



Te Ope Whakaora

**Social Policy &  
Parliamentary Unit**  
Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

# STATE of the NATION 2026

**Foundations  
of Wellbeing**

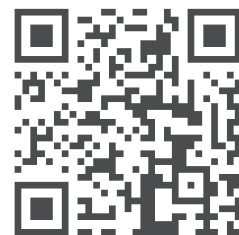
**Poipoia  
te Kākano**

**SUMMARY  
VERSION**

**Paul Barber,  
Ana Ika and  
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**Social Policy  
Analysts**

**February 2026**



The full report is available  
for viewing or download from  
[salvationarmy.org.nz/SOTN2026](https://salvationarmy.org.nz/SOTN2026)

# MIHI WHAKATAU

**He hōnore, he korōria, ki te Atua, he maungārongo  
ki te whenua, he whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa.**

Kia whai korōria ki te Matua, te Tama, te Wairua Tapu, me ōna āhuatanga katoa, kōia tēnei ko te rangi me te whenua, me ōna tino āhutanga katoa kei waenganui. Kei tō tātou Matua nui i te rangi. Tēnei tō whakaminenga e hāpai ana i muri, i ō tāonga katoa i hōmai kia mātou e takahi ana i runga i te mata o te whenua.

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā karangatanga maha o te motu, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

E mihi ana ki ngā poutokomanawa o ngā whare maire a ngā mātua tūpuna, ko ngā whatukura, ngā marae kura, kua toko ki te pō, kua ngaro nei i te tirohanga kanohi. Whakangaro atu nei koutou ki te pūtahitanga o Rēhua.

Tau a rae ki te pō, tītoko ki te ao mārama.

Tātou e waha ake i te kupu, tēnā tātou katoa.

Ki te hunga nānā nei te kaupapa, nānā nei koutou i whaiwhakaaro ake, kia kōwhaiwhaitia ngā pakitara o te whare, ki ngā kōrero, ki ngā whakaaro a Pou Tangata, hei tirohanga mō te oranga tangata, otirā, ki ngā ringa tehe o Te Ope Whakaora e kawē nei i te wāhanga e whai reo ai te hunga e taumaha ana, tēnā koutou.

Kei te puku o te kaupapa nānā nei tātou i whai wāhi ake nei ki te pūrongo nei, a *State of the Nation*.

E whai wāhi ake ai, ki te ia, o ngā kaupapa e here kore nei ki a tātou i roto i Te Ope Whakaora, e ngākau māhaki ana ki te tirohanga Pou tarāwhao o Te Oranga o Te Whānau, o te tangata, o te whānau, ahakoa rā, nō hea anō hoki koe, tēnei te mihi taioreore kia koutou katoa.

Kei ngā ringa tehe o SPPU, tēnā koutou i ā kotou werawera, i ā koutou manawa kōhatu ki ngā

āputa o tēnei ripoata, e whai wāhi ake ai, te reo, te wairua me te whatumanawa o te rawakore me te pōhara, e noho kainga kore ana. Me te wawata nui nei, kia whai wāhi ake ai te pūrongo hei whaikōrero i te pūrākau o te hunga takahi ana i ngā ara o te uaua, hei whai manaakitanga.

**Glory and honour to God on high, peace upon the  
land and goodwill to all people.**

To the esteemed leaders and guardians, to the many voices and to the many peoples of the land, greetings to you all.

We acknowledge our ancestral houses—our ancestors, and those who have journeyed beyond the veil and are now at rest. You have passed from the realm of

darkness into the realm of light. Though you are no longer seen, your legacy endures among us.

To those of us who remain upon this earth, bearing the treasures passed down, we extend our greeting to you all. To those who have guided and shaped this kaupapa, those who have carefully considered how the walls of this house might be adorned with the wisdom and insights of Pou Tangata, offering a lens through which to view human wellbeing and to the dedicated hands within Te Ope Whakaora who ensure that the voices of the burdened and marginalised are heard, we acknowledge and thank you.

At the heart of this kaupapa lies the *State of the Nation* report, in which we now take part. This report engages with the currents of issues that bind us within Te Ope Whakaora. It approaches these matters with humility, drawing upon the framework of Te Ora o Te Whānau as a means of understanding the wellbeing of individuals and whānau, regardless of their background or circumstances. To you all, we extend this sincere and enduring acknowledgement.

To the diligent team within the Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit (SPPU), we recognise your tireless efforts, your resilience and your steadfast commitment in shaping the findings of this report. Through your work, the voices, spirit and lived realities of those experiencing poverty, hardship and homelessness are brought to the fore. It is our deep hope that this report will serve as a meaningful narrative, a powerful testimony to the journeys of those who walk difficult paths and that it will inspire compassion, action and genuine care for their wellbeing.

**Dr Richard Kerr-Bell, Tumū Whakarae Te Tai Aroha—  
National Director Māori Ministry**

## FROM THE DIRECTOR LOOKING TO THE FOUNDATIONS OF WELLBEING

The *State of the Nation* report is a yearly deep dive into a variety of publicly available statistics, and some data from The Salvation Army's own service delivery. This information indicates how well Aotearoa New Zealand is travelling in terms of our social wellbeing.

As we look at the data we aim to be fair and show evidence of progress, even if it is fledgling, as well as highlighting areas where we have remained static or gone backwards.

The areas we explore in this report can be regarded as the foundations of wellbeing. When children and young people are thriving, when people have employment that pays a living wage, welfare that is adequate, healthy kai (food) and a stable home, and

when communities are protected from social hazards, then we have the basis for wellbeing for all.

