Regional Wellbeing

A broader view of community outcomes around New Zealand

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Economics put simply

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This report was prepared by Infometrics
2019

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Introduction

The current Labour-led administration is broadening the government's policy focus beyond the standard fiscal and economic indicators to incorporate wellbeing. This change explicitly recognises that New Zealanders' quality of life cannot be captured in a single measure such as GDP per capita.

Of course, income is an important consideration when assessing people's wellbeing, but so are factors such as environmental outcomes, community safety, and outcomes around health and housing. The concept of focusing on broader measures of wellbeing is not new – the King of Bhutan famously said in 1972 that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product." Even in New Zealand, the Local Government Act 2002 provided "for local authorities to play a broad role in promoting the social, environmental, and cultural well-being of their communities, taking a sustainable development approach." Despite the legislation, councils were not given any clear definition of wellbeing, so it arguably had little effect on the decision-making process. It has only been in the last few years that the concept of wellbeing has started to show through more clearly in the formulation of government policy.

The importance of understanding and influencing wellbeing stems from its focus on outcomes for people and communities across the country. Having objective measurements of wellbeing is critical to provide a more robust assessment of progress, for both local communities and decision-makers to consider.

Infometrics' Wellbeing Framework has been developed to help people better understand how different parts of New Zealand compare across a range of wellbeing metrics. The Framework uses 30 objective indicators of wellbeing across nine wellbeing domains. The indicators included in our Framework differ from those covered by The Treasury or Statistics New Zealand in their work. This divergence is often due to the unavailability of reliable data at a district, city, or regional level.

Doing well in the cities – mostly

One of the key themes to come through in the construction of our Wellbeing Framework is the urban-rural divide. Across seven of our nine domains, wellbeing is significantly higher in metropolitan centres than it is in provincial areas. The only two exceptions are for **Housing** and **Civic engagement and governance**.

In any regional breakdown of New Zealand, Auckland's size means that the city is going to have a strong influence on outcomes, and this result is particularly true in terms of **Housing** wellbeing. Auckland doesn't score more than

22 (out of 100) across each of the four **Housing** indicators. Other urban centres in the upper North Island also contribute to a lack of **Housing** wellbeing, particularly when it comes to housing affordability.

Our indicators for **Civic engagement and governance** are based on voter turnout at central and local government elections. The data shows that people in urban areas are particularly disaffected when it comes to local government politics, with local election turnouts below the nationwide average in eight of the 14 areas in our metropolitan grouping.

Looking out for the provincial underperformers

High levels of wellbeing are not limited to the cities, with areas such as Carterton, Tīmaru, and Central Otago recording good scores across a range of domains. But digging into the data a little more deeply uncovers some noticeable pockets within provincial New Zealand where wellbeing is lower than in other parts of the country. We have identified four areas with consistently poor wellbeing scores, all of which are in the North Island.

Whakatāne, Kawerau, Ōpōtiki, Gisborne, and Wairoa naturally fit together into an area we have called **Eastland**. Most of these districts score poorly across all our wellbeing domains except **Environment**. The worst results are for **Jobs and earnings** and are perhaps best encapsulated by the NEET rate (the proportion of people aged 15-24 who are not in education, employment or training). Kawerau, Ōpōtiki, and Wairoa are the three lowest-ranked districts in terms of the NEET rate, while Whakatāne and Gisborne also score well below the nationwide average.

Ōtorohanga, South Waikato, Waitomo, and Ruapehu form an area of relatively low wellbeing throughout the **Central North Island**. These districts have satisfactory scores in the **Housing** and **Income and consumption** domains, but their scores across the other domains are generally poor. The most disappointing domain is **Knowledge and skills**, highlighted by the relatively low levels of children attending early childhood education prior to starting school.

We also note that Rotorua, wedged between the **Eastland** and **Central North Island** areas we have described, has relatively low wellbeing outcomes – an outcome that is particularly concerning given the town is New Zealand's 10th largest urban area.

Each of the districts within **Northland** has low wellbeing across a range of domains. The two domains of most concern are **Housing** and **Social connections**. Both housing affordability and rental affordability are key factors dragging down the **Housing** domain, while school truancy rates are

relatively high across the region and negatively affect scores in the **Social connections** domain.

