

Building Blocks

Narratives that shift us towards the goal of decent homes for everyone are built intentionally, using building blocks.

Using these building blocks can help you create effective communications that are engaging, deepen understanding, and shift the way we think about decent homes. The building blocks are based on The Workshop's research.



Audience

Focus on people who are open to persuasion

Who you direct your communications to makes a difference. Focusing on people who are open to understanding and persuasion helps you tell your own narrative and story and avoid falling back into narratives that surface unhelpful thinking.

Avoid focusing on those who are firmly opposed.

- They hold their views strongly and are unlikely to shift their thinking. Treat a noisy opposition as an inevitable part of shifting thinking and systems.
- Their narratives may be loud and demand your attention, but responding to their narratives can use a lot of your communications resource with little impact.
- By responding to them you risk repeating, negating and myth busting their dominant narratives which inadvertently amplifies them and surfaces unhelpful thinking.

Focus beyond those that already understand your goals and vision.

- If you talk only to those who are already onboard (your base), you won't develop new communication strategies, new narratives or deeper understandings.
- Your base plays a critical role in spreading your helpful narratives to those that are open to persuasion and understanding.

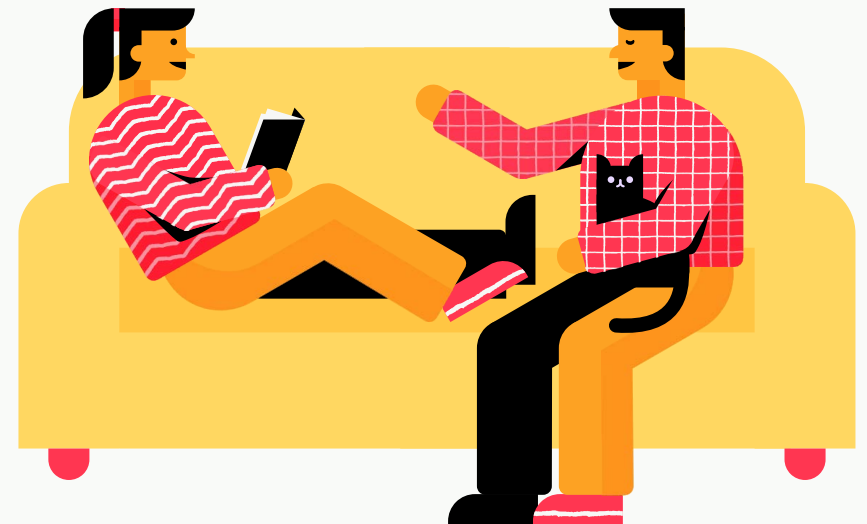
Focus on the people who are open to persuasion and understanding.

- Aim your communications at people who don't have a fixed view or who have mixed and sometimes competing views on the issue (persuadable or fence-sitters).
- These tend to be the majority of people and can be persuaded by your effective communications.

Tips for listening and building relationships with your audience

Find out what matters most to the people affected. Ask communities what they want for housing-related health then make sure your communications align with their vision for decent homes.

Use two-way communications developed in collaboration with communities and those that are most affected by unhealthy homes. This means you will include important aspects of local knowledge and behaviours. You will also build support in the community for necessary policy and behaviour changes.



Vision

Lead with a concrete vision for a better world

- A vision builds hope, helping people see past the sea of problems being communicated to them.
- A vision creates an invitation for people to consider the issue as important to them.
- It opens a side door for your evidence to be listened to.

Our vision — Decent homes for all

“A decent home is warm, dry, accessible, and offers security of tenure. Decent homes allow people to contribute to and participate in our communities. They allow people to get work and to keep kids in school. Decent homes keep people healthy.”

Key principles of vision-making:

- Be concrete, believable and specific. What does it look and feel like for people’s day-to-day lives as a result of decent homes.
- Lead with people-centred outcomes, not economic outcomes. Describe homes, communities that are calm and pleasant where people can connect with others, participate in work, school and community and be in good health.
- Envision the entire community. Do not talk about building or housing policy in isolation. Include energy, transport, access to employment and services, food, green spaces etc.
- Sell the cake, not the ingredients. Don’t mistake talking about the changes that are needed, the solutions that will work or the removal of a problem as a vision for people.
- Avoid leading with technological solutions — these become distracting or exclusionary.
- Ensure your vision is inclusive of all people and their needs. Create inclusive visions in partnership with those most negatively impacted by current unhealthy homes.

Experiential proof and vision-making

Seeing and experiencing what the change feels like in small ways can help build understanding and support for longer term changes, and form part of effective vision-making.

- Prototypes and experiments are one way to do this. Some developers and builders have demonstrated ways to build better performing homes without blowing budgets.
- Having lived in better performing homes overseas or in New Zealand has given some people an experience of the difference. These experiences could form the basis of a hopeful vision.

