

A photograph of two young boys of Asian descent standing on a beach. The boy on the right is shirtless and has his arm around the shoulder of the boy on the left, who is wearing a black tank top with green trim. Both boys are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a sandy beach, a body of water, and green trees under a clear blue sky.

A profile of children and young people in Auckland: 2022 update

**Summary
August 2022**



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A Profile of Children and Young People in Auckland: 2022 Update

Introduction

This report summarises the technical report, [A Profile of Children and Young People in Auckland: 2022 Update](#). It highlights key trends and statistics in child and youth wellbeing.

The information in this report will inform a three-year review of [I Am Auckland](#) (council's strategic action plan for children and young people). It will help staff understand where we need to focus our attention to support the wellbeing of children and young people.

The report is based on available data collected between 2016 and 2021. It focuses on children and young people in Auckland under 25 years old. It presents key trends in demography, education, employment, health, housing, safety and child poverty.

This is a summary report. For detailed information on the key trends, please refer to the technical report <https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/2381/tr2022-07-profile-of-children-and-young-people-in-auckland-2022-update.pdf>.

Please note that reader discretion is advised on pages 15-16, which discuss youth mental health and suicide.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are some gaps in the data, particularly for rainbow children and young people, and disabled children and young people. This report also tends to focus more on young people than children, as young people are more regularly asked to participate in research than children. Finally, it is worth noting that the data in certain areas is still emerging and therefore does not tell the full story. This is the case for child poverty and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.

1. Demographics

Auckland's population of children and young people is growing

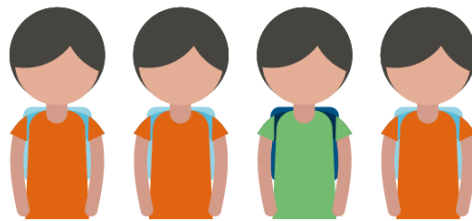
There are approximately

535,000

children and young people living in Auckland (Census, 2018). This equates to about **34 per cent** of Auckland's population.

The population of children and young people grew by approximately **30,000** between **2013-2018**.

Almost one-quarter of Auckland's children and young people live in South Auckland



24 per cent of Auckland's children and young people live in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa and Papakura local board areas (Census, 2018). There is a clear pattern of children and young people living in the periphery of the city centre, particularly those aged 0-14 years.

Auckland's children and young people are increasingly ethnically diverse

In Auckland:

- fifty per cent of children and young people identify as European
- twenty-eight per cent of children and young people identify as Asian
- twenty-four per cent of children and young people identify as Pacific
- seventeen per cent of children and young people identify as Māori
- just over two per cent of children and young people identify as Middle Eastern, Latin American or African (Census, 2018). An increasing proportion of children and young people also identify with multiple ethnicities (Census, 2018).

2. Family households

One in five Auckland families with dependent children were sole parents



Across New Zealand, children in sole parent households are more likely to experience poverty, live in poor quality housing and live with a parent experiencing poor mental wellbeing, compared to those living with two parents (Stats NZ, 2020d).

Teenage birth rates are declining

Nationally, the fertility rate for young people aged 15-19 years has halved since 2001 (Stats NZ, 2021b). This is likely a result of decreasing reported sexual activity amongst young people, as well as the increased use of contraception.

3. Education

Participation in early childhood education is increasing

96% of Auckland children regularly attended early childhood education (ECE) in the six months before starting school (Ministry of Education, prior participation in ECE).

The proportion of Auckland children enrolled in ECE has steadily increased since 2000 (although there was a slight dip in enrolment in 2020, compared to previous years). The largest increases were among Māori and Pacific children (Ministry of Education, prior participation in ECE).

Educational achievement is improving across ethnic groups

In 2020, slightly higher proportions of female school leavers had achieved at least NCEA Level 2 or equivalent compared to males (88% compared with 84%) (Ministry of Education, school leaver data). This discrepancy between male and female achievement has narrowed over time.

Levels of educational attainment increased for all ethnic groups, particularly Māori and Pacific students. In 2020, 69 per cent of Māori school leavers qualified with NCEA Level 2 or above (an increase of 5 percentage points since 2015), while 80 per cent of Pacific school leavers qualified with NCEA Level 2 or above (an increase of 4 percentage points since 2015) (Ministry of Education, school leaver data).