Perhaps one of the bigger surprises in the "disappointing" category is the appearance of **Tararua** and **Horowhenua**. The districts' scores for **Housing** and **Civic engagement and governance** are reasonably good, but one or both districts performs poorly across all the other domains. The weakest results are for **Knowledge and skills** and **Income and consumption**. Household incomes in both districts are among the lowest in the country.

In the South Island, the poorest performing area is the West Coast. However, in contrast to the North Island areas we have discussed, which have recorded low scores across 5-8 domains, the districts in the West Coast only have three or four particularly weak domains. The most consistently poor results are for **Health**, with suicide rates across the region among the worst in the country.

Which domains tend to move in tandem?

It isn't too surprising that there is a positive correlation between many of the scores across domains. For example, it makes sense that the indicators within the **Jobs and earnings** and **Knowledge and skills domains** tend to mirror each other.

Nevertheless, the correlation between the scores across these two domains is not the strongest one in evidence. In fact, the **Social connections** domain arguably provides the single greatest insight into an area's wellbeing. **Social connections** are highly correlated with **Jobs and earnings, Knowledge and skills, and Income and consumption**. It is possible to have poor **Social connections** but high scores across several other domains – Central Otago is a prime example. But with long work commuting times hurting Central Otago's score for **Social connections**, this district represents the exception, rather than the rule.

Two domains stand out as having negative correlations with several other domains: **Environment** and **Housing**. However, most of these correlations are only weakly negative. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that there is no obvious trade-off between a strong performance in the **Environment** domain and strength in more economically orthodox domains such as **Jobs and earnings** or **Knowledge and skills**. In fact, the most significant negative correlations shown by the **Environment** domain are against **Housing** and **Civic engagement and governance**. One could argue that a concentrated population base (which typically corresponds with reduced wellbeing in the **Housing** and **Civic engagement and governance** domains) offers greater scope for working towards better environmental outcomes – at least given the limited environmental indicators we currently have available.

A more in-depth understanding

The remainder of this report examines each of our nine domains, providing an in-depth look at an indicator within each domain and an associated region of interest. We conclude by looking at how our Wellbeing Framework fits alongside other international comparators such as the OECD's Better Life Index. These other comparators can tell us about potential improvements to our own assessment of wellbeing, including other indicators that could be included or areas where there is scope for better measurement. We also examine the policy implications of our Wellbeing Framework – which areas should be targeted for improvement, and what lessons can be taken from the areas where wellbeing is high in one or more domains. ■

Civic engagement and governance

Civic engagement and governance wellbeing highlights people's interactions with local decision making and public institutions. Better wellbeing in this domain is demonstrated through higher engagement by locals, indicating greater participation in civic processes and being involved in making choices that will affect their lives and the lives of those around them.

Focus on an indicator: Local election turnout

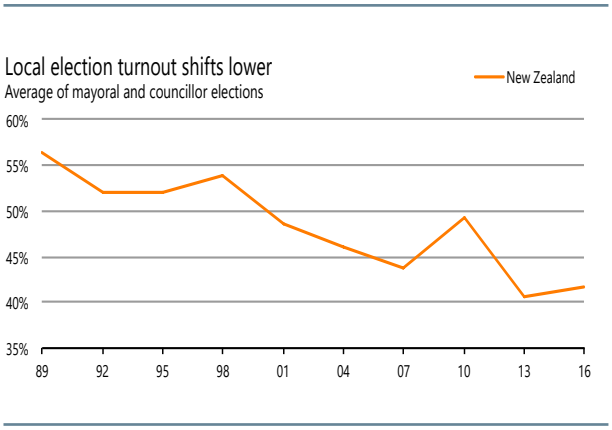
Elections are in the spotlight again this year, with the next round of three-yearly local authority elections scheduled for October 2019. Local elections are a key indicator of the level of participation in matters important to the local community. Local government provides various essential services to communities that are relied on daily, including access to safe drinking water, rubbish and recycling services, local roads, and community parks and social amenities. Provision of these services and other non-essential services can have a wide-ranging effect on people's lives.

Local election turnout provides an understanding of the level of engagement that people have with local issues, with the community influencing those outcomes directly through voting for their local government representatives every three years. Higher turnout shows areas where people are more engaged with the running of their local area, whereas low turnout indicates a lack of local engagement.

Concerningly, local election turnout nationally has been trending downwards throughout the last 30 years. Turnout for local elections fell below 50% in 2001 and has remained below half ever since (see Graph 1).

