



Te Ope Whakaora

**Social Policy &
Parliamentary Unit**
20 years working to eradicate poverty in New Zealand

STATE of the NATION 2025

**Kai, Kāinga,
Whānau**

**The Basics—Food,
a Home, Family**

**SUMMARY
VERSION**

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The full report is available
for viewing or download from
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FROM THE DIRECTOR

This is our 18th *State of the Nation* report, and it is therefore timely to remind ourselves of their purpose. These reports focus on the heart of any society—people—he tangata, he tangata, he tangata. When all people have what they require to meet essential needs, fulfil their potential and contribute, we have a society that is healthy. While we frequently hear about consumers price index (CPI), interest rates, gross domestic product (GDP) and other economic measures, there is less coverage about how people are doing. *State of the Nation* redresses this imbalance by researching trends across a range of issues that impact on the wellbeing of individuals and whānau. The Salvation Army sees more than 135,000 vulnerable people through our services every year, and this report is particularly concerned with how those people's needs are being met in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This year our theme focuses on three things we know people need to live well—kai, kainga and whānau. When people have food security and a warm, dry, affordable home, then they have the basis for nurturing a healthy family and positive relationships.

In measuring our progress, we aim to be fair and actively look for evidence of progress. This year, we can find few areas of improvement and, in many cases, indicators have worsened, making it harder for people to have what they need in terms of kai, kainga and whānau. Unemployment is rising, and as of December 2024 we have 400,000 people needing welfare support—the highest since the 1990s. Food insecurity amongst families with children has risen sharply, and half of all Pacific children go without food often or sometimes. While there has been a good increase in the number of social housing units available, that building programme is reducing, and rent for private rentals continues to be unaffordable for many on low incomes. Our prison population has grown, and remains high compared to other more economically developed countries (MEDC), and while crime overall has declined, violent crime is increasing.

The data shows that Māori continue to experience inequities in terms of life outcomes. More than one in four Māori whānau report that their family is doing badly or not well, higher than in 2018. Māori are also twice as likely to be the victim of a violent crime and continue to be over-represented in the prison population, with a 6.8 percent higher rate of imprisonment than non-Māori. Kai, kainga and whānau are getting more difficult for Māori.

Where there are positive signs for Māori, this is often in association with Māori-led initiatives that focus on meeting Māori needs and improving equity of access to services and support. In areas such as reducing

the need for children to be in care and improving educational outcomes, Māori-led initiatives show positive results. However, recent survey data shows that Māori are increasingly uncertain about their ability to express and uphold their identify as Māori—possibly in response to the public debates about Te Tiriti and the funding of Māori-specific services.

In the face of these largely negative trends, The Salvation Army asks Aotearoa to do better for people. As a nation we need to consider:

- How do we better tackle child poverty in the short term, recognising that childhood experience is a determinant for later life, and so our children in poverty need help now?
- Given the trend in unemployment and the need for welfare, how do we best work with those on benefits in a way that is mana enhancing?
- How can the community, businesses and government work together to ensure we increase our stock of affordable housing?
- Can we commit to dealing with the underlying causes of crime, and to improving recidivism rates through the right support and interventions?
- Can we uphold Te Tiriti in practical ways, through supporting Māori-led initiatives that work appropriately with Māori whānau and communities?

Given the direction our social measures are taking, we urgently need to draw on experts, research and lived experience about what works to create a society where people flourish. We cannot wish these issues away or wait for the right time in an economic cycle.

As we start another year, let us focus on our people, and work to ensure that we will see progress across kai, kainga and whānau.

Dr Bonnie Robinson

Director—The Salvation Army 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 and Social Hazards. We also assess all these areas through a specific focus on outcomes for Māori, using He Ara Waiora wellbeing framework.

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 2025. 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 2024.