Values

Connect with what matters to people

Values are what matters most to us in life. They are at the heart of human motivations. Engaging with people's values is shown to help better communicate science.

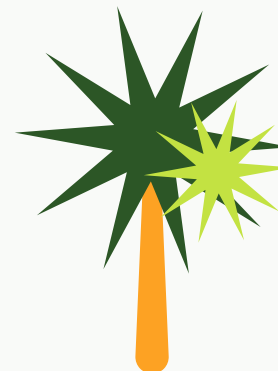
- Public narratives that tell us money, personal success, our public image is most important, surface what are known as extrinsic and individual values.
- Many public narratives also surface fears for our own health and safety or that of our loved ones.
- Research shows that what matters most to most people is taking care of each other and the planet, discovery, creativity and reaching our own goals, known as intrinsic and collective values.
- These intrinsic values are the ones most likely to engage people in deeper thinking about complex issues and improving systems for collective wellbeing.
- Use intrinsic and collective values to communicate about issues of collective wellbeing.

The Universal Values Map created by Common Cause Foundation based on the research of Professor Shalom Schwartz is a helpful reference for values. Values that encourage choices for the collective good are those in the 'Self-direction', 'Universalism' and 'Benevolence' sections.

Special Topic: Te ao Māori and values research

The Schwartz research reflected in Common Cause's Values Map is broad but does not specifically include te ao Māori perspectives. The Workshop have used the values map in collaboration with Māori organisations and people and found broad agreement between te ao Māori perspectives and the intrinsic values.

Kaupapa Māori organisations have been part of the development of this toolkit and have tested elements of the approach. However, we believe that there is ongoing work to do in ensuring that messaging reflects and respects a te ao Māori perspective. We recommend taking the Schwartz research and Values Map as a starting point and tool to use in thinking about values. Always consult with tangata whenua and others affected by the work to make sure that the implementation and framing feel true and accessible to their cultural context and lived experience.



Values for homes that support health and wellbeing

Talk about responsible management and pragmatism

Talking about responsible management and pragmatism reminds people that responsible care for our communities and planet is the sensible, pragmatic choice. Often people use cost-effectiveness arguments when they would be better to lead with responsible management and pragmatism which surfaces collective thinking over zero-sum (win-lose) thinking, i.e., more for you means less for me (which discussions of money and allocation of funding tend to do).

What does this sound like?

A decent home is warm, dry, accessible, and offers security of tenure. Decent homes allow people to contribute to and participate in our communities. They allow people to get work and get to work and to keep kids in school. Decent homes keep people healthy. Ensuring all New Zealanders live in a decent home is the responsible and pragmatic thing to do.



Talk about homes and housing as a system that we have the knowledge and tools to improve

This surfaces values of self-direction and wisdom. It draws attention to the systemic causes of unhealthy homes and reminds us that we have the means and ability to address problems. It avoids surfacing individualism (the problem is due to individual actions and can be addressed at the individual level) and fatalism (this problem is too big for us to solve).

What does this sound like?

We have the knowledge and capabilities to ensure every New Zealander can feel at home in their home. When researchers, government policy-makers, local council advisors, housing providers, the building industry and community organisations work together we can ensure homes can do their job and look after people's health.



Talk about public good and everybody getting what they need to thrive

This connects to the value of equity and encourages helpful thinking about collective responsibility and the importance of everyone having conditions in place for good health and wellbeing. It helps people understand that working to improve home health can help solve inequality across communities. It can also surface values of self-direction and choice.

What does this sound like?

Our homes need to look after us at every stage and circumstance of life: from newborn babies to grandparents/kaumatua; when we are well and when we are sick. Homes can be the safe haven everyone deserves.



Key values to surface helpful thinking about home health include:

- Care (love)
- Responsibility
- Social Justice
- Equality (fairness)
- Self-direction
- Wisdom
- Mana

Avoid

Fear and security values

This is when communicators imply that what matters most in the context of the issue is keeping safe. E.g. don't lead your communications with how unhealthy homes may impact people's material wellbeing, or damage their health. It is possible to describe health effects in a story that explains how home health affects us. Leading with fear increases a desire for simple behavioural solutions to big problems. In complex, systemic problems these solutions don't exist so people disengage from supporting other actions.

Economic values

Leading with economic values like cost effectiveness or value to the economy when discussing home health should be avoided. This triggers individualistic thinking and action (what's in for me vs. what is in it for us)

This policy to improve homes will save us x amount of money each year.

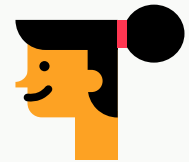
Leading with security values, as it may surface individualism

Note that talking about health in an explanation is fine, just avoid leading with security-focused ideas of health.