COVID-19 has impacted Auckland students' learning

Examining rates of formal educational attainment alone may mask equity issues that worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as they do not factor in declining attendance or loss of young people from school entirely. The high rates of attainment in 2020 are more reflective of those able to remain in secondary schooling, who are more likely to be students in more affluent areas of Auckland. There is a cohort of young people from less affluent areas whose schooling was interrupted and therefore are not captured by the data.

Secondary students in Auckland reported greater levels of anxiety about COVID-19 compared to their peers outside Auckland (Education Review Office, 2021). The proportion of chronic absences increased for Māori and Pacific students and attendance rates declined for decile 1 and 2 schools, deepening existing inequities (Webber, 2020). Māori and Pacific students were also disproportionately impacted by digital inequities (Martin Jenkins, 2021).

Achievement in South Auckland is mixed

The attainment gap between South Auckland and the rest of Auckland narrowed between 2009-2018 (Auckland Council, 2020). However, inequities in achievement remain.

In South Auckland, young people in all ethnic groups are leaving school with little to no qualifications at a higher rate than those of their ethnic group in the rest of Auckland. Attainment of University Entrance for South Auckland students has remained static. In addition, student attainment of NCEA is being driven partially by unit achievement in non-academic subjects (Auckland Council, 2020).

4. Employment

There are concerns that the pandemic has negatively impacted young people's employment opportunities, particularly in Auckland. Young people tend to be more at risk of losing employment or being unable to find new employment, due to employer preferences to retain more experienced and more qualified workers (Wilson, 2014). A greater proportion of young Aucklanders (aged 18-24 years) received a JobSeeker (Work Ready) benefit between March 2020-March 2021, compared to other young New Zealanders, highlighting the greater burden they have borne throughout the pandemic (Martin Jenkins, 2021).

Youth unemployment is trending down

Official rates of youth unemployment have been trending downwards from December 2011-December 2021 (Stats NZ, Household Labour Force Survey). While there have been brief rises in unemployment during the pandemic, early indications in the data show that youth unemployment may be decreasing again.

More young people are not in employment, education or training

The rate of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) was **12 per cent** for young people aged **15-24 years** in Auckland (for the year ending December 2021).

The Auckland NEET rate is slightly higher than the national NEET rate. This is the highest youth NEET rate since 2010, following the impact of the Global Financial Crisis.

Young women are more likely to be NEET than young men, largely due to young women taking on parenting or caregiving roles. Māori and Pacific young people are also more likely to be NEET. There are complex factors underlying this, including socioeconomic deprivation, multiple barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities and participating in caregiving activities at a younger age.

Five local board areas have higher youth NEET rates compared to other local board areas: Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa, Papakura and Whau.

5. Housing

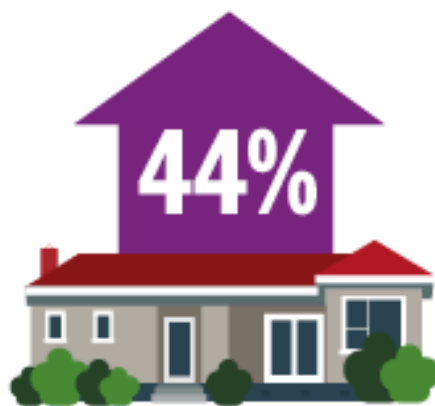
Housing is a major determinant of health, particularly for children and young people.



It is estimated that more than one in five homes in Auckland are either sometimes or always damp (Stats NZ, 2020b).

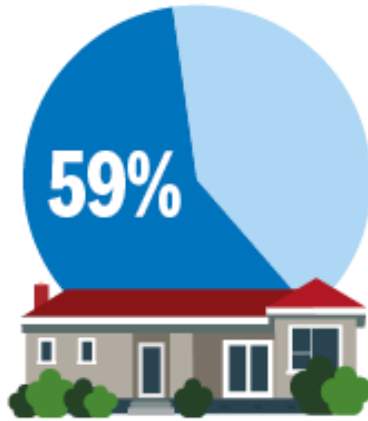
The Youth19 study found that almost one in three young people experience some form of housing deprivation.¹ Rainbow youth are more likely to experience housing deprivation than non-rainbow young people (Clark et al., 2021; Fraser et al., 2019).