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 & YOUTH

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

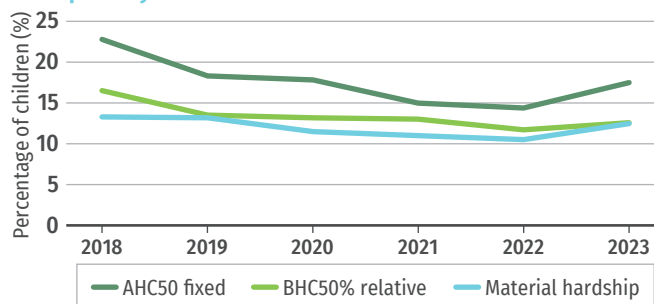
There are around 1.2 million children and young people under 18 years old in this country, and our vision for all of them is to grow up free of poverty, safe from harm, with a good education and skills for a fulfilled life. The indicators in this section attempt to capture how well we are doing as a nation towards this goal. Concerningly, in the past year most of the indicators monitored show worsening or unchanged outcomes for children and youth in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Child poverty rates increased in the year to June 2023 (the most recent figures) and the growing number of children in households needing to access main welfare benefits in 2024 means even more children are at risk of living in material hardship and poverty.

Violence against children is increasing. The number of children admitted to hospital with injuries because of assault, abuse or neglect increased sharply in 2024 to the highest number in at least a decade. Violent offending against children also continued to increase and was at levels much higher than five years ago. The number of children who are victims of abuse and neglect rose in 2024, although it is still much lower than five years ago. The number of children going into state care increased for the first time in some

years, even as the total number of children in care continued to reduce.

Child poverty rate selected indicators—2018–2023



AHC: household income after housing costs.

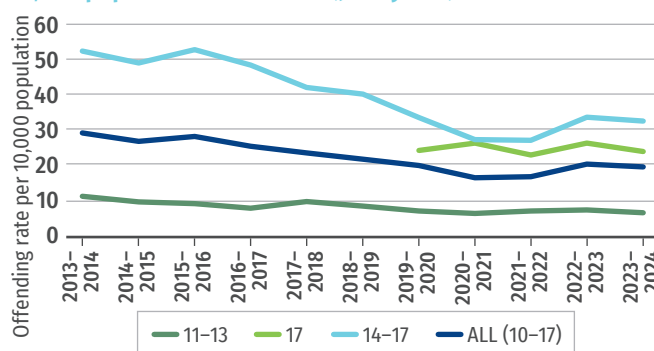
BHC: household income before housing costs.

MOVING LINE/RELATIVE (REL): compares incomes with a contemporary equivalised median income.

FIXED: a measure comparing current incomes with a previous (2018) baseline median. Useful during recessions.

The numbers—eg, **AHC50**—refer to the percentage of the equivalised median income considered to be the 'poverty line'. The lower the percentage, the more severe the poverty being measured.

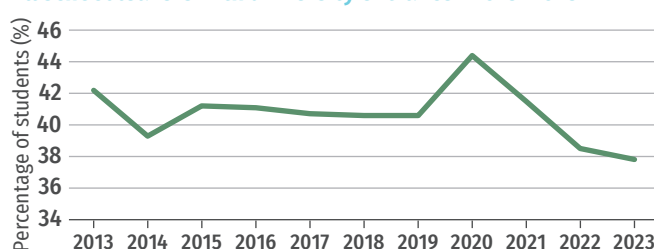
Child and youth serious and persistent offending rate per 10,000 population—2013–2024 (June years)



Youth offending is very much in the limelight and a prominent target of current government policy. The youth offending rate decreased slightly in 2024 after an increase in the previous year, and offending rates are much lower than a decade ago.

Increases in the number of children taking part in early childhood education (ECE) prior to starting school was a positive sign; ECE enrolments are recovering from the large declines resulting from the social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

All school leavers with university entrance—2013–2023



Educational achievement outcomes worsened in 2023, with both an increase in students leaving school with less than NCEA Level 1 qualification and a decrease in higher achievement as fewer young people attained university entrance or higher.

Mental health pressures on young people remained high in 2024, with around one-quarter of young adults experiencing high levels of mental distress.