This year, we take a new approach by drawing on Te Ora o Te Whānau—a wellbeing framework. The framework was originally developed by Pou Tangata, grounded in He Ara Wairoa, and shaped by the late Professor Dr Manuka Henare. This framework asks those who use it to examine data through a lens that connects measurable indicators with deeper structural and behavioural dimensions of wellbeing—dimensions that are foundational to thriving and flourishing communities.

The framework examines four interconnected factors that used together enable analysis of both symptoms and root causes of social distress:

- **Kawa** (intrinsic quality of life)—how deep and important aspects of wellbeing like identity, belonging, aspiration and agency are affected by different supports, constraints and barriers.
- **Tikanga** (structural and societal factors)—how systems enable or constrain access to wellbeing.
- **Ritenga** (behavioural factors)—how people navigate choices within constrained options.
- **Āhuatanga** (observable symptoms)—the measurable indicators and their systemic causes.

We acknowledge that we are learners in this area of weaving hard statistics with a different lens and a holistic understanding of analysis.

Starting to utilise this framework in *State of the Nation 2026* is an expression of The Salvation Army's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the living out of this covenant in policy and practice.

As part of incorporating this framework, this year we have included some case stories from the frontline of The Salvation Army's social services. These stories include whānau (families) who have previously engaged with Salvation Army services and now give back as kaimahi (workers)—in faith-based roles, volunteering or as employees. They include passionate kaimahi who walk alongside whānau, and their stories reveal hope that endures and resilience that persists every day in communities. They offer glimpses into what works, not as fixed solutions, but as lived examples of how whānau and communities can, with resources and support, navigate systems, maintain cultural connections and continue to thrive, even in the face of significant barriers.

In using these stories, we do not want to hide or deny the harsh reality that sits behind many of the statistics in this report. However, in the face of what seem like unrelenting and endemic problems, we do need spaces of hope. Not an unrealistic hope. Not

a hope that suggests that if people just try harder things can change for them. But real hope of real change, where all sectors of society—individuals, whānau, communities, business and government—play their appropriate part.

The statistics tell us that we cannot solve social wellbeing deficits one person at a time. Without change to the underlying drivers of the statistics in this report, as a nation we simply farm these issues, helping some, while at the same time more people come through the funnel of need.

Real wellbeing comes when we work at all levels—societal, community, family and individual—simultaneously and with a consistent focus on he tangata—the people. *State of the Nation 2026* is part of The Salvation Army's contribution to this collective and urgent work.

**Dr Bonnie Robinson MNZM**, *Justice and Research Stream Lead and Director Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit*

## INTRODUCTION

The Salvation Army—Te Ope Whakaora, the Army that brings life— is working every day with communities, whānau and individuals right around the country. In this report, the wellbeing of our nation is assessed by looking at outcomes that impact people and communities. We look at measures across the following areas: Children and Youth, Work and Incomes, Housing, Crime and Punishment, Social Hazards and Māori Wellbeing through Te Ora o Te Whānau.

The aim of this report is to focus on trends and outcomes at a national level to see what they can tell us about the overall state of our nation at the beginning of 2026. The statistics and data are mostly drawn from publicly available sources, and we aim to use the most recently available indicators for the year to 31 December 2025.

The indicators in each section are grouped into themes, and an assessment is made as to whether there is overall improvement (+), no change (NC) or deterioration (–). NA indicates where data is unavailable.

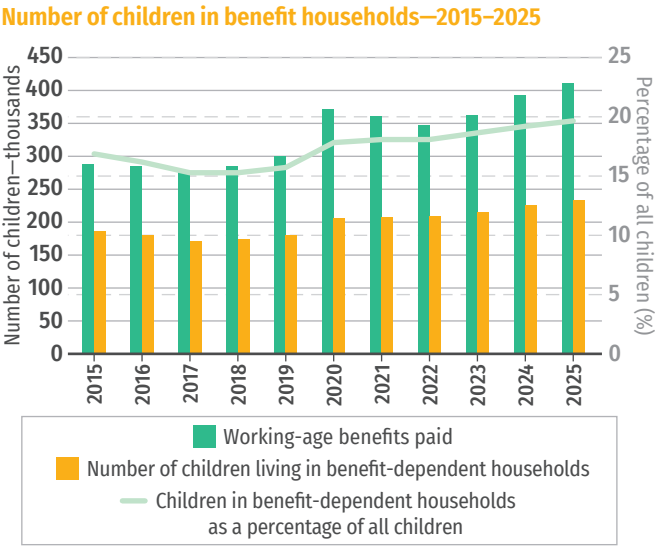
These assessments are intended to promote debate and discussion about our progress towards greater wellbeing.

# CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CATEGORY	RESULT
CHILD POVERTY	-
CHILDREN AT RISK	-
CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE	-
YOUTH OFFENDING	+
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	NC
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT	-
TEENAGE PREGNANCY	NC
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH	NC

Our vision for children and young people in this country is for all of them to grow up free of poverty, safe from harm, with good education and skills for a fulfilled life. The indicators in this section attempt to capture how well we are doing at supporting the country’s 1.2 million children and young people to achieve this.

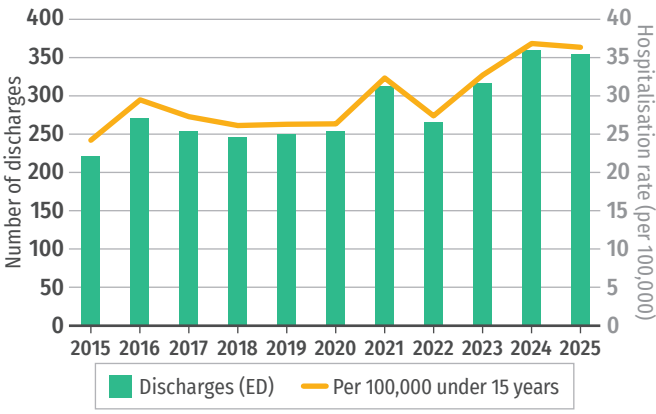
Child poverty rates increased in the year to June 2024 (the most recent figures) and the number of children in material hardship in 2024 was higher than the current (2018) baseline for measuring progress. The number of children in households needing to access main welfare benefits continued to increase in 2025, likely contributing to further hardship for children.



