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Hon Annette King

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Findings of Meningococcal Disease study

Health Minister Annette King says the results of a study into meningococcal disease clearly demonstrate the link between the disease and poor housing and overcrowded living conditions.

"Members of this Government have been saying that for years, but the link was consistently denied by Jenny Shipley and members of her former government."

The case-control study was carried out by ESR Wellington, ESR Auckland, Auckland Healthcare and Auckland University from 1997-99, and was funded by the Ministry of Health and New Zealand Health Research Council. It aimed to identify potential modifiable risk factors for the disease in Auckland children.

"Overcrowding, inadequate housing and unaffordable housing have long had a big impact on the health of New Zealanders, particularly on Maori and Pacific people. This Government has already begun taking action in terms of making decent housing affordable for New Zealanders again," she said.

A clear link had been drawn between housing and health in the New Zealand Health Strategy released for discussion in June. The NZHS identified "the unacceptable reality that some New Zealanders live in unhealthy housing, have poor nutrition and, in rural areas, have limited access to clean water and sewerage systems", she said.

"Such unacceptable living conditions will be easier to remedy when we have established the new District Health Boards. These boards will work closely with the communities they serve, and will be well placed to identify local conditions that have an adverse effect on the health of their populations," she said.

Mrs King said the study also identified other modifiable risk factors such as the effects of passive smoking. "The Government is committed to helping New Zealanders stop smoking. Our children have a right to grow up in a healthy, smokefree environment whenever that is possible.

"It is important other health initiatives, such as the search for a suitable vaccine, continue, but if we can modify those factors that place New Zealanders most at risk, we will prevent much suffering and unnecessary deaths. This Government is prepared to take the responsibility the previous Government abrogated."

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