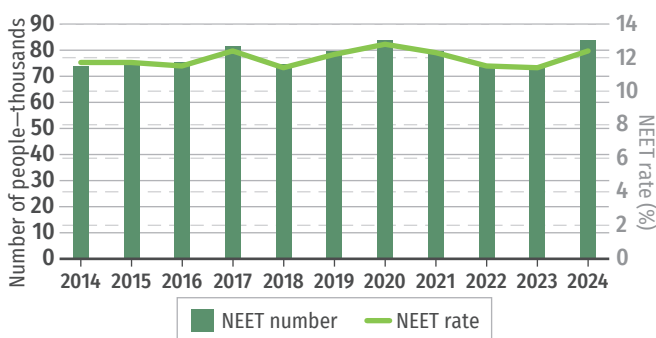
WORK & INCOMES

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

A country where everyone can have enough income and the necessities to live with dignity and freedom and able to participate and contribute to their communities is the vision that underpins this section. The goal is kotahitanga (unity), that suggests we are stronger together and, when times are tough, those who have more share from their bounty for the good of all.

The economic downturn that has shaped most of the past two years deepened during 2024, sharpening social impacts which brought more pain to communities. In inflation-adjusted terms the share per person of the total economy declined, and the overall fall in economic growth in the six months to September 2024 saw the largest decline since 1991 (excluding the Covid-19 period). Strong net inward migration counteracted the record level of New Zealand citizens leaving the country.

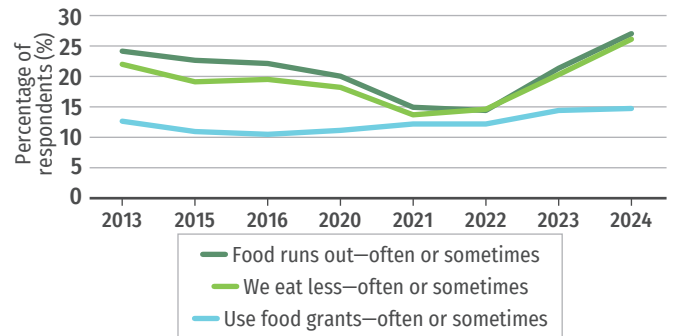
Number of young people (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET)—2014–2024 (September years)



Paid-employment growth stalled during 2024, and the unemployment rate continued to rise steadily throughout the year. The unequal burden of this increase continues to be on Pacific, Māori and disabled people who face unemployment rates two to three times higher than other population groups.

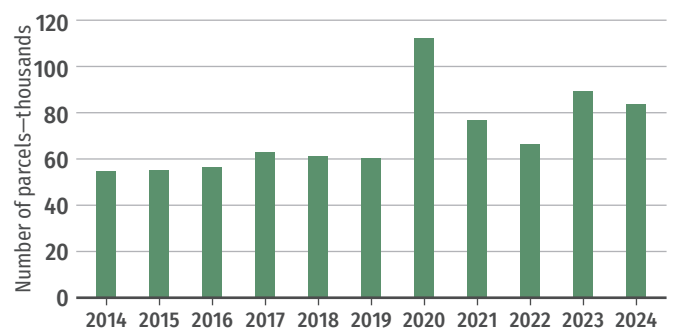
The number of younger people not in employment, education or training (NEET) increased by over 9000 to more than 83,000 in September, close to the Covid-19 high in 2020.

Food security indicators, households with children aged under 15—2013–2024



Food insecurity worsened sharply again in 2024, with the proportion of households with children reporting some level of food insecurity, reaching the highest level in over a decade. More than one-half of Pacific children face food insecurity. Household living cost increases eased somewhat as the inflation rate decreased, but this was not enough to ease the pressures on families. Salvation Army services continued to see levels of need for food support that are 40 percent higher than pre-Covid-19, distributing more than 84,000 food parcels during 2024.

Number of food parcels provided by The Salvation Army—2014–2024 (December years)



The number of people receiving income support reached a record high at over 400,000 at the same time as the government reduced the spending on hardship support payments for food and housing, by tightening criteria for accessing that support and an increasing use of sanctions.