There was a large increase in the number of reports of concern and a large increase in the number of children who were substantiated as victims of abuse and neglect. The number of children in state care however remained unchanged compared with 2024.

Violence against children is high. Violent offending against children continued to increase and the number of children admitted to hospital with injuries as a result of assault, abuse or neglect has increased over the past five years.

Hospitalisations due to assault, abuse or neglect—2015–2025 (June years)



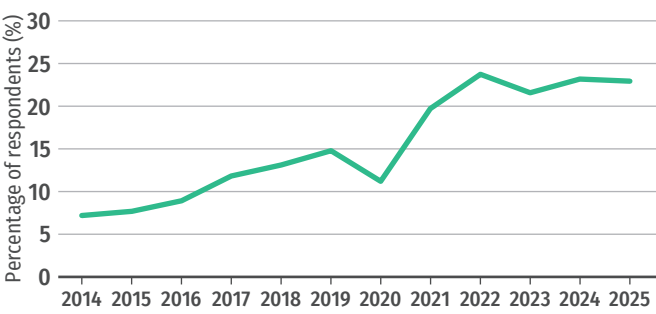
Youth offending decreased slightly in 2025, and remains at substantially lower levels than a decade ago.

Early childhood education enrolments increased slightly in 2024 (most recent data), but the proportion of children taking part in early childhood education prior to starting school remained largely unchanged.

Educational attainment outcomes were mixed; the proportion of students leaving school with less than NCEA Level 1 qualification in 2024 increased, while there was also an increase in the proportion of students attaining university entrance or higher.

The high rate of mental distress among young people continued in 2025 and remains at levels three times higher than a decade ago. Youth suicide rates were little changed in 2025 from 2024.

Percentage of young people aged 15–24 years reporting high or very high psychological distress—2014–2025



# WORK AND INCOMES

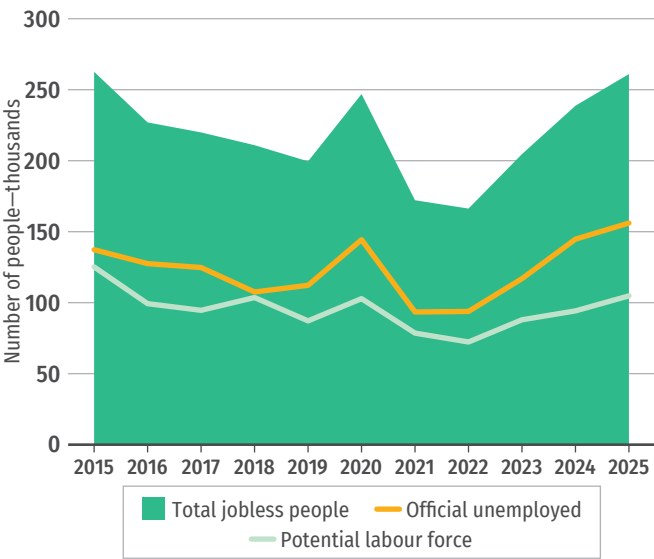
CATEGORY	RESULT
EMPLOYMENT	-
UNEMPLOYMENT	-
INCOMES	NC
INCOME SUPPORT AND WELFARE	-
HARDSHIP AND FOOD SECURITY	-

Ensuring all people have sufficient resources to live with dignity and participate in society should be a

fundamental goal of any country. When people have enough income and access to the essentials then communities and our nation do well. That is the base from which progress needs to be assessed.

Paid employment is the main source of income for most people, but over the two years to September 2025 the number of people in paid employment fell by 35,000 and the number in unemployment was 40,000 higher than September 2023. The working-age population continued to grow despite a record number of people leaving the country, which meant overall net inward migration was well below pre-Covid-19 levels.

Total jobless, unemployed and potential labour force, thousands—2015–2025 (September quarter)

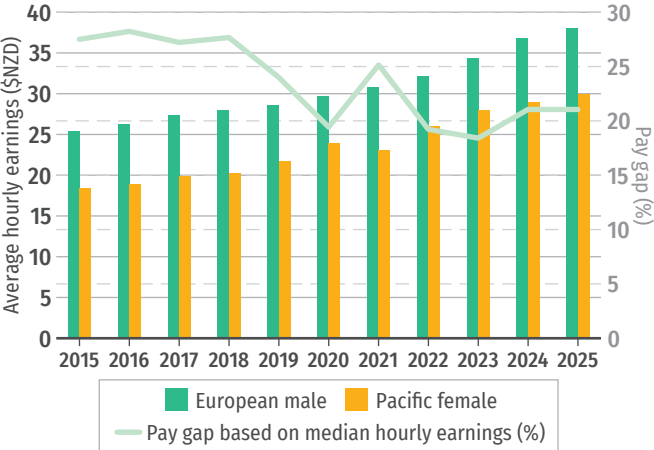


Over a quarter of a million people are wanting work but unable to find it. The unequal burden of rising unemployment continued to be carried by Pacific and Māori workers whose unemployment rates are not only high but also rising faster than others, and disabled workers facing rates more than twice that of non-disabled. The number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) was the highest it had been for 20 years by late 2025.