Embrace

Care for people and communities

It's important that governments and businesses act to improve liveability of homes to protect people and places



Responsible management

More effective than leading with cost effectiveness or cost is leading with values about responsibility, responsible management, and pragmatism.



People in government can legislate and resource to ensure all homes are affordable to heat and ventilate.

Fairness across places

For all people to live in healthy homes and have good health and wellbeing.

No matter where we live, all of us deserve decent homes that keep us warm, dry, safe and connected.



Explanations

Provide pathways to understanding

Explaining how a problem happens, who is responsible, the effects and what to do, is different from just describing a problem. To surface better understandings for people about decent homes, we also need to provide better explanations.

In strategic communication a good explanation:

- provides an entire new story about home health and why it matters
- avoids repackaging unhelpful thinking and narratives
- includes an intentional and helpful way of framing the issue
- is solutions driven
- uses facts as a character in a complete story about causes, effects and solutions.

Under this Building Block we will talk about five elements to consider in building better explanations: **frames, metaphors, using facts, explain in a chain, name the agent.**

Frames

- Frames are pre-packaged explanations about how the world works.
- Frames surface particular ways of thinking about an issue. For example, health is often 'framed' as an individual responsibility, through the language, metaphors, and images we see.
- Frames are one of many cognitive shortcuts we take to make the mental effort of information processing easier.
- Frames are employed unconsciously and are often shared across a culture.
- We cannot avoid frames or negate or myth bust unhelpful ones, but we can replace them with better ones.



Avoid

Framing home health problems and solutions as an issue of individual choice. This frames the solution as an individual one not a structural one.

People not turning on the heater is causing health issues.

Talking about individual responsibility for managing exposure to unhealthy homes.

Mothers are responsible for making sure their children are not exposed to mould.

Framing unhealthy homes as normal and living in them as a choice/ rite of passage. It taps into unhelpful thinking that the problem is too challenging to solve. It also surfaces individualistic thinking (I will lose something).

I lived in a cold, damp flat when I was a student and I survived — we've all done it.

Embrace

Framing our collective capability to do something about home health. This encourages helpful thinking that we can work together to solve the problem as we have done with other problems before.



We have the knowledge and capabilities to ensure every New Zealander can feel at home in their home. The Warmer Kiwi Homes programme has shown how when researchers, government policy-makers, local council advisors and community organisations work together we can improve children and family health by improving homes.

Framing the specific systems and structures that need to be improved.

People in government can legislate and resource to ensure all homes are affordable to heat and ventilate.



Using health and wellbeing frames, and talking about public health as a common good.



People in government can ensure that we all live in homes that do their job, and deliver health and wellbeing for us all.

Metaphors

Metaphors take something familiar, that we understand on a practical everyday level, and connect it to something more abstract or complex as a way to help simplify and explain it. Using tested metaphors in your messages can help short-cut people to understanding.

These metaphors all help explain key concepts of decent homes and redirect unhelpful thinking to more productive ground.

Healthy housing as infrastructure

It works to highlight the systemic nature of housing and its function as a fundamental determinant of wellbeing.

What does this sound like?

Decent housing provides the infrastructure of care, connection, and contribution. Decent homes allow people to contribute to and participate in our communities. They allow people to get work and get to work and to keep kids in school. Decent homes keep people healthy.



Homes have a job to do

Homes have a job to do — to keep us all warm, dry, safe, healthy — enable us all to care, connect and contribute. This metaphor helps focus attention on the active role of homes in providing basic human needs and rights — shelter, warmth, security etc.

What does this sound like?

With at least a third of New Zealand homes still not performing well enough to do their job of keeping people warm and dry, and with housing costs increasingly unaffordable, many New Zealanders have no option but to live in unhealthy homes.



Upstream environments, downstream health

This metaphor works to get people to think more helpfully about the connections between environmental factors and human health and wellbeing and the need for intervention and prevention.

What does this sound like?

The way in which we resource and regulate housing creates the conditions for human health and wellbeing. The cold, damp homes we experience 'downstream' is a consequence of poor upstream regulation. We need to work together upstream to create positive housing conditions for human health. This will make sure that what flows downstream offers a healthy and safe environment for all of us.



Avoid

Embrace

Housing market	Decent homes as infrastructure for care, connection and contribution
House as an asset	Homes have a job to do — keep us all warm or cool, dry, safe, healthy — enable us all to care, connect and contribute
Decent homes as a trade-off or a financial/ social preference (or ‘high standard’)	Decent homes lead to downstream improvements in health, education, employment, community engagement

Special Topic: Making home health tangible

The issue of home health does, by its nature, mean we are communicating about something that is often invisible/ intangible to people. The challenge is to make the issue more visible and physical. One way to do this is to describe the physical aspects of healthy home performance such as smell, taste, feel and how it can be seen. This can be done by talking about the discomfort of unhealthy homes — cold and damp, overheating etc — and about what we see/ experience — mould, condensation, high power use, noise, kids with runny noses all the time, worry.