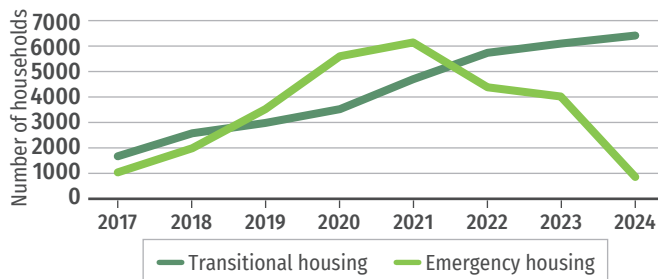
Wages continued to rise in 2024, with the average wage just keeping ahead of inflation, although the gender pay gap barely changed. Other indicators of wage inequality worsened in 2024, following the increase in income inequality in the June 2023 year (most recent figures).

HOUSING

CATEGORY	RESULT
HOUSING AVAILABILITY	NC
HOUSING AFFORDABILITY	-
HOUSEHOLD DEBT	NC

Increasing homelessness during the past year dominated the experience of the communities where The Salvation Army is working. Visible street homelessness is the proverbial ‘tip of the iceberg’ for the much larger issue of severe housing deprivation in this country. Living in a home that is healthy and affordable is fundamental to the dignity and good life outcomes for every person in this country. Progress must be measured against this goal to end homelessness and ensure affordable housing for all.

Number of households in transitional housing and emergency housing—2017–2024 (October years)



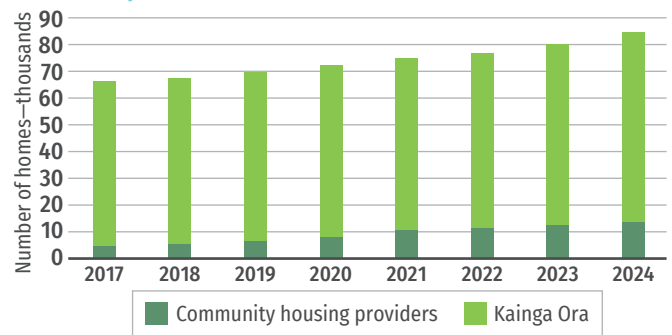
The number of people in emergency housing declined dramatically by nearly 80 percent during 2024 to its lowest number in at least eight years, as the government tightened criteria for access to this kind of housing support. While many of those previously in emergency housing were able to be supported into social housing and even private rentals, the housing situation for around one-fifth of those leaving emergency housing in 2024 is unknown.

Housing unaffordability continues to impact Pacific and Māori disproportionately. Pacific peoples in Aotearoa face the highest rental affordability stresses and have the lowest home ownership rates of our country’s large ethnic groups.

The year to September 2024 saw the largest increase in the total supply of public housing provided by community housing and Kainga Ora in many years. This helped to reduce the number of people waiting to be housed on the public Housing Register to the lowest level since 2020, but other factors such as people exiting the register for other reasons than being housed have also contributed to the reduction.

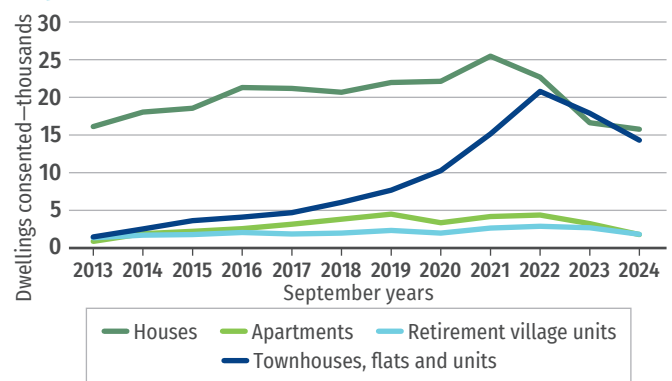
Rental affordability worsened for those renting in the private rental sector, with rents in lower-income communities continuing to increase faster than inflation and average wage growth over the past decade.

Number of public homes—2017–2024



The number of building consents declined for the second year in a row following the 50-year high in 2021. But population growth continues to be strong, and there was an estimated shortfall of over 4000 in the number of housing consents required to provide enough housing to meet population growth (let alone reduce the housing shortage).