Since mid-2023, New Zealand has experienced two years of negative real economic growth per capita. Yet in the midst of this economic turbulence, average weekly earnings from employment continued to rise in real terms. The gender pay gap reached a record low of just 5 percent in 2025 as women’s hourly earnings rose on average more than men’s, but inequalities continue to be high for Pacific and Māori female workers.

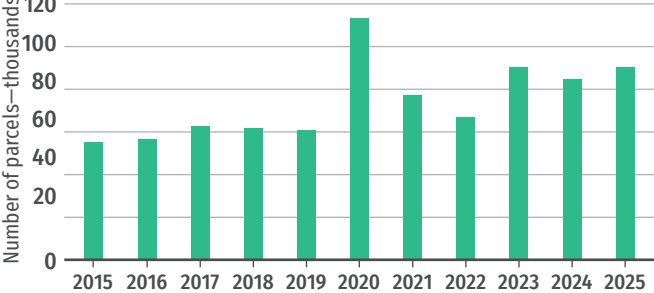
The number of people receiving welfare assistance rose further during 2025, yet tightened access to hardship support through the welfare system meant less support going into households just at the time it is most needed.

European men’s and Pacific women’s median hourly earnings, and Pacific women’s pay gap as a percentage of European men’s—2015–2025



Food insecurity and other indicators of material hardship remained high during 2025 and while household living cost increases eased, lower-income households still faced higher household costs increases compared to high earners. Salvation Army food assistance through food parcels increased with some 90,000 food parcels distributed, 7 percent higher than in 2024 and almost 50 percent more than in 2019 pre-Covid-19.

Number of food parcels provided by The Salvation Army—2015–2025 (December years)



## HOUSING

CATEGORY	RESULT
HOUSING AVAILABILITY	+
HOMELESSNESS	-
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY	NC
HOUSEHOLD HOUSING DEBT	NC

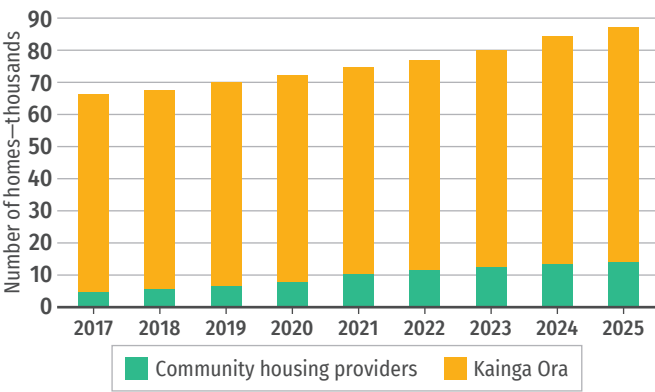
Housing that is warm, dry and affordable is crucial to people’s wellbeing. The right to housing is centred around the goal of housing that is available and affordable for all, and that no-one should be without shelter. During 2025, homelessness continued to increase and housing affordability showed little or no improvement. For those on lower incomes, the housing crisis continues.

The supply of new housing of all types is crucial to ensuring the availability of housing for everyone.



Record low population growth and stabilising housing consent numbers contributed to new housing exceeding population growth during 2025. The increase in overall housing supply in recent years is one factor in the affordability crisis faced by those on low and middle incomes. Other structural factors such as access to social and affordable rental housing and inadequate incomes are also important.

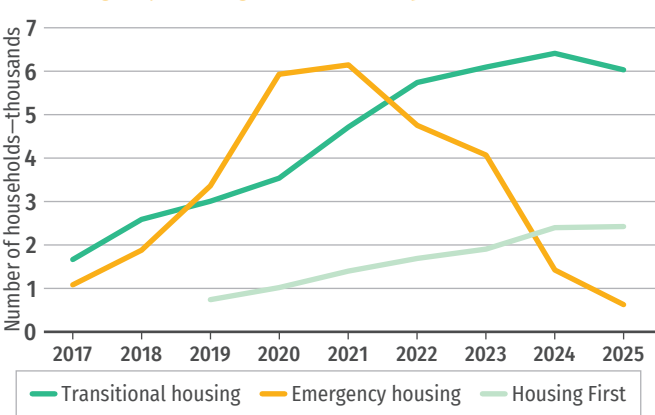
Number of public housing units—2017–2025 (September actual)



The supply of affordable public housing rental units continued to grow in 2025, but at a slower pace than in previous years. The number of people waiting for public housing in 2025 was 2600 fewer than in 2024, but with over 19,000 people with high housing need on the public Housing Register, our country is still short of tens of thousands of social housing places.

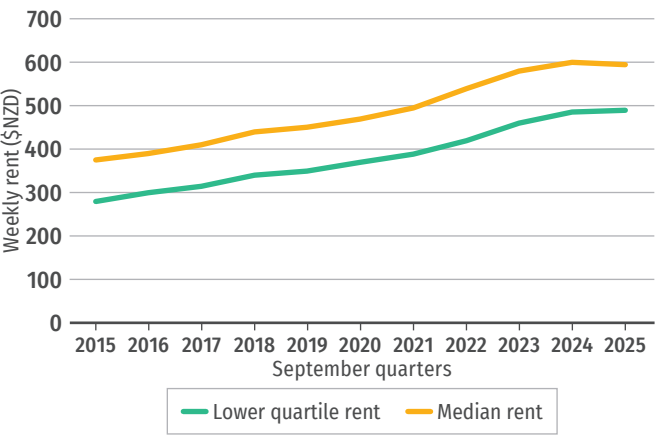
Homelessness continued to increase during 2025, and the rise in street homelessness is one very visible part of this. But most severe housing deprivation is largely hidden from public view, and access to some specialised housing services for people facing homelessness actually reduced during the year.