Reliable data is available since the 1989 local government reorganisation occurred. Although licensing trusts, community boards, regional council, and Auckland local board turnouts are available, our analysis focuses on territorial authority turnout, for ease of comparability – our analysis is an average of Councillor and Mayoral voter turnout.

Graph 1



Waikato District had the lowest turnout in 2016, at 31.4%, but in previous elections there were some areas where turnout was effectively zero. In 2007, turnout in the Mackenzie District was zero as there were the same number of candidates as seats. In 2013, Kaipara District also had zero turnout, with the area being run by Commissioners. This zero turnout effectively allowed no choice of representation by the local community, meaning the zero turnout in these areas received the lowest wellbeing scores available.

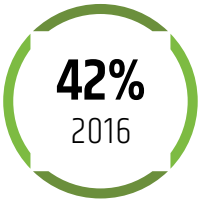
Focus on an area: Waikato

The Waikato Region ranks poorly in the **Civic engagement and governance** domain, with pooled data from the 2016 local authority elections and the 2017 general election. This low score in the **Civic engagement and governance** domain highlights lower engagement with matters that affect the lives of the local community, and a smaller willingness or ability to influence changes coming to the Waikato Region.

Local government turnout

The Waikato Region had the lowest average local election turnout over the last four elections (for

Local election turnout
Average turnout



General election turnout
Average turnout

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

which detailed data is available), with an average of 40.3% turnout across the 2007, 2010, 2013, and 2016 elections. Auckland was only marginally better, with 40.8% turnout, and was well below the highest average turnout of 56.3% recorded in the West Coast. Of the other two large regions, Wellington recorded an average turnout of 43.3% over the last four local elections, while Canterbury's average turnout sat at 45.5%.

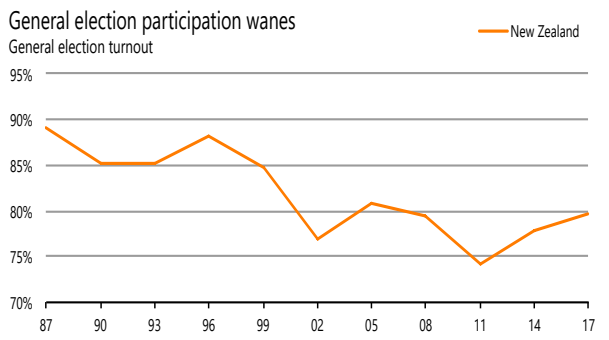
Within the Waikato Region, in line with the nationwide trend, voter turnout generally has been trending lower since 1989. Hamilton's local election turnout rate has fallen from 58.0% in 1989 to just 33.6% in 2016, the second lowest turnout in the country, meaning just one third of electors effectively chose the city's local representatives. Waikato District had the lowest turnout in 2016, with 31.4%, having nearly halved from 61% in 1989.

Central government turnout

While local government deals with local matters, central government sets the rules for the entire country. Engagement with the highest authority in the land, and the ability to influence the direction of this central authority, influences the outcomes the local communities themselves can achieve. In 2018, core New Zealand central government spending totalled $80.5b and was mirrored by core Crown tax revenue – money from companies and individual taxpayers – totalling $80.2b.

Given central government's authority to determine the laws throughout New Zealand, and its power to raise and spend money, it is again concerning to note a decline in general election turnout. Over the past 30 years, general election turnout has fallen from 89.1% in 1987 to 79.8% in 2017 (see Graph 2).

Graph 2



Although not nearly as dramatic as the fall in local election turnout, the decline in general election turnout cements a worrying trend. Fewer New Zealanders are directly interacting with the main, and universal, methods of representation and influence over their own lives.

Waikato Region has the fourth lowest general election turnout, but contains the second, third, and fifth lowest reporting areas: Kawerau District (72.5%), Waitomo District (74.7%), and South Waikato District (75.9%).

General election turnout data is scarce at a regional level, with local data only readily available for 2014 and 2017. For most elections, there is data on how many votes were cast, and for whom, but the data does not tell us where those voters came from. ■

Environment

Environmental wellbeing highlights the effects of human actions on the natural environment. The natural environment is important to wellbeing as it provides the foundations for life to exist, and it embodies a significant proportion of the resources that are used daily for employment, social interactions, and basic living. Better wellbeing in this domain is represented through minimising the damage and disruption to the natural environment caused by human interactions.

