

Summary of Key findings from interviews

Interviews suggest that residents hold a strong desire to return home following disaster displacement. This desire relates largely to the emotional connection they feel towards the home they left behind. Comments made during the interviews also suggest that some residents find it difficult to return. This is due to financial constraints, failure to receive insurance payouts and red-zone restrictions (which limited reconstruction activities).

After the 2011 February earthquake, the government condemned and zoned large areas of liquefaction prone land. These Red Zones are areas where there is area-wide damage and an engineering solution to remediate the land damage would be uncertain, disruptive, not timely, nor cost effective. Those living in these areas are given an offer to sell their property to the Government. While residents can legally choose not to accept this offer, services in the area will not be restored and insurers may also cancel insurance coverage. Perhaps most importantly, however, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) also has legal powers to require (essentially force) residents to sell their property for its market value at that time. For some, then, the decision of whether to return home (or relocate) is no longer their choice to make. Complete neighbourhoods and suburbs have therefore been displaced, and the inhabitants scattered across the country – their freedom to return home restricted by government zoning.

Some residents also highlight the emotional trauma they experienced viewing earthquake damage to their home. For them, this damage is too distressing to deal with. As a result, they decide to relocate to a new suburb/town/country where they can create a new home for themselves.

All of my interviews indicate that disaster displacement is a deeply emotional and traumatic experience. During this time, victims find solitude in speaking to others who have lost their homes and personal possessions. They also appreciate the emotional and practical support offered by local community groups and NGO's. During a time of anxiety, these networks offer aid, advice and support to individuals as they attempt to rebuild their lives.