Number of households in transitional housing, Housing First and emergency housing—2017–2025 (September months)



Most people on lower incomes are renting their homes, and most are renting from private sector landlords. Increases in lower quartile rents in the private rental sector have slowed and rental affordability has not worsened significantly in 2025, but large proportions of lower income renters continue to face unaffordable rents.

Lower quartile and median rents (\$NZD)—2015–2025 (September quarters)



Home ownership is a distant prospect for most people on lower incomes. Median house prices have stabilised over the past few years but remain hugely unaffordable for lower- and middle-income earners. Lower interest rates for mortgage lending and declining personal credit debts countered a small increase in households’ overall housing-related debt.

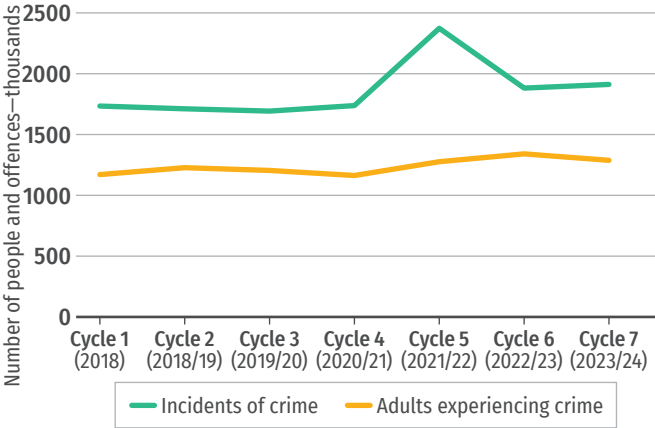
## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

CATEGORY	RESULT
OVERALL CRIME	+
VIOLENT CRIME	+
FAMILY VIOLENCE	-
SENTENCING AND IMPRISONMENT	-
RECIDIVISM	-

In an election year, justice issues attract heightened scrutiny. Understanding how Aotearoa New Zealand measures, experiences and responds to crime—and what this means for victims, whānau and communities—is essential, as these trends affect all New Zealanders. The latest data presents a mixed picture, with some encouraging improvements alongside persistent areas of concern.

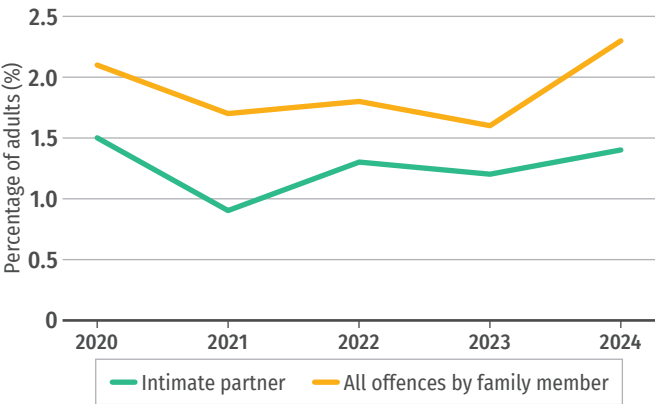
The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) conducted annually by the Ministry of Justice is the most comprehensive source of data on adult victims of crime in New Zealand. The survey captures incidents whether or not they are reported to the police, offering a more thorough picture of crime than police data alone. Cycle 7 of the NZCVS was released in 2025. Cycle 7 shows that 29.5 percent of adults—around 1.28 million people—experienced at least one offence in the past year, a decrease from 31.5 percent (1.34 million) in 2023. However, the total number of offences increased to 1.911 million, around 29,000 more incidents than the previous year. This indicates fewer victims overall, but those who are victimised are experiencing repeat victimisation more often.

NCVS Cycles 1–7 adults experiencing crime and the number of offences in the past 12 months—2018–2024 (thousands)

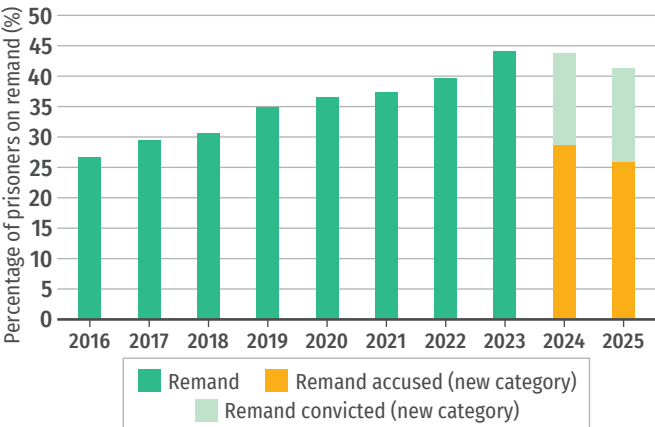


In 2024, the NZCVS estimated that 2.3 percent of adults (around 100,000 people) experienced family violence, breaking three years of stability and marking the highest rate since at least 2018. Intimate partner violence (IPV) accounted for 1.4 percent (approximately 61,000 individuals), with 0.9 percent involving other family or whānau members. While rates had declined steadily from 2.1 percent in 2020 to 1.6 percent in 2023, the increase in 2024 signals a concerning shift.

NZCVS percentage of adults experiencing at least one family violence offence—2020–2024



Percentage of prison population on remand as at June 30—2016–2025



The figure above shows the sustained rise in the proportion of prisoners held on remand over the

past decade. Prisons were originally designed for a remand population of around 15 percent, yet this share has more than doubled, peaking at 44 percent in 2023 before easing to 41.3 percent in 2025. From 2024, remand data is split into remand accused (those held before conviction) and remand convicted (those found guilty or who have pled guilty but are awaiting sentencing). In 2025, 25.9 percent of the prison population were remand accused and 15.4 percent were remand convicted, indicating that both pre-trial and post-conviction delays are contributing to the elevated remand levels. These trends reflect a combination of factors, including legislative changes such as the reverse onus for bail, strengthened enforcement through electronic monitoring and improved data capture, and longer court timeframes that increase opportunities for bail breaches. Although more than 80 percent of people charged with imprisonable offences are released on bail, the growing remand population highlights a delicate balance between public safety and system pressures, as prolonged periods on remand can disrupt employment, housing and family connections, compounding social and economic harm for those awaiting trial or sentencing.

