



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
University
of Auckland

Growing Up
in New Zealand

Data factsheet: food security and nutrition

2026



Making Aotearoa a better place to call home

Introduction to Growing Up in New Zealand

Growing Up in New Zealand is a contemporary longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families, launched on 1 February 2008. The overarching objective of the study is to generate policy-relevant evidence to optimise children's developmental trajectories in multiple areas, including health, education and social and cognitive functioning.¹ *Growing Up in New Zealand* has enrolled approximately 18,000 participants (6,822 mothers, 4,401 partners and 6,853 children). Data was first collected during the mothers' last trimester of pregnancy, and subsequent major data collection waves occurred at 9 months, 2 years, 4.5 years, 8 years, 12 years and 15 years.

Policy priority: food security and nutrition

- Food insecurity is defined as a limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited ability to acquire personally acceptable foods that meet cultural needs in a socially acceptable way.^{2 3} Children living in households with moderate to severe food insecurity are less likely to receive the nutrition they need for healthy development.⁴
- Having regular access to nutritious food is a focus area of the Youth Wellbeing Framework^{5 6}, which includes food insecurity as an indicator. Addressing food insecurity as an aspect of child poverty is also a key priority for the New Zealand Government.^{7 8}
- Growing Up in New Zealand can provide robust contemporary evidence on a range of topics related to food security and children's diet and nutrition.
- The table on the following page provides an overview of food security and nutrition constructs that Growing Up in New Zealand has collected at each data collection wave, with some examples of items from our questionnaires.

¹ Morton SMB, Ramke J, Kinloch J, Grant CC, Atatoa Carr P, Leeson H et al. Growing Up in New Zealand cohort alignment with all New Zealand births. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2015 Feb;39(1):82-87.

² Parnell WR, Reid J, Wilson NC, et al. Food security: is New Zealand a land of plenty? *N Z Med J* 2001 114:141-145.

³ Ministry of Health. Household food security among children: New Zealand health survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health; 2019.

⁴ Gerritsen S, D'Souza A, Goodsell-Matthews T, Pillai A, Swinburn B, Wall C. Food hardship and early childhood nutrition: findings from Growing Up in New Zealand with a focus on food hardships among tamariki Māori and Pacific children. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development, 2020.

⁵ Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Wellington: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; 2019. 1-89.

⁶ The Child and Youth Strategy 2024-27. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development; 2024.

⁷ New Zealand Government. Child poverty related indicators report for the year ending 30 June 2021. Wellington: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; 2022, 1-37.

⁸ New Zealand Government. (2018). Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018. Parliament of New Zealand. <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2018/57/en/latest/#LMS10034>

How can Growing Up in New Zealand contribute to the Government's policy priorities?

Policy area	Measured construct	Data collection wave							Example measures	
		AN	9M	2Y	4.5Y	8Y	12Y	15Y*		
Food insecurity	Food insecurity									<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether food runs out in their household due to a lack of money • How many days a week does your family sit together to eat any main meal? • How many servings of fruits and vegetables does your child eat each day? • How often does your child consume soft drinks and fast foods? • Does your child have any food allergies? • How often does your child go without lunch to school? • Where do you get your information relating to healthy eating?
	Family eating behaviours									
Access to nutritious foods	Food intake	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
	Food allergies			■		■				
	Personal eating patterns					■	■			
	Portion sizes			■	■		■			
	Food/meals eaten outside the home				■	■	■	■		
	School lunches					■				
	School food programmes							■		
	Sources of information about nutrition	■						■		
	Breastfeeding	■	■	■						
	Diet during pregnancy	■								
Anthropometry	Body size	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
	Body size perception				■	■	■	■	■	

* Note: The 15Y DCW was a checkpoint (primarily to engage/retain the cohort) not a full Data collection wave. #The 13Y Extreme weather event DCW was a bespoke subset Data collection wave

Constructs related to food security and nutrition

Growing Up in New Zealand also collects data on factors related to food security and nutrition.

Domain	Constructs related to food security and nutrition
Culture and identity	Traditional/cultural practices, cultural values and beliefs
Education	School attendance, academic performance, academic resilience, choice and utilization of educational services
Family and whānau	Family relationships and structure, parent-child interactions, parent-child trust, parenting practices, parenting attitudes, parent expectations
Health and wellbeing	Health status, health-related quality of life, physical activity, sleep, sedentary behaviours, infectious diseases, health care
Psychological and cognitive development	Anxiety, depression, resilience, personality, perceived stress, life satisfaction
Societal context	Material wellbeing, household income, parental employment, housing quality, severe housing deprivation

Using Growing Up in New Zealand data

1. Growing Up in New Zealand has four main objectives:

- To map the developmental trajectories for a cohort of New Zealand children as a group and within Māori, Pacific and Asian subgroups in particular, across multiple levels of influence (political, social, cultural, intergenerational, familial and individual) for outcomes in key social, developmental and health domains across the lifecourse.
- To provide a description of cross-sectional outcomes (in several domains) at key points in the lifecourse of the developing child to enable subgroup-specific analyses and comparisons with international populations.
- To focus on factors and trajectories, across multiple levels of influence, that confer resilience and optimise development, rather than focusing solely on risk factors for poor outcomes.
- To identify critical or sensitive periods in development, and levels of influence, that will allow the development of policy directed at optimising the development of every child born in New Zealand.