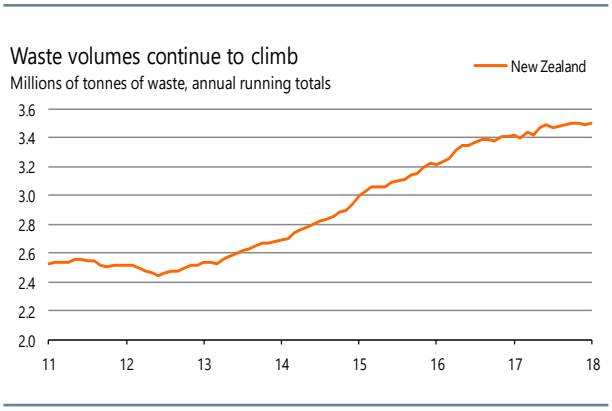
The environment remains a difficult area to assess in a wellbeing context. The linkage to wellbeing is difficult to assess over the short term, which is particularly problematic given the short-term nature of the political cycle and policy thinking. Furthermore, the ability to access reliable and consistent data at a sub-national level is limited. **Environment** is a domain where much more information is necessary if informed decisions are to be made at a local level.

Focus on an indicator: Waste diversion rate

Environmental wellbeing is often highly future-focused. Poor environmental wellbeing outcomes will not necessarily affect the populace now but will certainly affect people's quality of life in the future. Given the long lag between actions and discernible consequences in the **Environment** domain, detailing the human effect on the environment provides some clarity around current actions and future outcomes.

As a result, detailing what a population dumps into a hole in the ground is important in understanding the likely future environmental outcomes. Populations create waste as a matter of living, with this waste often heading to a local landfill. This process exemplifies the "out of sight, out of mind" mantra. However, the quantity of waste being disposed of in the ground can be limited by recycling or other means of reuse. Over the year to January 2018, New Zealand sent 3.5m tonnes of waste to landfill (see Graph 3).

Graph 3



Rubbish and recycling collections, run at a local-council level, have been a focus of central government decision making in recent time. In 2008, the Waste Minimisation Act entered force, aiming to "encourage waste minimisation and a decrease in waste disposal in order to … protect the environment from harm; and … provide environmental, social, economic, and cultural benefits." The Act also set out a need to properly record the volumes of waste produced in New Zealand as, without this data, informed decisions are limited in scope. Although this reporting has occurred, the actual collection and creation of the statistics varies across the country, with inconsistent measurement and no centralised repository. Moreover, analysing a trend is difficult, with limited data available – in some areas, only for a year or two.

Compiling waste diversion rates for each area required analysis of individual councils' Waste Assessments and Waste Minimisation Plans, with a national waste diversion rate of around 40% estimated from this information. The Wellington Region is a poor performer for waste diversion, with Upper Hutt City recording the lowest estimated waste diversion rate of 3.3%.

Focus on an area: Canterbury

The Canterbury Region performs well in the **Environment domain**, coming second only to Auckland when measured against our limited set of regionally available and comparable environmental indicators.

Carbon emissions
Estimated tonnes per capita

16.47
2015

Waste Diversion Rate
% of waste diverted from landfill

40%
2017

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Waste diversion rate

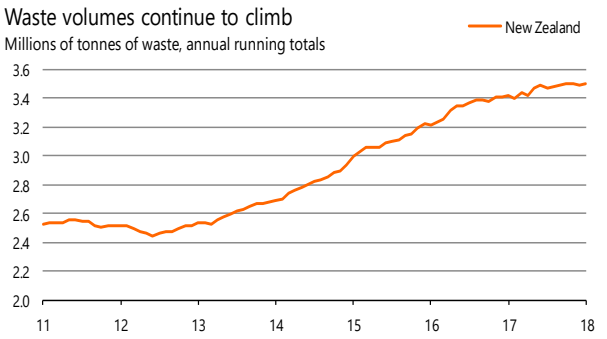
The Canterbury Region's waste diversion rate was estimated at 46.6% in 2017, just below the highest estimated waste diversion rate of 46.8% for the Auckland region. Given that Christchurch makes up a large proportion of Canterbury's population, the City's estimated waste diversion rate of 52% helps pull the region's score higher.