## SOCIAL HAZARDS

CATEGORY	RESULT
ALCOHOL	+
ILLICIT DRUGS	+
GAMBLING HARM	NC
PROBLEM DEBT AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP	-

Social hazards continue to present persistent and evolving challenges across alcohol use, illicit drug use, gambling and problem debt in New Zealand. While several indicators show little change in the past year, longer-term trends reveal gradual improvement in some areas alongside deepening harm in others.

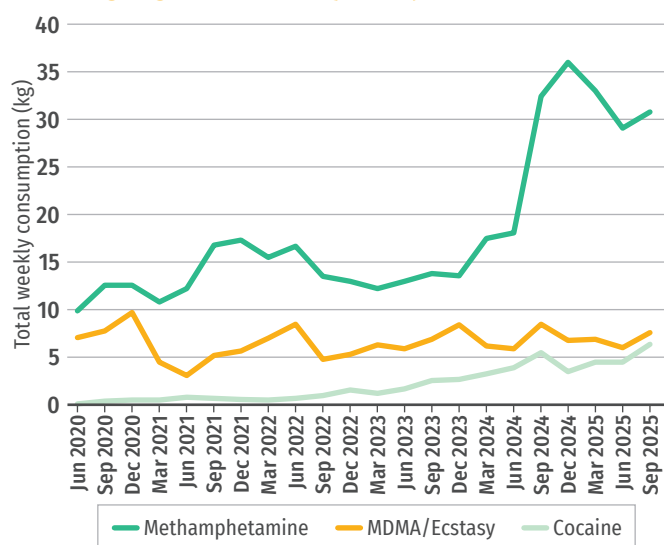
The weekly consumption of illicit drugs graph (next page) shows national illicit-drug consumption trends from the New Zealand Police’s National Drugs in Wastewater Testing Programme for methamphetamine, MDMA and cocaine between June 2020 and September 2025. Results for the quarter ending June 2025 indicate sustained high consumption across all three drugs, following sharp increases through late 2024.

Methamphetamine use was relatively stable from 2020 to mid-2023 (12–17 kg/week) before rising steeply in late 2024, peaking at 36 kg/week in December 2024. Although levels eased to 33 kg/week

in March 2025 and 29.1 kg/week in June 2025, they rose again to 30.8 kg/week by September 2025. These figures remain more than double the 2022–2023 average of around 13 kg/week.

MDMA consumption remained steady at 5–6 kg/week from 2020 to mid-2023, spiked to 8.5 kg/week in September 2024, then settled back to around 6–7 kg/week through 2025, indicating stable but persistent use. Cocaine, by contrast, shows the fastest growth—rising from under 1 kg/week in 2020 to 2.7 kg/week by late 2023, climbing to 5.5 kg/week in September 2024 and reaching a new high of 6.4 kg/week in September 2025.

**Estimates of average total weekly consumption of selected illicit drugs (kgs)—2020–2025 (quarterly)**

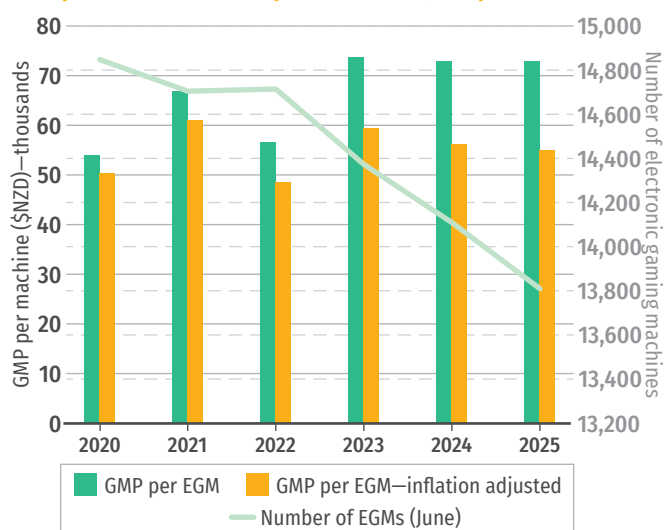


New Zealanders lost \$2.79 billion to gambling in the year to June 2024—up 1.1 percent from 2023 and 33.5 percent over the decade. Gaming machines outside casinos accounted for the largest share at \$1.04 billion. Electronic gambling machines (EGMs) remain New Zealand’s largest source of gambling losses, even as machine numbers continue to fall under sinking-lid policies. By 2025, there were 13,810 EGMs nationwide—299 fewer than in 2024 (next column, first graph). Despite this decline, annual spending per machine remains high: gaming machine profits (GMP) per EGM was \$72,967 in 2025, similar to 2024 levels. When adjusted for inflation, average losses per machine fell to \$54,987. To put this in perspective, each EGM generates more income in a year than a full-time minimum-wage worker earns annually—which is approximately \$48,880. This pattern shows that although EGM numbers are decreasing, the remaining machines continue to generate substantial gambling losses.

