of work which has a focus on Rheumatic Fever, given the origin of the HHI programme as part of the Rheumatic Fever Prevention Programme.

In addition to my PhD work, during the last six months I also had the opportunity to support the Graduate Women Wellington branch volunteering to collect returned graduation gowns from Victoria University graduates. Over the course of two days, I had the privilege to work with several incredible women who shared their knowledge and experiences. Thank you to the Graduate Women Wellington branch for welcoming me into your community, your kind support and advice that will stick with me far beyond my PhD studies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/publications/healthy-homes-initiative-five-year-outcomes-evaluation>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/publications/healthy-homes-initiative-three-year-outcomes-evaluation>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/news-and-events/news-from-2/new-initiative-to-make-homes-healthier-for-pacific-families/>

Unfortunately, the past six months have also brought challenges. In December 2024 my abstract was accepted for the Australasian Housing Researchers Conference in Sydney. This conference was to mark my first international conference, a unique opportunity to present my work on an international stage and a milestone in my PhD journey. However, due to a family bereavement I was unable to attend. A silver lining was that my supervisor, Professor Nevil Pierse, kindly stepped in to present my work on my behalf. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of a supportive supervisor in one's PhD journey, a role Professor Pierse exemplifies.

As I conclude this report, I would like to once again acknowledge the generous support of Graduate Women New Zealand who have provided far more than just financial support.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'EJohnson'.

Ellie Johnson