Housing affordability



The five-year trend (between January 2017-January 2022) showed that the average house price grew 44 per cent (GV, 2022).

¹ Housing deprivation is a lack of access to adequate housing, measured by five indicators: inadequate housing, serious housing deprivation, housing financial stress, familial separation, and frequent residential mobility. The Youth19 study includes Northland and Waikato, as well as Auckland.



In 2018, 59 per cent of Aucklanders owned their own homes (Stats NZ, 2020b).

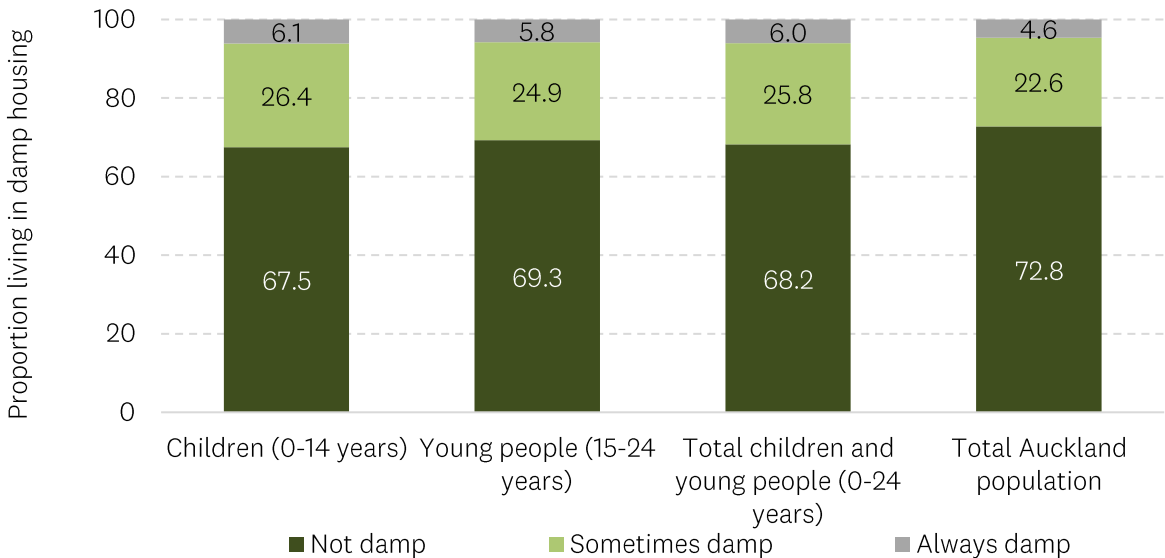
Home ownership is progressively out of reach for many families, and rents are rising faster than wages (Stats NZ, 2020b). Issues of affordability and housing quality can lead to crowded households, an inability to adequately heat homes and cause families to move more frequently.

This has flow-on effects for health, education and social outcomes, and can also contribute to family stress and child poverty (Fu, 2015; Leventhal & Newman, 2010). These issues impact Māori and Pacific children and young people disproportionately.

