

# Reducing child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

Issue Snapshot | 2026



New Zealand Council Of Christian Social Services

## Understanding child poverty in Aotearoa

Child poverty is a long-standing issue in Aotearoa New Zealand, leading to the introduction of the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018.

Under the Act, the government must measure and set targets around the reduction of poverty as defined by the following indicators:

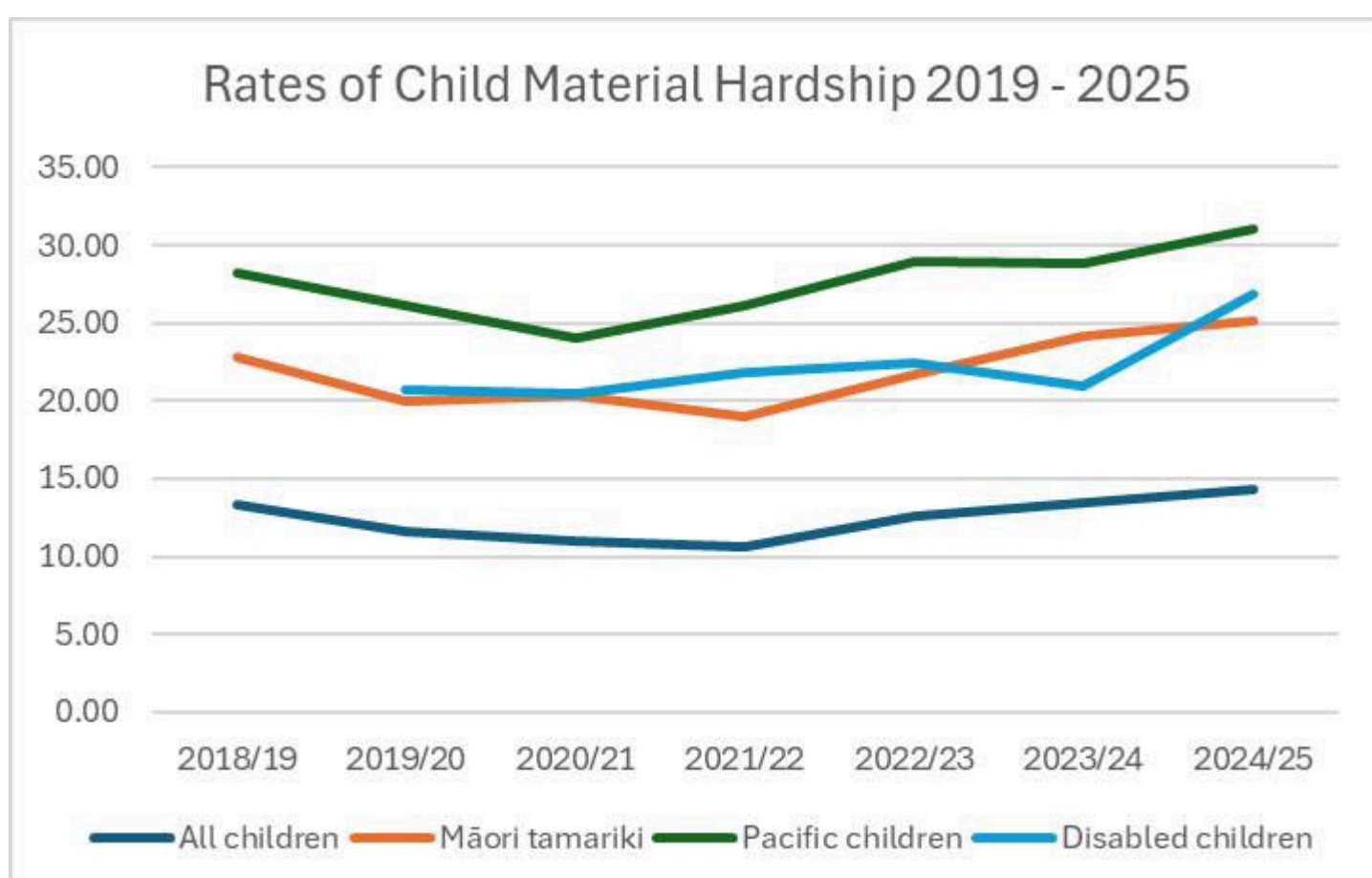
- Material hardship
- Low income after-housing costs
- Low income before housing costs
- Poverty persistence

