

Data factsheet: Material wellbeing

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: material wellbeing

- Material wellbeing is a key determinant of child health and development. Adequate material wellbeing means that households can afford essential everyday items and access local amenities, while material hardship refers to circumstances where households are having to forgo necessities. Experiencing material hardship in childhood can shape both early-life health and developmental outcomes as well as long-term health, employment prospects and family-life in adulthood.²⁻³
- Ensuring material wellbeing for children and reducing child poverty are policy priorities for the New Zealand Government. Reducing child poverty is one of the wellbeing objectives of the Budget Policy Statement 2023,⁴ and material wellbeing is a focus area of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework.⁵ ⁶ The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 also requires that the Government regularly gathers data and reports on rates of child poverty and material hardship.
- *Growing Up in New Zealand* can provide robust contemporary evidence on a range of topics related to material wellbeing. The study collects data on measures of child poverty and material wellbeing, as well as child health outcomes that may be affected by material wellbeing.

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 Cantor P, Osher D, Berg J, Steyer L, Rose T. Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. In: *The Science of Learning and Development: Enhancing the Lives of All Young People*. 2021. p. 3–54.

³ Commission On Social Determinants of Health. *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Final report of the commission on social determinants of health. Geneva; 2008.

⁴ Budget 2023: Budget Policy Statement. Wellington: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government; 2022. 1-28.

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.

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	13Y#	15Y*	
Material hardship	Material hardship		Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEP-17 Material Wellbeing Index What is the approximate total value of debt that you currently have? What is the current total income for your household? What are the current sources of income for your household?
	Material wellbeing			Yellow		Blue	Purple	Light Blue	Pink	
	Savings and debt	Red			Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	
	Household income	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	
	Sources of household income	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	
	Benefits and payments	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	
	Child's money, jobs, savings				Green	Blue	Purple		Pink	
	Housing condition, costs, and disruption to amenities after 2023 extreme weather events				Green	Blue	Purple	Light Blue	Pink	
Parental work and education	Employment	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many jobs do you have? What is your occupation? How many hours a week do you work? Are you currently attending, studying, or enrolled at an educational institute? Does work leave you with too little time or energy to be the kind of parent you want to be?
	Occupation	Red			Green	Blue	Purple			
	Hours/schedule of work	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple			
	Work/life balance				Green	Blue				
	Reasons for part-time work	Red			Green					
	Reasons not in paid work	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green					
	Parental leave	Red	Orange							
	Parental education	Red					Purple			
	Job changes related to COVID-19						Purple			

* 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 material wellbeing

Growing Up in New Zealand also collects data on factors related to material wellbeing.

Domain	Constructs related to material wellbeing
Education	Education cost, education subsidies, care arrangements, school engagement and attendance, resources in the home
Family and whānau	Family structure, family relationships, work-family life balance, parent-child interactions
Health and wellbeing	Availability and access to health services and information, food intake, food insecurity, child health, parental health, health-related quality of life, medications, infectious diseases.
Psychological and cognitive development	Anxiety, depression, loneliness, perceived stress, life satisfaction, resilience, social support and coping
Societal context	Housing condition, household crowding, heating and insulation, housing tenure, housing costs, severe housing deprivation, residential mobility, engagement with neighbourhood

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.

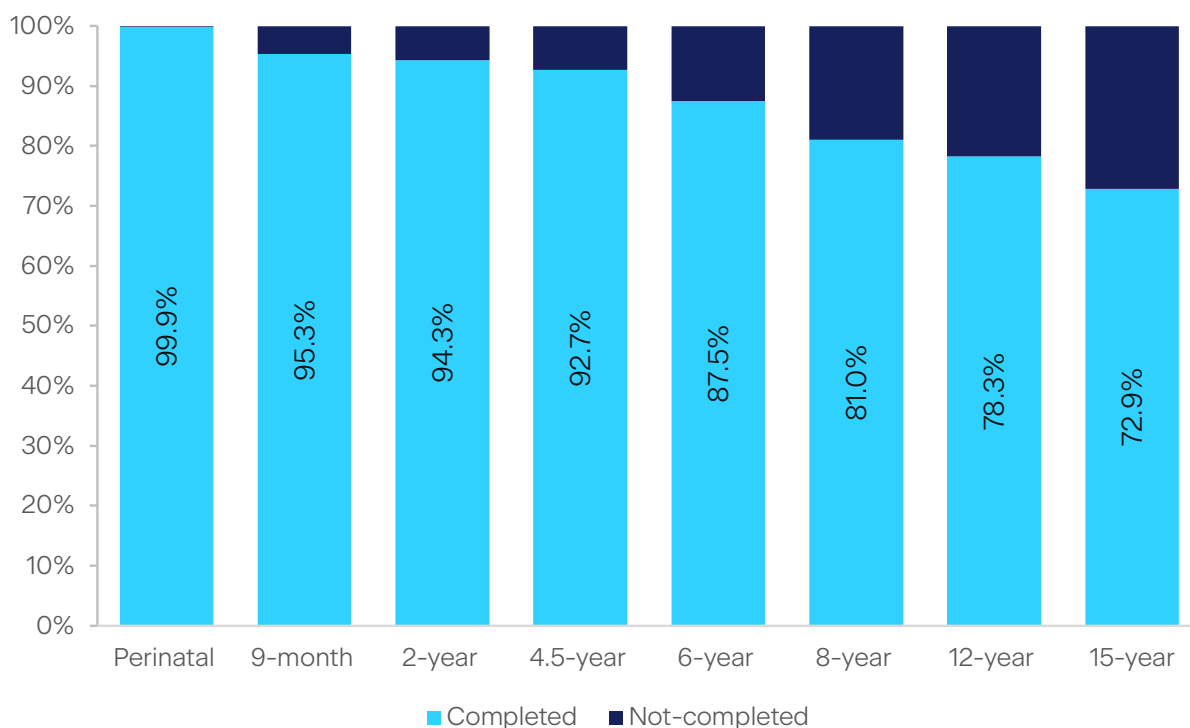


Figure 1. Longitudinal completion rate over time as a proportion of eligible cohort for each data collection wave

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 material wellbeing 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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