Consents by dwelling type nationally—2013–2024 (September 2024)



The median house price in 2024 remained largely around the same level as in 2023, still well above the prices pre-Covid-19 in 2019, meaning little improvement in the affordability of housing to buy for those on low incomes. Total average debt per household, including housing as well as consumer and credit card debt, remained around the same as in 2023. When adjusted for inflation, average housing debt per household is back down below 2019 levels and consumer credit debt, 36 percent lower than five years ago.

Too little progress has been made this year and the crisis of housing unaffordability remains intense for people on lower incomes.

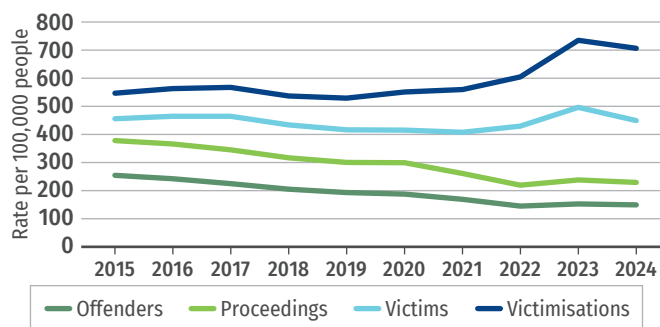
CRIME & PUNISHMENT

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

The New Zealand criminal justice system involves multiple agencies working together to improve safety and deliver accessible justice for victims and hold offenders accountable. However, only 28 percent of crimes are reported to the police, reflecting an incomplete picture of the criminal landscape. According to the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey (NZCVS) Cycle 6, 32 percent of adults experienced at least 1.8 million offences in 2022/23 this estimate would include reported and unreported crime. For crimes reported to the police in the past year, the rate of alleged offenders being charged declined by 2 percent, while proceedings dropped by 3.5 percent. This continues a decade-long trend, with arrests and charges decreasing by 41.2 percent and 39.3 percent, respectively, since 2015.

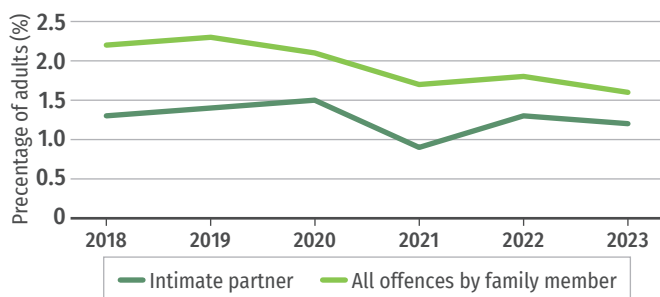
Victimisation rates fell by 3.9 percent—the first decline since 2019—but remain 29 percent higher than in 2015, largely due to increased awareness and improved reporting of underreported crimes like family harm. There were 207,846 victims reported to police, which is a decline of 9.5 percent in the past year.

Summary of police proceedings and reports of victimisation per 100,000 people—2015–2024 (June years)



The NZCVS showed that in 2023, an estimated 1.6 percent of the adult population (about 70,000 people) experienced one or more family offences. Of these, 1.2 percent, were victimised by intimate partners, while 0.5 percent were harmed by other family members, as shown below. This is the lowest recorded family-violence victimisation rate in at least six NZCVS cycles.

NZCVS—percentage of adults experiencing at least one family violence offence—2018–2023



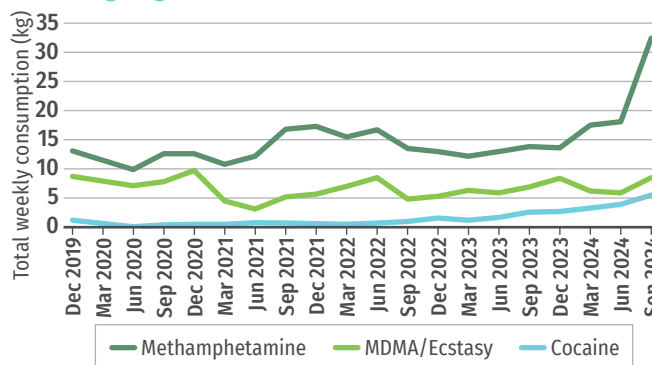
The number of people in prison continued to grow during the year, reaching almost 10,000 in late 2024; recidivism rates also increased.