Despite previous gains made in the reduction of poverty since the introduction of this Act, recent results have shown that progress has stalled and current child poverty targets are unlikely to be achieved without increased investment in child poverty reduction. Child poverty is disproportionately experienced by Māori and Pacific children, children in households experiencing disability and sole parent households.

Results published for the year ending June 2025 show no annual change in child poverty, but a statistically significant increase in children living in poverty since 2022 for two out of the three primary measures.

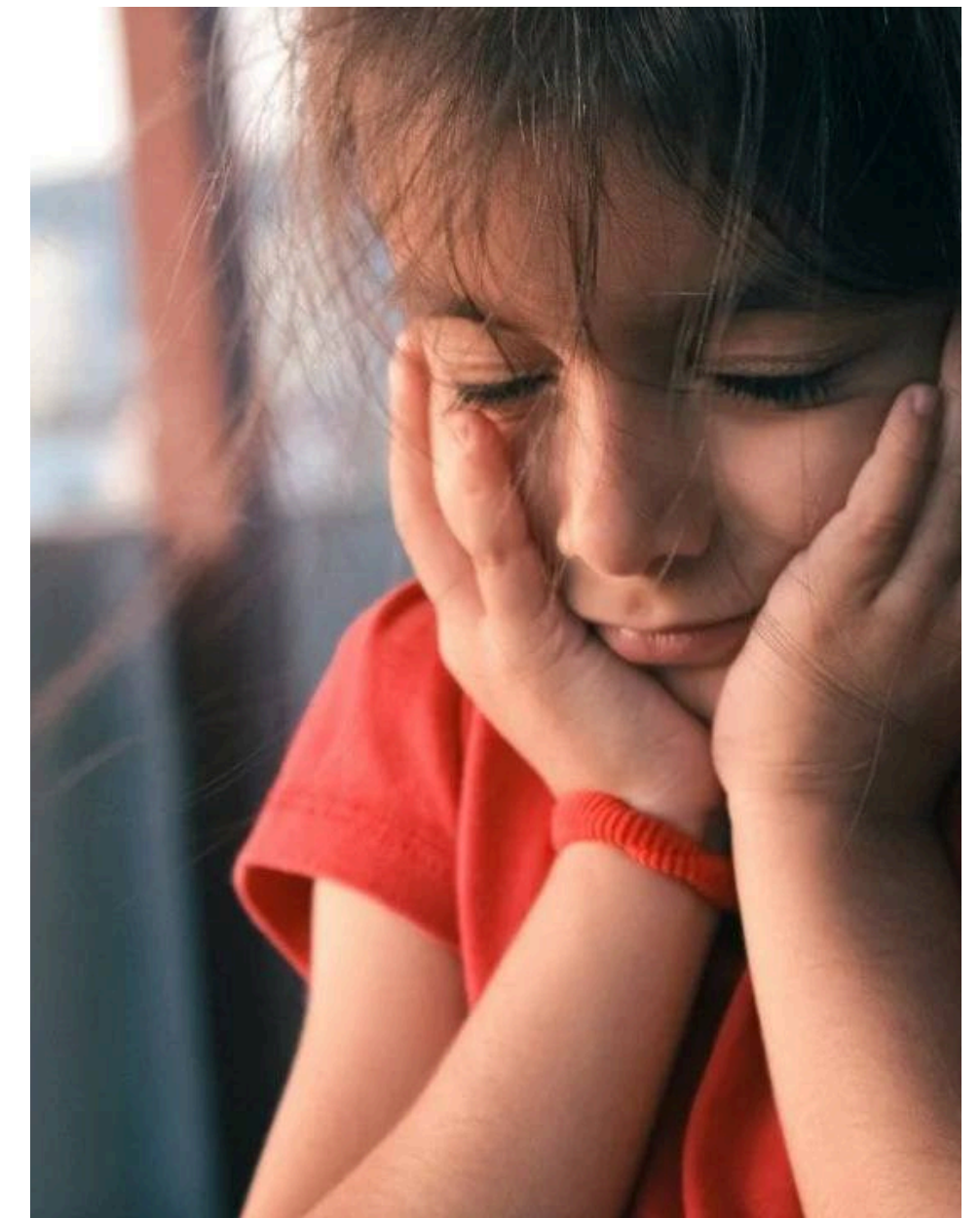
Previous targets for reducing child poverty between 2021-2024 were not achieved and Treasury forecasts suggest that the 10 year targets for halving child poverty are unlikely to be met in 2028.