Low-quality housing frequently affects Auckland children

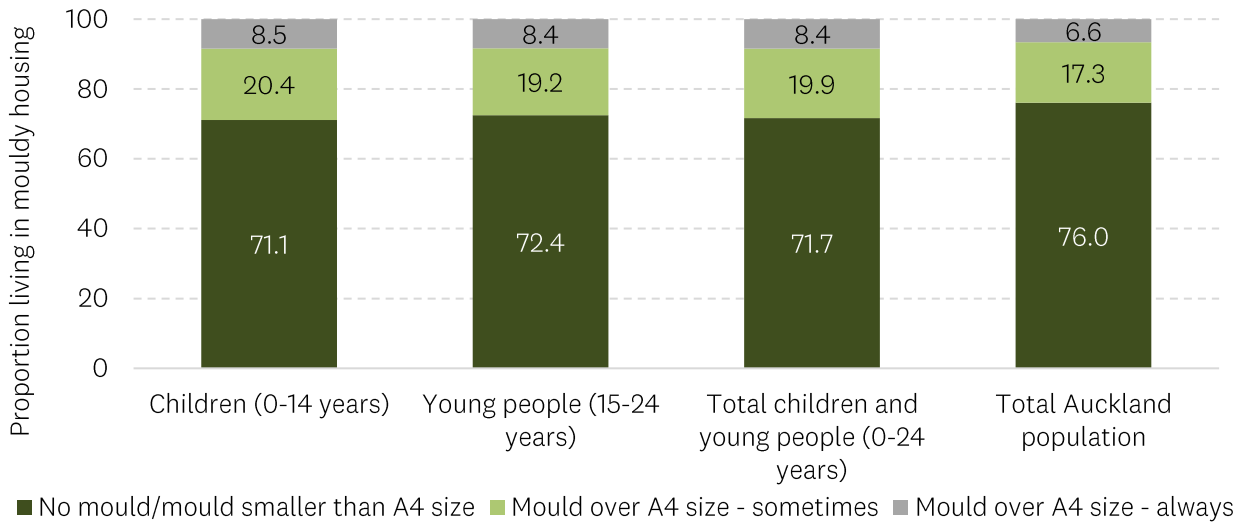
It is estimated that across New Zealand, about 28,000 homes are always damp and have invisible mould. Approximately 41 per cent of these were in Auckland (Stats NZ, 2020b). Figures 1 and 2 below show the number of children and young people living in damp and mouldy housing.

Figure 1: Proportion of Auckland children and young people who live in damp housing (2018).



Source: Stats NZ, Census of Population and Dwellings.

Figure 2: Proportion of Auckland children and young people who live in mouldy housing (2018).



Source: Stats NZ, Census of Population and Dwellings.

6. Health and wellbeing

Regular physical activity continues to decline as children grow up

Participation time in hours has remained stable over time. Participation in active recreation, play and sport tends to peak between 12-14 years and then drops sharply between 15-17 years (Active New Zealand survey).

There are subgroup differences in activity levels:

- Asian young people tend to have lower weekly participation, while rangatahi Māori spend more time in both organised and informal activities.
- Girls tend to be less active than boys.
- Young people living in higher areas of deprivation were less likely to be active (Active New Zealand survey).

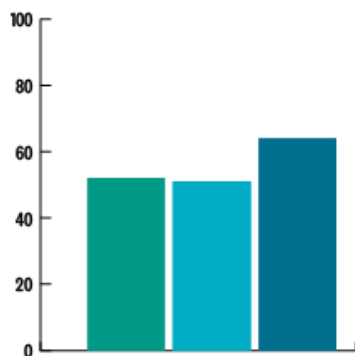


Ninety-four per cent of young people were physically active in play, sport, exercise or active recreation at least once a week (Sport New Zealand, 2020a).

Reported substance use is declining

Tobacco use

Across Auckland's District Health Boards, we can observe dramatic declines in cigarette smoking between 2006-2018 (for those aged 15-24 years who were regular smokers):



- Waitematā District Health Board has had a 48 per cent reduction
- Auckland District Health Board has had a 49 per cent reduction
- Counties Manukau District Health Board has had a 36 per cent reduction.

Vaping

Youth19 indicates that vaping among secondary school students was two to three times more common than cigarette smoking, with 38 per cent reporting that they had used vapes/e-cigarettes at least once. Young people were more likely to try vaping younger and increase use over time, when compared to patterns of cigarette smoking (Ball et al., 2021).

Alcohol

Reported adolescent drinking has declined sharply in the past two decades (Ball, Edwards, et al., 2020). Nineteen per cent of Auckland young people were categorised as hazardous drinkers (NZ Health Survey). Although this is lower compared to New Zealand young people overall, this is still quite a high incidence of heavy drinking.

Cannabis and other substances

Cannabis use has declined slightly since 2001 (Youth19).



Twenty-three per cent reported ever having used cannabis and 4 per cent reported regular use (at least weekly). Only 4 per cent of respondents to the Youth19 survey reported trying other drugs.