SOCIAL HAZARDS

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

The ‘Social Hazards’ section monitors four critical areas: alcohol use, illicit drug use and convictions, gambling and problem debt. While most actions associated with these areas are legal, they are heavily regulated; others, like illicit drug use, remain illegal. All four areas have the potential to create significant harm. Alcohol, drugs and gambling have addictive elements that can profoundly impact individuals, their whānau and wider communities. Similarly, problem debt can impose financial and emotional strain, exacerbating family stress and hardship.

Estimates of average total weekly consumption of selected illicit drugs (kgs)—2019–2024

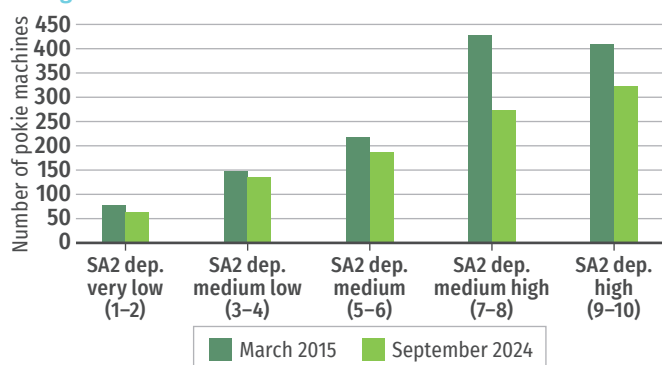


The New Zealand Police Wastewater Drug Testing Programme recorded a sharp increase in methamphetamine, MDMA and cocaine use in quarter ending September 2024, signalling a rise in illicit drug-related harm nationwide. Methamphetamine remains the most harmful drug, despite only 1.3 percent of the population using it. In September 2024, weekly methamphetamine use doubled to 32.4 kg, causing \$34 million in social harm. MDMA rose to 8.5 kg weekly (a 22% increase), costing \$1.8 million, while cocaine reached 5.5 kg weekly (an 86% increase), with \$2.1 million in harm costs per week. Cannabis remains the most-used illicit drug (15.6% of adults), but is not measured through wastewater testing.

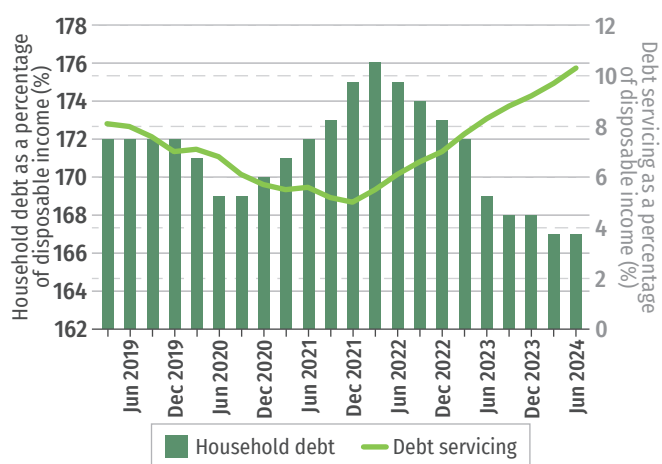
Electronic gambling machine venue numbers decreased across all deprivation levels, with the most significant declines in medium-high and high deprivation areas—36.3 percent (427 to 272) and 21.1 percent (408 to 322), respectively—reflecting the impact of the sinking lid policy, particularly in areas with high deprivation which have a high density of EGM venues. Despite these reductions, over 60 percent of venues remain in high deprivation areas,

with each EGM causing an average annual loss of \$18,732 in 2024 (up from \$16,310 in 2019), underscoring the ongoing challenge of gambling-related harm in vulnerable communities.

