

Reducing Poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

Issue Snapshot | 2026



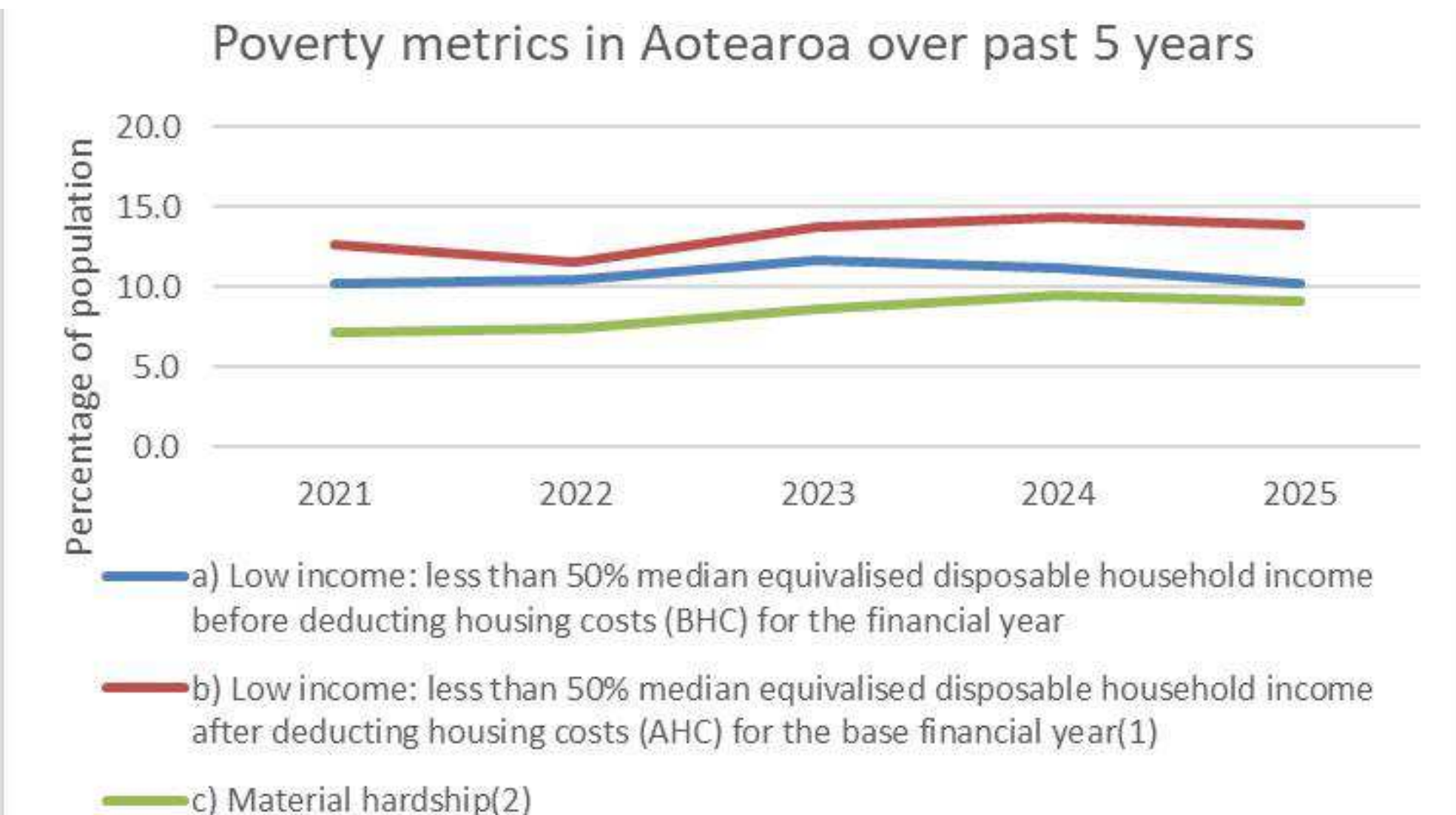
New Zealand Council Of Christian Social Services

Understanding poverty in Aotearoa

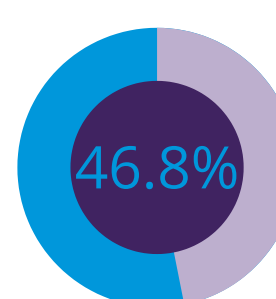
In Aotearoa in 2025 there were 528,500 people defined by international standards as living in poverty before housing costs were deducted¹. When assessing poverty rates after housing costs, this increased to 859,100 people¹. This puts New Zealand above the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation; a group of countries that work together to improve economic and social policy) average for whole population poverty rates.