Replace:

- ‘healthy homes’ with ‘warm, dry homes’, or ‘comfortable, dry homes’ (taking account of the increasing prevalence of overheating as an issue in summer).
- ‘energy efficient homes’ with ‘homes that use less power to heat and cool.

Using facts

Facts are a character in your story, they need to be presented as part of a fuller explanation in order to deepen understanding. Facts presented on their own don’t shift thinking.

To help tell your story, choose a few limited facts and talk about them in a way that makes them easier to understand and recall.

- Present the facts so people have an everyday context for them, e.g., “This is equivalent to 1 in 80 children in our region being hospitalised for preventable housing-related illness every year.”
- Show facts visually as a preference, e.g., show how many hours children’s bedroom temperatures are below the WHO healthy minimum, what area is covered by mould, proportion of Māori vs non-Māori children who are hospitalised.
- Use strategies such as guess and reveal. e.g., ask people to make a guess at the fact and then reveal the answer.

Explain in a chain

Presenting our information in this order works with our fast-thinking brains to help us understand.

- Start by introducing the issue positively using intrinsic values (why it matters) and/or your vision of what better looks like
- Identify the cause or origin of the problem
- Explain the impact of that problem using facts
- Offer a solution (related to the cause identified initially)
- End by reminding people of why this matters, using a vision and intrinsic values

Vision and/or values

We have the knowledge and capabilities to ensure every New Zealander can feel at home in their home. But currently those most vulnerable in our communities are those most likely to be locked out of the option to live in a healthy home.

Cause

New Zealand is cold and damp for over half the year, but inadequate building standards and lack of knowledge in the past have resulted in many homes today that are not fit-for-purpose.

Impact

Close to half of the population currently live in homes that are expensive or impossible to keep warm and dry. Breathing cold, damp air causes respiratory illness, impacts on school and work participation, and affects mental health. Excessive energy costs contribute to poverty and energy hardship.

Solution

By working together we can build on good work already being done to retrofit and build homes that are cost-effective and easy to heat, cool and ventilate. People in government can ensure energy performance measures are required for all homes at point of sale and rent, and resource retrofits to bring old homes up to standard.

Values

A healthy thriving community depends on healthy homes for all of us. When we work together, using the tools at our disposal, we can make this a reality.



Name the agent

We want people to understand that there are things they can do to change systems to fix issues. Headlines such as “we’re making progress toward warmer homes” fail to name a person or agent involved in the problem. This makes it hard for people to see who needs to act and what needs to be done.

One way to help people lift their gaze and see what needs to happen is to name the specific agents of change within the system. For example, we can talk about members of a ‘healthy housing team’ that includes public health experts, as well as people in government who can make decisions that have a positive effect on systems and structures.

What does this sound like?

I can access a healthier home if people in government make changes to building and rental standards.



This helps to draw people’s focus to aspects of home health that people do have control over and gives them a sense of competence.



Storytellers

We all use a variety of mental shortcuts to assess what information to trust. It is less work to take a trusted person's advice than assess all the information ourselves.

The person telling the story can help us decide if the information is trustworthy and credible. We also use mental shortcuts in deciding who to trust or who is credible, i.e., how someone looks, the institutions they come from, past experience with similar people or institutions.

Use trusted others to provide positive social proof and improve credibility of a message

- We move to accept beliefs and positions that we see frequently repeated in order to fit in.
- Repetition from trusted others confers credibility to the information you are trying to get across.
- This cuts both ways — repeating unhelpful information gives it credibility.

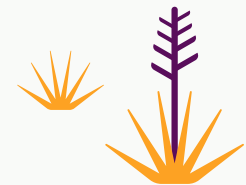
Use messengers with shared values

- It is important to find messengers that people can see represent their values.
- Use surprising messengers — for example, people seen as focused on 'houses as assets' talking about decent homes being the infrastructure for collective wellbeing.

Pair the right messenger with the right message

- Pair effective narratives with a messenger that is trusted/credible to your audience.
- Choose messengers who will bring with them trust and credibility for your persuadable audience and who are in a position to transition/slide your audience into your helpful message.

Social proof shows people that others they consider trustworthy are willing to make or support changes. This is a more effective strategy to garner support for things like government investment in home health than presenting people with negative facts about the problem.



Talking About Decent Homes

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This resource was created as part of the Healthy Homes Communication Action Research project funded from BRANZ Building Research Levy and Todd Foundation. We thank The Workshop for sharing some of the IP that informs this resource.