Location and number of EGM venues by deprivation rating—2015 and 2024



Household debt and servicing as a percentage of disposable income—2019–2024



Household debt, which includes mortgages, consumer loans and student loans, peaked at 176 percent of disposable income in early 2022 before declining to 167 percent by mid-2024, driven initially by strong housing market growth, low interest rates and borrowing facilitated by the Reserve Bank’s low official cash rate (OCR). From 2022 onwards, regulatory changes, stricter loan-to-value ratio (LVR) restrictions, cooling property prices and rising interest rates reduced new borrowing and encouraged repayment. In contrast, debt servicing costs fell from 8.1 percent of disposable income in early 2019 to 5 percent by late 2021, but surged to 10.3 percent by mid-2024. This was driven by rapidly rising interest rates, as the OCR increased to combat inflation, alongside reduced purchasing power of disposable income due to inflation and higher living costs, despite the overall decline in debt levels.

MĀORI WELLBEING

Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been prominent across social and political debates during the past year. What is

most puzzling about much of the discourse are the claims that Māori are somehow given unfair advantage or ‘privileges’ simply by identifying as Māori.

This is a complete misrepresentation of the experience of Māori in this land today. Ongoing colonisation, including systemic racism and monocultural institutional assumptions (often invisible to Pākehā perceptions), contribute to inequities of key outcomes, such as life expectancy.

Māori leadership and Māori-led initiatives increase equity, when they are not prevented from doing so. For example, the significant reduction in Māori children in care coincided with hapū, iwi and other Māori strategic partnerships with Oranga Tamariki under section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act; and, students at kura kaupapa have educational attainment parity on some measures.

The experience of growing food hardship, increasing homelessness and housing unaffordability, and the pressures on whānau headline the stresses on fundamental elements of wellbeing for Māori.

More than one in four whānau (27.8%) report that their family is doing badly or not well, higher than in 2018 (25%). Māori report a reduction in the proportion of those able to speak te reo Māori at least fairly well or better. Alongside this is the large decline in the proportion of Māori who feel it is easy to express their identity from 84 percent in 2019 to 75 percent in 2023.

Improving outcomes were few. Average weekly personal incomes rose by 5.5 percent, keeping marginally ahead of inflation. As more social housing became available during the year, the number of Māori waiting for social housing declined significantly.

Meaningful signs of reduction in the often huge disparities experienced by Māori are largely absent this year. Early childhood education and illicit drug offending showed both modest improvement in outcomes and improved equity. However, progress made in previous years is being eroded in several outcome areas. Underlining the financial and economic pressures were the increases in unemployment and youth unemployment in 2024, as well as more Māori receiving welfare support. The imprisonment rate is rising again, which affects Māori disproportionately. This is likely related to the reimprisonment rate, which is increasing again after several years of reductions. The hazardous drinking rate has been trending down but rose in 2024.

The set of wellbeing outcome measures covered in this report cannot fully represent all aspects of the wellbeing aspired to by whānau, hapū and iwi in