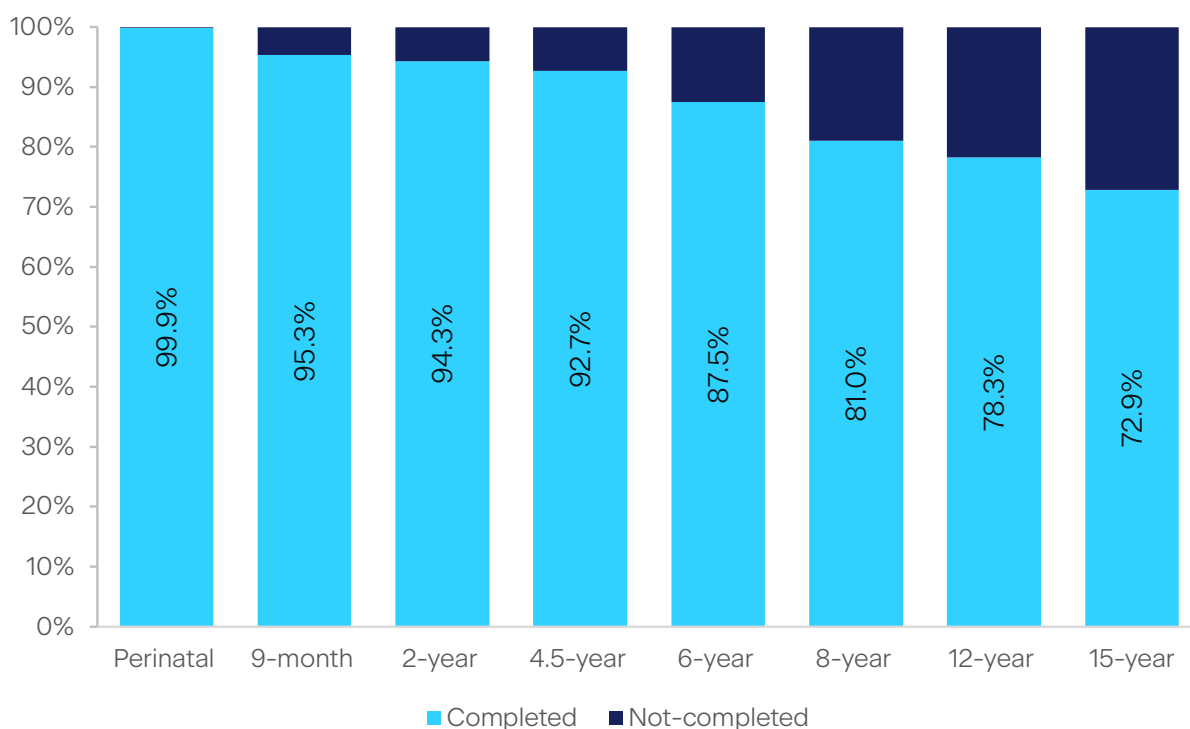


Figure 1. Longitudinal completion rate over time as a proportion of eligible cohort for each data collection wave

2. Growing Up in New Zealand has several unique features that make it an important resource for policy development.

- It is the first population-based longitudinal study in New Zealand to begin data collection from before birth, which accounts for the importance of the antenatal period for children's developmental pathways.
- The cohort is unique in terms of its size and diversity to provide evidence across multiple domains of influence on development for New Zealand children. It includes significant numbers of Māori, Pacific and Asian children, which makes analyses within these ethnic groups possible.
- Information is gathered from mothers and their partners from the earliest time point so that the evolving nature of the New Zealand family can be tracked alongside that of our growing children.
- The study has ongoing engagement with the policy sector to ensure the collected data links to areas of cross-sectoral policy focus for children and families.
- Data collected from *Growing Up in New Zealand* is intended to be used widely. Clear data access protocols govern the study to safeguard participants' ongoing involvement, privacy and confidentiality.
- Some food security and nutrition constructs have been measured longitudinally, which can help identify critical periods during cognitive development.

3. Growing Up in New Zealand can provide evidence through:

- Fast track requests – simple cross-tabulations to answer a specific policy-relevant query
- Policy briefs – maximum four-page policy briefs on specific topics
- Bespoke, comprehensive reports for government agencies
- Collaborative projects between government agencies and *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers

4. Datasets available

Datasets are currently available from antenatal to the 12-year data collection wave. Additionally, we have data available from smaller data collection waves at 6 weeks, 16 months, 23 months, 31 months, 45 months, 72 months, a specific COVID-19 survey at 10 years, and Extreme Weather Event (EWE) survey at 13 years. The 15-year data collection wave data will become available April 2026.

Further resources

A range of existing resources based on our research findings can be found on our website, including:

- [Policy briefs](#): smaller publications on a specific topic of interest to policymakers and government. growingup.co.nz/growing-policy-briefs
- [Reports](#): comprehensive reports based on data collected at key milestones. growingup.co.nz/growing-reports
- [Published articles](#): *Growing Up in New Zealand* researchers use the study data to investigate a wide range of topics around child and youth development. growingup.co.nz/published-articles

For more information, please email researchgrowingup@auckland.ac.nz or visit our website at growingup.co.nz

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