## Child material hardship



The current Government has a focus on reducing child material hardship. Rates of material hardship are currently similar to what they were prior to the introduction of the Child Poverty Reduction Act at 14.3% of children, despite dropping to 10.6% in 2021/22.

A child is in material hardship if they go without seven or more items within a set of 18 goods and services considered to be essentials.



## Child poverty results (2025)

148,700 | 12.6% children in poverty before housing costs

210,600 | 17.8% children in poverty after housing costs

169,300 | 14.3% children living in material hardship

This equates to:

- 1 in 7 children
- 1 in 4 Māori tamariki and disabled children
- 1 in 3 for Pacific children

Almost 50,000 more children are now living in material hardship than in 2022.

The full set of child poverty results can be found [here](#).

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## What does it mean for children's lives?

Evidence suggests childhood poverty can have broad ranging impacts including on cognitive development, school achievement and adult employment (1). These restrictions in opportunity can increase a child's risk of experiencing poverty in adulthood, leading to a cycle of inequality that may span generations (2).

Our members currently report that they are seeing the following impacts of poverty in their communities:

- Increasing numbers of working households and those impacted by benefit sanctions seeking emergency food assistance due to financial crisis.
- Sharp increases in acute homelessness.
- Greater complexity of need among whānau seeking housing support.
- Growing benefit sanctions that threaten housing stability and rental affordability

## Recent research and reporting

Child Poverty Action Group (2025). [Below the Income Floor: Modelling Income Adequacy for Low-Income Households in New Zealand 2018-2026](#)

This report demonstrates how inadequate increases to income support and the minimum wage, coupled with rising living costs, are keeping children in poverty.

Key findings include:

- Couples with two children working 40 hours on minimum wage are unable to meet core living costs and participate in society.
- A sole parent support recipient with three children in a private rental faces a shortfall of almost \$200 per week, and sole parents with 1-2 children are also struggling with budget deficits.
- Renting couples on Jobseeker support with two children face a shortfall of over \$300 per week.

Children discuss how having what you need is part of what matters most in Mana Mokopuna's 2024 report [You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling – Understanding the life-course journey:](#)

- “Financial support for parents that are really struggling with money, more support to lower income families.”
- “Not having to worry about school uniforms because they are really expensive”
- “Stationery and lunches need more resourcing and costs too much”
- “Not being able to do out of school activities”

Ministry of Social Development (2025). [Annual Report on The Child and Youth Strategy/ the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and the Child Poverty Related Indicators](#) This report explores a range of indicators that measure the broader causes, correlates and consequences of child poverty and forms part of the government's reporting responsibilities under the Child Poverty Reduction Act. The report finds that most indicators have worsened since 2019/20 however student attendance has improved between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

- 222,285 children live in benefit dependent households
- 52.9% of children live in households spending more than 30% of disposable income on housing
- 53.7% of students are present more than 90% of a term
- 77.9% of school leavers aged 16-20+ with at least NCEA Level 2
- The rate of potentially avoidable hospitalisations is 75.96 per 1,000 children

# Reducing child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

## How are NZCCSS members responding to this issue?



Christchurch Methodist Mission's **Aratupu Preschool & Whānau Hub** offers quality, holistic early childhood education, with wrap around support available to whānau.