Young people are waiting longer to have sex

Recent evidence suggests that a larger proportion of young people are waiting to have sex compared to previous cohorts (Clark et al., 2020).

However, variable access to good-quality sex education and healthcare services may be exposing young people to a greater risk of teen pregnancy, contracting sexually transmitted infections and encountering discrimination or a lack of privacy when seeking support for their sexual and reproductive health (Clark et al., 2020). Rainbow young people are more likely to face challenges compared to their peers, including a lack of good-quality information from healthcare providers about sexual health education (Fenaughty, Sutcliffe, Clark, et al., 2021).

New Zealand youth have some of the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections in the OECD (Martel et al., 2017). This is concerning, particularly as contraceptive use is declining.

Young people's mental health is deteriorating

2012



13% experienced depressive symptoms

2019



23% experienced depressive symptoms

In 2012, 13 per cent of respondents to the Youth 2000 survey series experienced depressive symptoms. This increased to 23 per cent in 2019 (Fleming, Tiatia-Seath, et al., 2020).

Female respondents were more likely to experience depressive symptoms than males. Rangatahi Māori experienced higher rates of depressive symptoms than European youth (Fleming, Tiatia-Seath, et al., 2020; Menzies et al., 2020).

The mental wellbeing of rainbow young people is particularly concerning. Transgender and non-binary young people typically report experiencing high levels of psychological distress compared to cisgender young people (Fenaught, Sutcliffe, Fleming, et al., 2021; Veale et al., 2019). This is likely to be a result of social isolation, safety at home, school and the workplace and a lack of acceptance for their identity.

The impacts of poor mental health can be serious, as it affects development, relationships, educational and employment prospects and overall quality of life (Bowden et al., 2020).

The drivers of declining mental wellbeing are complex. The trend in New Zealand is consistent with international trends and may be reflective of the increasing complexity of challenges that young people are contending with in their lives. A variety of experiences contribute to mental deterioration including:

- poverty
- stress
- childhood trauma
- lack of access to appropriate healthcare services
- socioeconomic deprivation
- social media
- intergenerational trauma
- colonisation
- racism
- worries about the future (particularly the climate) (Gibson et al., 2017; Menzies et al., 2020).

The lack of access to mental health professionals specialising in child and youth wellbeing is exacerbating these issues.

Youth suicide continues to be a significant issue

Note that reader discretion is advised.

New Zealand consistently has one of the highest suicide rates in the OECD (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Young people between 15-24 years are more likely to die by suicide than any other age group (Ministry of Health, 2021).

Males are more likely than females to die by suicide and rangatahi Māori have higher suicide rates than other ethnic groups (Ministry of Health, 2017). There are links between ethnicity and socioeconomic deprivation for Māori and Pacific people, who are more likely to die by suicide when they live in highly deprived areas, compared to those living in the least deprived areas (Ministry of Health, 2017).

Rainbow young people also show worrying trends concerning suicidality. According to the Counting Ourselves study, 84 per cent of transgender and nonbinary young people had seriously considered attempting suicide at some point in their lives.

7. Safety

The rate of child injuries in New Zealand has remained stable

Injuries are a leading cause of hospitalisation and death of children, despite most injuries being preventable (Child & Youth Wellbeing, 2020). The age-standardised rate for all serious injuries in New Zealand children (aged 0-14 years) was 81 per cent per 100,000 children in 2018. This has remained relatively stable since 2004. The rate of fatal injuries has declined over the last two decades. There is a low incidence of serious assault injuries to children (Stats NZ, 2021a).

Increasing number of family violence investigations during COVID-19

Children and women are the most common victims of family violence (New Zealand Police, no date). There has been an increase in family violence investigations over time, particularly in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Foon, 2020).

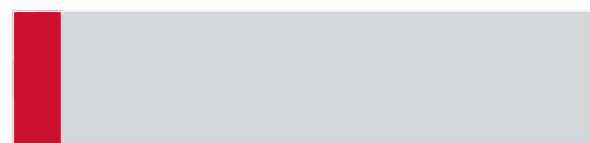
Young people's experiences of safety, abuse and violence

Youth19 provides data on young people's feelings of safety and experiences of abuse and violence:

Witnessed incidents of violence at home



6% witnessed adults at home hit or hurt another adult



8% witnessed adults at home hit or hurt a child

- Violence at home: 6 per cent of respondents had witnessed adults at home hit or hurt another adult in the last 12 months, while 8 per cent had witnessed adults at home hit or hurt a child.

