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## ANZ research highlights challenges of Māori housing affordability and identifies ways banks could help

New ANZ NZ research highlights the huge challenge Māori face in owning their own homes and how making it easier for Māori to build on collectively owned land could help.

The research report - Ko Tū, Ko Rongo - examines the specific barriers Māori encounter in their home ownership journeys and what role ANZ and the banking sector can play in improving outcomes.

Home ownership rates for Māori have been falling for decades, the report shows.

The 2023 Census estimates that 27.5% of Māori own or partly own their home. If current housing market trends persist, then current estimates show almost all Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand will be renters by 2061.

Meanwhile, Māori are overrepresented in housing support statistics and are more likely to be living in poor quality housing and to experience crowding.

Ko Tū, Ko Rongo is one of the first pieces of Māori-centred research undertaken at ANZ NZ, and is underpinned by kaupapa Māori methodologies and values.

Many of those spoken to for the report were not ANZ customers, and the focus of the study was not to gather evidence on direct experience with ANZ, but of housing aspirations and realities more generally.

The research was led by Mākere Hurst, ANZ NZ's Te Ao Māori Kairangahau Matua Principal Researcher.

Hurst spent two months at the end of last year travelling around New Zealand talking to Māori in a range of housing situations, good and bad - from Northland through Bay of Plenty, the East Coast, Rotorua and Wellington to the South Island.

### Unlocking the potential of Māori land

ANZ NZ's research found that building on collectively owned Māori land is essential to affordable housing provision, in particular in regional locations in New Zealand.

However, the complexity of the process made it difficult for Māori to get access to their whenua and then to get finance to build on it.

"Māori land is owned collectively, so you have to prove your whakapapa or your genealogy to the land," Hurst said.

"A general process would look like asking permission from shareholders to build, getting a license to occupy from the Māori Land Court, getting some kind of lending or using savings to build a transportable home and transporting a home on to the land."

Banks could help by changing their risk appetite and evolving their lending policies, the report said.

Most of the participants wanted to see more readily available home loan products available for building on Māori land. This was particularly important for locations where Māori land is readily available, yet underutilised.

There was an expectation from those surveyed in Hurst's report that banks should understand the end-to-end process of building on whenua Māori - not just their specific part relating to accessing finance.

### Home loan challenges

The Ko Tū, Ko Rongo report found that some of the challenges Māori faced in getting into home ownership were obvious - such as having sufficient income, saving for a deposit and having consistent employment to service a mortgage.

However, some of the challenges were less obvious. These included a need for culturally appropriate financial advice, lack of Māori representation in banking, prejudices and racial bias towards Māori.

The research outlined how one negative comment or judgmental interaction with a bank could turn an individual or whānau away from interactions with the financial sector for life.

“When someone who looks Māori walks into a bank, don’t assume who they are. Don’t look at their bank accounts and think ‘you’re never going to own a home’ because we probably are already thinking that. And we need someone to believe in us,” Hurst said.

### **Innovative solutions**

Ko Tū, Ko Rongo, recommends banks partner with iwi, hapū and community housing providers to create innovative programmes to increase Māori home ownership.

There was a need for better accommodation and knowledge of alternative housing options in lending, including transportable homes, intergenerational mortgages, and rent-to-buy schemes.

“[Intergenerational lending] means not just your mum, dad, nuclear family going in to buy a house. It means the generation that are retired that might not have anything but a pension coming in. It means a generation that might be almost about to retire. And then it might mean a couple of young families – all going in together.”

This intergenerational group could look to build large dwellings or multiple dwellings.

The report also said ANZ could also explore ways to lend on infrastructure only – providing the groundwork for shared land to be used for housing.

Because Māori land remained in collective ownership, houses had to be removable.

“You can build it on the land but at the moment it has to be on piles or stilts . . . because the house theoretically needs to be moved if the mortgage on the house is defaulted on.

“That is seen very unfavourably in many communities because it makes people feel like their home is temporary, like their home is just going to be taken away from them.

“Only on Māori land do you see that kind of restriction.”

This also meant that Māori wanting to build on collective land had fewer choices and enjoyed less competition from builders and providers.

Hurst said improved competition in the provision of transportable homes and more flexibility from banks lending to them would help.

She said her experience of researching Ko Tū, Ko Rongo gave her optimism about potential solutions.

“What I’ve seen is that Māori are innovators, when faced with all these barriers, Māori will find a way. They live intergenerationally, they are navigating huge hurdles to build on ancestral Māori land and collective titles.

“They are spending two, three, four, or five years going through the Māori land court to build on their own land, just so they can get into housing. They’re building transportable homes and things like that. There are positives I’ve seen.”

### **A Te Ao Māori focus**

Many of the people interviewed for Ko Tū, Ko Rongo, who were on the home ownership journey or had achieved home ownership, believed that 1:1 financial literacy advice was pivotal – particularly if they were from a whānau who hadn’t owned a home before.

The report recommends ANZ explore ways to provide financial coaching or financial literacy services that are underpinned by Te Ao Māori world views and values.

Having Māori banking staff in customer facing roles, and providing opportunities for Māori to have career pathways, contributed to positive housing outcomes, the report said.

The report recommends building and upskilling internal staff, in particular customer facing staff to have the skills and knowledge necessary to interact in a positive way with Māori customers and communities.

It also suggests investing in welcoming physical spaces for staff and customers.

Hurst said her research for ANZ reinforced the importance of building strong relationships with customers.

“Relationships are the foundation to how everything is done in a Māori society. When you form these genuine relationships with people and you maintain them, it forms a bond or a trust between people,” she said.

“Once you find trust a lot of the other obstacles can be worked through . . . that’s when the magic starts to happen.”

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