### Money Mentors

Visionwest supports people to navigate financial challenges and the stress associated with it. [Read about](#) the impact of this service for solo mum Virginia



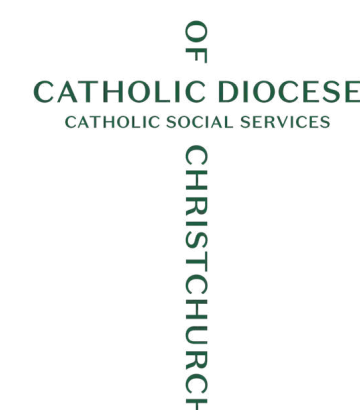
### Christmas Gift Store

The Wellington City Mission's response to Child Poverty is to assist whānau with the social, health, wellbeing, and economic challenges they are facing. Alongside social work, practical support, health services, counselling, and financial mentoring; this is primarily done through provision of food support through a freely accessible Social Supermarket open 6 days per week, and through a Children's Toy Store for the three weeks before Christmas



### Making learning assessments accessible for whānau

Catholic Social Services in Christchurch offers free learning disorder and psychological assessments for children, enabling access to diagnosis and support for children who might not meet the threshold for support via the public system.



As well as traditional kai parcel provision, some of our members now offer **Social Supermarkets**.

## Little Things fund

Presbyterian Support's Little Things fund seeks to mitigate the impacts of poverty, supporting whānau to overcome everyday financial hurdles. Each Presbyterian Support region has a Little Things fund that kaimahi can use to help tamariki and whānau in need.



A Little Thing could be a sports or school uniform, heater for the bedroom, a device for a child's homework or a pass to attend local swimming pools.

Over 350 tamariki and whānau have benefited from the fund to date. Through PSNZ's partnership with The Tindall Foundation which acts as a local donation manager, regions can now opt in or out of direct funding from The Tindall Foundation into their Little Things fund.

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## NZCCSS calls on the government to address poverty rates

NZCCSS' *Free from Poverty* campaign advocates for policies aimed at reducing child poverty by ensuring income adequacy for whānau raising children and increasing investment in housing availability and accessibility.

### Working for Families

Child payments, such as Aotearoa's Working for Families scheme, are a primary lever for reducing child poverty. NZCCSS advocates for a more effective Working for Families scheme, including:

- the simplification of Working for Families into one single tax credit and increasing the overall rate
- an increase to the amount people can earn before their payments reduce, by setting the abatement threshold at a minimum of 40 hours on minimum wage
- a reduction to how quickly Working for Families payments decrease to ensure work pays and explore whether a two-tiered abatement threshold would be beneficial for families working more hours
- a reduction of debt by introducing grace periods to allow for changes in income and increasing how much debt can be automatically written off
- indexing of entitlements to align with wage growth or CPI depending on which is greater, in line with Superannuation.

Find out [more](#).



### Urgent change needed to address rising numbers of children growing up in poverty

In response to increases in child poverty since 2022, NZCCSS [calls on](#) political leaders to address poverty for people of all ages.



### Budget 2025 fails to shift the dial on child poverty

We [call on](#) the Government to ensure it doesn't leave people behind and seek a Budget that delivers compassion and equity for New Zealanders.

## Get involved

- Share our [Free from Poverty](#) campaign highlighting policy changes aimed at reducing poverty in Aotearoa.
- Check out [Tick for Kids](#) in the lead up to Election 2026: Tick for Kids is a movement designed to engage candidates every national election in public discussion about what needs to be done to improve life for children and young people in Aotearoa.



### Find out more

New Zealand Council Of  
Christian Social Services

[www.nzccss.org.nz](http://www.nzccss.org.nz)