Despite this, there are currently no recognised targets for reducing overall poverty in New Zealand, with the only established targets aimed at reducing poverty in households with children. Poverty data was collected through the Household Economic Survey (HES) and more recently as part of the Household Income and Living Survey (HILS). These surveys have provided some insight into the extent of the problem, but detail on specific cohorts who are impacted is not currently publicly available.

Historically society has a poor understanding of the causes of poverty. A 2011 survey in New Zealand reported that 60% of respondents believed people were poor due to laziness and lack of will power. There is no more recent data on perceptions of poverty in Aotearoa but this highlights a distinct lack of public understanding of poverty and the circumstances and conditions that lead to this cycle of deprivation.

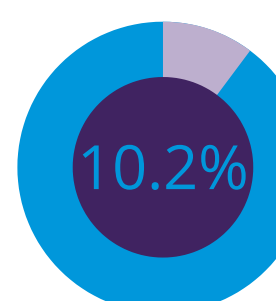
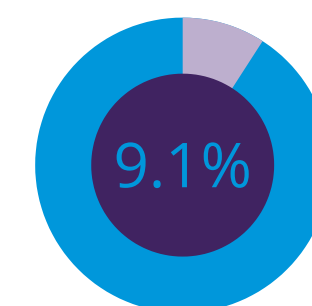


Poverty rates in 2025 remain similar to 2021. However, there has been a substantial increase in people experiencing material hardship from 7.1% in 2021 to 9.1% in 2025.



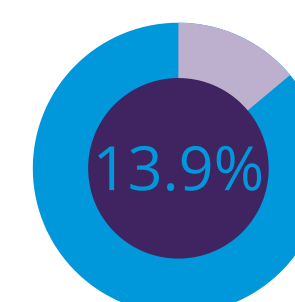
Māori and 52.4% Pacific households have incomes in the lowest 2/5's compared 37.6% of Europeans in 2025

People live in a household experiencing material hardship in 2025.



People live in a household experiencing income poverty before housing costs in 2025.

People live a household experiencing income poverty after housing costs in 2025.



What does it mean for people's lives?

Poverty and material hardship prevent households from being able to afford basic everyday needs including food, safe and secure housing, and healthcare. Lack of access to these can lead to poor health and reduced access to education and employment. Even temporary periods of poverty can have significant impacts on people's lives, with health continuing to be affected long after an individual is no longer experiencing poverty, and in some instances having flow on effects to future generations. While poverty is often temporary, without adequate support it is hard to escape from. With an inability to cover every day household costs due to inadequate support, households often take on further debt as a means to cover these costs in the short-term, which can increase the likelihood of experiencing poverty longer-term.

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

- Increased demand for food parcels and social supermarkets
- Increased demand for housing support services
- An increase in people sleeping rough (including those sleeping in cars) or in unsafe housing (including caravan parks and boarding houses)

Perceptions of fairness in New Zealand:

Phase 2 report

Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures 2024

Research by Koi Tū investigating people's perception of fairness in New Zealand found:

- only 16% of respondents thought income and wealth differences experienced across New Zealand society today are fair
- only 29% of respondents thought in New Zealand today there is fair access to opportunities and services

“I've got kids choosing which meals to miss every week because their parents can't stretch their food budgets... Parents who are cutting their hair to save money on shampoo, taking fabric out of inorganic rubbish collections to use as nappies

Paterson, 2024 - Poverty rising with costs of living and children in dire need. RNZ

Recent research

Salvation Army (2026). State of the Nation 2026

This report assesses many of the factors which impact the wellbeing of people and communities across Aotearoa.