Arrears represent the share of borrowers falling behind on repayments across mortgages, credit cards, personal loans and other consumer credit. In 2025, arrears remained persistently high, indicating

continued financial stress despite stable overall debt levels. After peaking at 13.1 percent in early 2024, the arrears rate eased only marginally, fluctuating between 12 percent and 12.7 percent throughout 2025. By September 2025, arrears sat at 12 percent, still well above pre-pandemic norms. This sustained elevation may reflect pressures such as high interest rates, elevated living costs and slow wage growth, all of which can reduce disposable incomes and make it harder for households to keep up with repayments. However, the drivers of arrears are often more complex, involving a wider mix of financial, social and personal factors that affect families differently.

**Number of electronic gaming machines in New Zealand and GMP per machine annually—2020–2025 (June years)**



**Centrix: percentage of consumer arrears—2020–2025 (quarterly)**



These social hazards present a complex and uneven landscape, with some measures improving gradually over time and others showing persistent or emerging pressures. Together, these trends reflect interconnected challenges that continue to evolve and require coordinated policy responses to make a difference.



## MĀORI WELLBEING

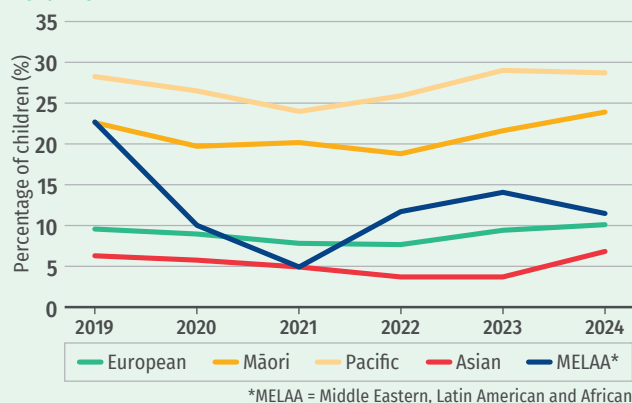
Hauora is essential to wellbeing, enabling tangata whenua and all communities in Aotearoa to thrive and flourish. Genuine Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership with whānau, hapū and iwi creates positive outcomes where tangata whenua prosper. What works for Māori works for everyone; when we apply this same approach with vulnerable communities, community-led solutions emerge that create meaningful change and positive impacts for all.

When communities thrive, wellbeing and hauora strengthen, leading to better outcomes for everyone.

### KAWA—INTRINSIC QUALITY OF LIFE

Hauora and wellbeing outcomes for tangata whenua are significantly affected when identity, belonging and dignity are disrupted.

Percentage of children in material hardship by ethnicity—2019–2024



Early disadvantage, such as the rate of tamariki living in material hardship—24 percent, almost twice that for all children—sets a trajectory that affects hauora and wellbeing throughout life. Inadequate and insecure income limits whānau ability to maintain cultural practices that ground Māori identity, which can inhibit their ability to exercise tino rangatiratanga in everyday decision-making.

Housing instability removes the anchor that enables whānau to maintain cultural ties to whenua, hapū and iwi. Without a secure home or knowing where you are from, whakapapa connections become strained or lost, eroding identity and belonging.

For tamariki and rangatahi, rising psychological distress and material hardship undermine self-worth and hope. Disconnection from whānau, culture and te reo (language) compounds these pressures, weakening their intrinsic sense of who they are and where they belong.

In the justice system, high rates of victimisation and incarceration disrupt identity not only for individuals but for entire whānau, fracturing relationships across generations. Social hazards such as alcohol, drug harm, gambling and debt impose additional strains, diminishing dignity and hope while creating cycles of whakamā and isolation that ripple across whānau and communities.

Overall, identity, dignity and belonging sit at the heart of wellbeing for tangata whenua. When these core foundations become weakened through structural and systemic barriers hauora declines, resulting in disproportionate impacts and overrepresentation in negative statistics. When they are upheld and supported, whānau and communities do better and are able to thrive and flourish.

### TIKANGA—STRUCTURAL AND SOCIETAL FACTORS

Tikanga examines structural and systemic settings that can either enable or constrain wellbeing. The patterns across the data show that structural settings continue to produce inequitable outcomes for tangata whenua and vulnerable communities.

For tamariki and rangatahi, overrepresentation in state care reflects systemic failures rather than whānau shortcomings. Child protection and welfare systems respond to harm rather than addressing the underlying causes of poverty and material hardship that create disadvantage and risk.

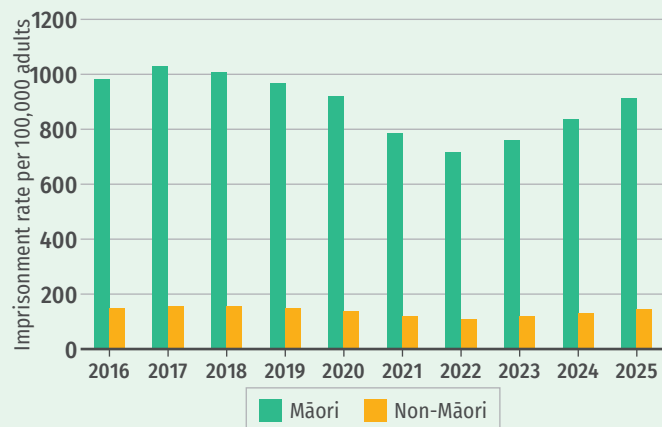
Inequitable access to education and training, reliance on government benefit support and policies that privilege the individual over collective wellbeing limit economic participation for many tangata whenua.

In housing, limited public supply, reliance on private markets and barriers to collective ownership models or papakāinga constrain pathways that align with Māori aspirations. These settings limit stability, disrupt connections to whenua, hapū and iwi and reduce the ability of whānau to plan for the future.