School safety



79% in 2001



87% in 2019

- Safety at school: young people feel safer at school than they used to (this has increased from 79 per cent in 2001 to 87 per cent in 2019). Rainbow students feel less safe at school than non-rainbow students, due to higher rates of bullying.

Safety in the neighbourhood



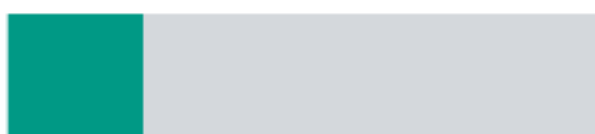
44% in 2001



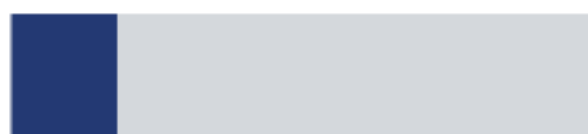
59% in 2019

- Safety in the neighbourhood: feelings of safety in the neighbourhood increased from 44 per cent in 2001 to 59 per cent in 2019.

Unwanted sexual experiences



23% in 2001



18% in 2019

Reported experiencing these issues



26% Female



10% Male

- Unwanted sexual experiences, sexual violence or abuse: the proportion of young people reporting these experiences declined slightly from 23 per cent in 2001 to 18 per cent in 2019. In 2019, 26 per cent of females reported experiencing these issues, compared to 10 per cent of males (Fleming et al., 2021).

8. Child poverty

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of child poverty among rich and developed nations (Office of the Children's Commissioner, no date).

Children experience the negative effects of child poverty as hunger, food insecurity, living in cold and damp housing and not having enough to meet their basic needs. This typically leads to poor health outcomes. It can also result in social exclusion, poor educational outcomes and fewer employment opportunities. Child poverty is also associated with having contact with the criminal justice system later in life (Haigh, 2018).

Child poverty rates are worse for Māori, Pacific and disabled children (Duncanson et al., 2021; Haigh, 2018).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, national data indicated that child poverty appeared to have declined since 2018 on all measures (Duncanson et al., 2021).

Based on the available data, in Auckland it appears that child poverty rates worsened between the year ending June 2019-June 2020 (Household Economic Survey). However, this data should be interpreted with caution, as the Household Economic Survey is subject to survey sampling errors and high margins of error. From these figures alone, which only present two years' worth of data, we are unable to explore what role the COVID-19 pandemic has had on child poverty rates in Auckland.

Conclusion

Most children and young people are persevering despite the challenges in our social and economic landscape. Gaps amongst ethnic groups and local board areas are narrowing, particularly in school leavers' attainment.

However, many children and young people are not healthy or thriving. Declining mental health is an urgent and worrying issue. Too many children and young people are living in unaffordable and low-quality housing. This report has highlighted that inequities exist for some of Auckland's population groups, including:

- tamariki and rangatahi Māori
- Pacific children and young people
- rainbow children and young people
- disabled children and young people.

This shows that there is more to be done to improve the health, wellbeing and life outcomes of children and young people to ensure that Auckland is a strong, inclusive and equitable society in the future.

References

The full report from which this summary document was drawn was prepared by the Research and Evaluation Unit (RIMU) at the request of the Community and Social Policy Department within Auckland Council. It has been published as an Auckland Council Technical Report and can be found on Knowledge Auckland: <https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/2381/tr2022-07-profile-of-children-and-young-people-in-auckland-2022-update.pdf>. The references in this report can be found from page 74 of the full report.

Details of full report

Prakash, A. (2022). A Profile of Children and Young People in Auckland: 2022 Update. Auckland Council Technical Report, TR2022/7.



A profile of children and young people in Auckland: 2022 update. Summary
© 2022 Auckland Council, New Zealand, August 2022

ISBN 978-1-99-110182-2 (PDF)

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