- Increased reliance on food banks, including in households with working adults. The Salvation Army delivered 90,000 food parcels in 2025, an increase of 7% from the previous year
- Unemployment and underemployment, housing affordability and homelessness and family violence remain high.

The Helen Clark Foundation (2025). Social Cohesion in New Zealand.

This report assesses the level of social cohesion in New Zealand, looking at how people view their society.

- Only 32% of New Zealanders surveyed reported feeling satisfied with their financial situation
- Only 55% of New Zealanders reported they were happy
- 25% of New Zealanders reported they sometimes or often went without meal

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) (2025). Mana Āki - Dignity for All

CAB report they have seen a rise in people whose incomes either from low wages or welfare are not meeting their basic living costs. This is impacting their ability to cover electricity costs, afford housing and food and cover medical and dental expenses.

Reducing Poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

How are NZCCSS members responding to this issue?



Koha Kai Whare

This social supermarket initiative based in Palmerston North allows people to choose groceries while also offering budgeting and counselling services.

Te Kai Mākona

Te Kai Mākona is supporting whānau in Whangārei to choose food, grow gardens, learn to cook and connect as a community, through the strong community engagement practices of The Salvation Army.



De Paul House

This Auckland member helps to support families and seniors in accessing and sustaining safe and secure housing, including providing the 'Sustaining Tenancies' programme for those at risk of losing their tenancy.

CareRanui whakaruruhau

Ranui Baptist Community Care offer a mentoring service to assist clients to develop a 2 year plan towards independence and self management.



Social workers where it matters

Christchurch CityMission offer a drop-in social worker service in addition to their usual scheduled appointments. This helps to tackle issues of accessibility for people who need to see a social worker on the day. The Mission can ensure that these people can get immediate access to support on the day they need it.

Communities Feeding Communities

This Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) initiative is aimed at addressing food insecurity and social cohesion in Puketāpapa (Mt Roskill), Auckland. Established in 2021, Communities Feeding Communities (CFC) offers:



- Emergency food support - provided through referrals from PSN social services, partner organisations or in emergencies for locals living in the Puketāpapa area. CFC provides 80-90 food parcels a week.
- Community garden - nutritious kai to support the CFC social food pantry with fresh produce packs and community meals cooked in the kitchen.
- Community kitchen - used by local community groups preparing food for events that support the community and volunteers preparing the regular twice a week community lunch.
- Free budget guidance and support - provided by a Family Works financial mentor
- Pastoral care and support.



More information about these services are available here:

<https://www.psn.org.nz/what-we-do/communities-feeding-communities>

Just Stories website <https://www.juststories.nz/stories/communities-feeding-communities>

<https://www.facebook.com/CommunitiesFeedingCommunities/>

Reducing Poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand

What is NZCCSS is advocating for?

NZCCSS advocates for a New Zealand free from Poverty, with policies to improve income adequacy, access to safe and affordable housing and address rising food costs.

Introduce a Poverty Reduction Act

In order to better understand poverty, who it impacts and ensure that change is made to allow all people to live dignified lives free from poverty, it is essential to introduce legislation that measures and sets poverty targets for all New Zealanders. NZCCSS advocates for:

- the introduction of legislation to measure and target poverty rates for all New Zealanders
- the establishment of an official national poverty line
- retention of the requirement to report and set targets for specific populations including children
- the establishment of an advisory body to the responsible Minister outlining how to meet the established poverty targets.

Improve housing access and affordability.

Access to safe and affordable housing is the foundation for living a life free from poverty. NZCCSS advocates for:

- increased social housing builds over time to bring us in line with the OECD average of 7% of housing stock
- the removal of asset thresholds for Accommodation Supplements for those who are renting and do not already own a property.

Addressing rising food costs now

NZCCSS strongly encourages food policy which will target food affordability, however, there is need for more immediate action to ensure that people can afford food now. NZCCSS advocates for:

- the introduction of a GST-Rebate type support package targeted at low- and middleincome households and equivalised to household food costs.

Get involved

- Share our Free from Poverty campaign highlighting policy changes aimed at reducing poverty in Aotearoa.



Find out more

New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

www.nzccss.org.nz