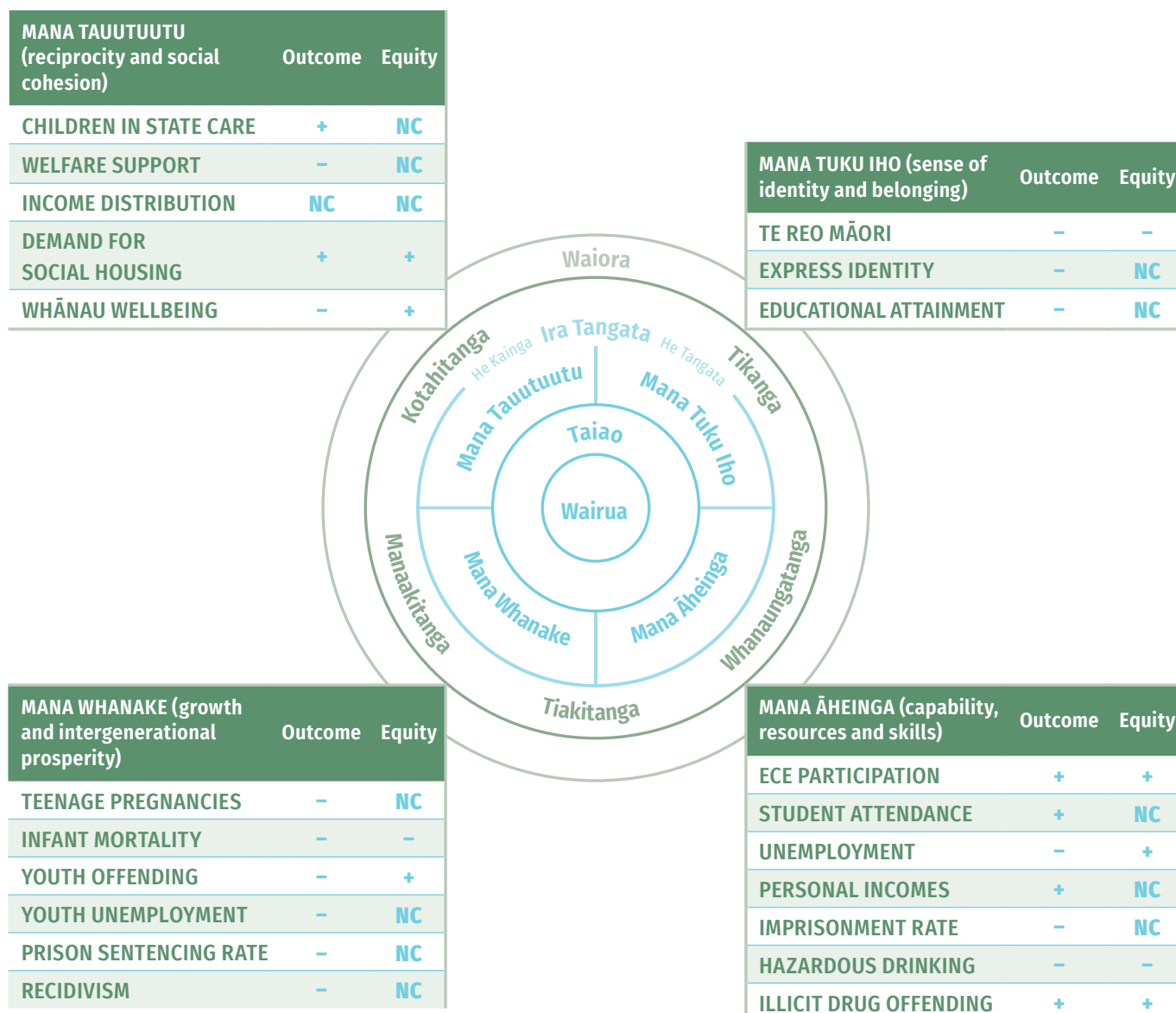
Aotearoa New Zealand. However, what is presented is a stark reminder of the extent of disadvantage experienced. It also shows that positive progress is still too limited and, in many places, highly vulnerable to being undermined by political and economic decision-making. Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi by enabling Māori to exercise tino rangatiratanga is key to improving outcomes and quality of life, not only for Māori but for everybody in Aotearoa New Zealand.

He Ara Waiora

This commentary uses He Ara Waiora wellbeing framework to group outcome measures from across the five areas covered in the *State of the Nation 2025*

report into four domains of wellbeing. We focus on indicators in the four domains of mana within te ira tangata: **mana āheinga** (capability, resources and skills), **mana tauutuutu** (reciprocity and social cohesion), **mana tuku iho** (sense of identity and belonging) and **mana whanake** (growth and intergenerational prosperity). These four domains express aspects of wellbeing that in te ao Māori are viewed as essential to fulfilled lives. The wellbeing analysis considers two aspects of change in wellbeing—whether the indicators are improving or not, and whether outcomes for Māori are improving relative to non-Māori (reducing inequity and inequality).

He Ara Waiora wellbeing framework



We welcome your feedback

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