
RAISING THE BAR: ENABLING TRANSITIONS THROUGH MORE EFFECTIVE ADVICE

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Government strategies to improve the performance of New Zealand homes include a focus on providing consumer information to encourage good choices (Department of Building and Housing, 2012; Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). This 'information deficit' model (Owens & Driffill, 2008) overlooks issues of agency and simplifies the myriad social and economic factors that influence decision-making (Shove, 1998; Stephenson et al., 2010; Wilson & Dowlatabadi, 2007). Personalised, independent advice from a trusted source can address many of these barriers by guiding householders towards relevant and appropriate decisions, and giving them the confidence to act. Such services are not widely available in New Zealand, although an increasing number of organisations offer advice alongside products and services. While the growth in advice services is positive, a number of issues are likely to prevent optimal outcomes. 1) No standards exist for advice quality, 2) practitioners have inconsistent access to training and skills development, 3) households cannot distinguish credible advisors in the market, and 4) The qualities of independence and trust, which are desired by households (Barton et al., 2013) are undermined when the business model is commercially driven. Through a collaborative initiative (The Practitioners' Hub) Beacon Pathway, Community Energy Network and the EnviroSchools Foundation have sought to address these issues by developing the Home Performance Advisor training and certification programme. This national programme provides a comprehensive understanding of whole of house performance from first principles. Fundamental elements of the programme include: competency based assessment, a code of conduct, professional development requirements and an assessment approach that supports a sustainable business model whilst maintaining credibility and independence. By addressing barriers to the efficacy and availability of advice it is expected that households will increasingly have the confidence to take action, which is fundamental for New Zealand to transition to better performing homes.

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