Within the justice system, Māori remain disproportionately represented due to the enduring impacts of colonisation, institutional bias and limited access to culturally grounded prevention and rehabilitation. High remand and re-imprisonment rates sustain cycles that disconnect people from identity, whānau and opportunity.

Social hazards allow harm to cluster in high-deprivation communities through licensing, pricing, enforcement and debt structures that profit from vulnerability. This concentrates alcohol and drug harm, gambling losses and financial stress where communities are least able to absorb them.

#### Imprisonment rates per 100,000 for adult population (18 years old and over)—2016–2025



Overall, structural settings determine whether whānau can access the conditions needed for wellbeing. When systems operate without authentic Te Tiriti partnership, inequities deepen and hauora declines. However, authentic partnership, tikanga-based approaches and Māori-led solutions help reduce barriers and strengthen the conditions that support hauora, enabling whānau and communities to thrive and flourish.

#### RITENGA—BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS

Ritenga focuses on how people navigate choices within constrained environments and how these choices affect hauora and wellbeing. The behavioural patterns observed across the data reflect responses grounded in the necessity to survive. They signal systems under strain rather than any lack of capability, motivation or willingness on the part of whānau and vulnerable communities.

When it comes to work and incomes, this can look like accepting insecure or low paid employment, working multiple jobs or relying on government welfare benefit support to meet basic needs. Within housing, these constrained choices can take the form of overcrowding, frequent moves or leaving their home communities and whānau, hapū and iwi ties, in search of affordability and stability.

In the justice system, decisions such as offending, breaching conditions or disengaging from services are shaped by fear, trauma, institutional mistrust, whānau obligations and limited access to kaupapa Māori support. For whānau navigating social hazards, behaviours such as substance misuse, gambling or reliance on high-cost credit are often coping

strategies in environments that offer few viable alternatives. These behaviours are not evidence of poor values or lack of motivation, instead they reflect the limited range of choices available within current systems and structures.

Overall, Ritenga reveals how whānau continually adapt to conditions that restrict their options. Understanding these behaviours as practical, relational and survival-driven responses strengthens our ability to interpret the data in ways that recognise capability rather than deficit-based narratives. As an example, the rate of hazardous drinking for Māori in 2025 has reduced by 9.5 percentage points over the past five years (from 36.5 percent in 2020 to 27 percent in 2025), which signals a sustained shift in patterns of alcohol consumption.

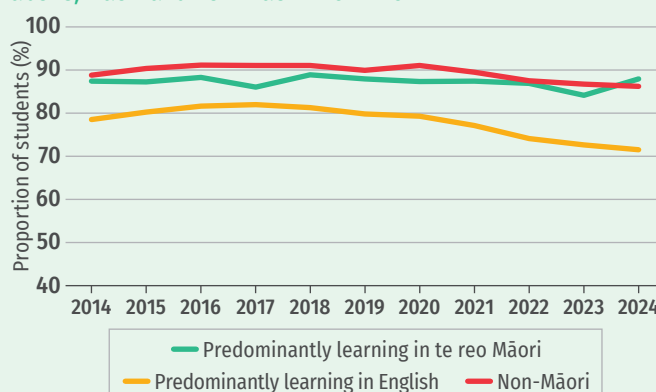
When whānau have access to culturally grounded support, consistent relationships and meaningful opportunities, their choices expand and pathways to hauora wellbeing become far more attainable. However, this does not apply to forms of harm such as family or sexual violence, which emerge from different relational and structural dynamics.

#### ĀHUATANGA—OBSERVABLE SYMPTOMS

Āhuatanga draws together the visible outcomes, revealing how systemic and structural settings are seen in the lived experiences of some whānau. These visual symptoms show where systems are supporting hauora and wellbeing, and where they are falling short.

The data presents a mixed landscape. There are signs of progress, including reduction in youth offending, increase in public housing supply and stabilising alcohol availability. Yet persistent pressures remain, such as ongoing poverty and material hardship, economic strain, housing instability, continued overrepresentation of Māori in the criminal justice system and concentrated social hazard harm. These visible patterns reflect the cumulative impacts of systems that have not consistently upheld hauora and wellbeing.

#### Percentage of students leaving school with NCEA Level 1 or above, Māori and non-Māori—2014–2024



The positive impacts of kaupapa Māori approaches are also evident. Rangatahi at school who are learning predominantly in te reo Māori have similar achievement levels to non-Māori students. Where identity is strengthened, whānau connections restored and holistic support provided, observable harm reduces. Community-led and culturally grounded responses demonstrate that different outcomes are possible when systems focus on hauora and wellbeing.

These outcomes suggest that when systems and structures strengthen identity, connection and collective hauora, whānau are better positioned to thrive and flourish.

## SUMMING UP THE FRAMEWORK'S FINDINGS

The Te Ora o te Whānau framework, applied to the *State of the Nation* data shows that wellbeing is shaped not only by individual circumstances but also by the systems whānau and vulnerable communities must navigate. There is progress being made, but persistent negative outcomes show that these systems are not consistently upholding hauora and wellbeing, the conditions needed to thrive and flourish.

The evidence invites us to think differently about vulnerability and to recognise the hope and resilience already present in communities. They highlight the importance of care for tamariki and rangatahi that is grounded in Te Tiriti and protects identity and connection; of income supports and employment conditions that uphold dignity and participation; of housing that provides stability and strengthens whakapapa ties; of justice responses that heal and restore rather than disconnect; and of approaches to social hazards that prioritise prevention and community-led solutions over punitive or profit-driven settings. This is not a set of recommendations, but a reminder that outcomes reflect the design of our systems.

These insights remind us that whānau and vulnerable communities already carry strength, capability and hope; the challenge is to re-shape systems so that they create better conditions for vulnerable communities to thrive and flourish.



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