Nevertheless, Canterbury also contains the district with the highest estimated waste diversion rate: Kaikōura's, at 76.6%. The remaining areas within Canterbury are a mixed bag. High-growth areas tend to have lower waste diversion rates, such as Selwyn's estimated rate of 32.7%, while Tīmaru's waste diversion rate is estimated to be above the national average, at 41.2%.

Carbon emissions

The amount of carbon emitted assists in quantifying the effect that the populace has on the environment, with human activity leading to higher volumes of carbon emissions, warming the planet with detrimental consequences. Carbon emissions are estimated from experimental data from Statistics New Zealand, which breaks down carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions by industry in New Zealand. Using Infometrics' knowledge of the structure of local economies, we have estimated the quantity of carbon emissions per person in each area.

Graph 4



The Canterbury Region slips down the rankings in the carbon emissions indicator, coming in at 10th out of 16 regions. However, with an average per-person carbon emission estimate of 20.2 tonnes, the area fares better than lowest-ranked Southland (57.2 tonnes per person) and second-to-bottom Taranaki (51.3 tonnes per person). Although the urban area of Christchurch City has a smaller per-person carbon emission estimate, the agricultural focus of the remainder of the Canterbury region drags the regional score lower, with Hurunui and Ashburton both recording high per-person emissions estimates.[1]

1 We are conscious of possible shortcomings of our regional estimates of carbon emissions with relation to household-related emissions, as well as the "carbon sink" effects of the forestry industry, which is currently outside Statistics New Zealand's scope when preparing its experimental estimates.

Health

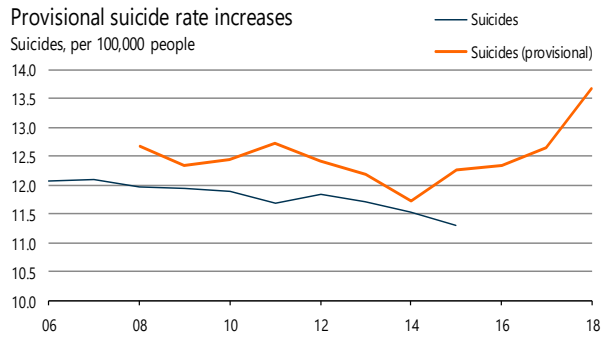
Health wellbeing highlights people's ability to live life free from illness and injury. Having better health outcomes provides people with the foundation to be an active and engaged member of society, through their ability to participate in the community, work, and education.

Focus on an indicator: Suicide rate

New Zealand's suicide statistics are particularly poor, with the rate of youth suicides the worst in the developed world. Official suicide statistics collected by the Ministry of Health's Mortality Collection, which are available until 2015, show the suicide rate declining. This decline aligns with a similar decline in the provisional suicide rate.[2]

Data from the Ministry of Justice shows the provisional suicide rate fell from 12.68 deaths per 100,000 people in 2008 to 12.27 in 2015. However, by 2018, the provisional suicide rate had increased to 13.67 deaths per 100,000 people (see Graph 5).

Graph 5



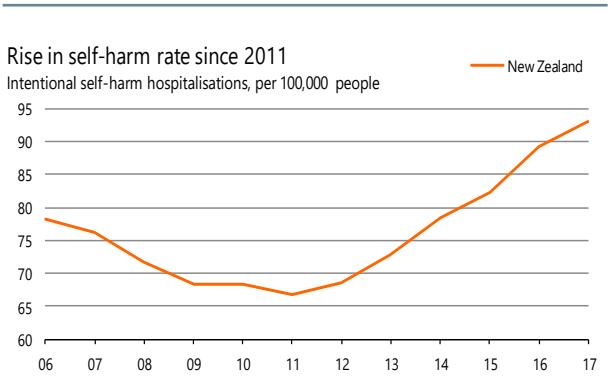
In total, there were 530 confirmed suicides in 2015. Provisional data for 2018 indicates 668 suspected suicides in 2018.

2 The provisional suicide rate is generally higher than the confirmed suicide rate because coronial findings rule that some deaths that were initially suspected to be suicides occurred due to other causes such as a medical event.

Regionally, the highest suicide rates are in rural communities. For the five years to 2015, the highest suicide rate around New Zealand was in Kawerau District, with 39.04 deaths per 100,000 people. Tararua District had the second highest rate, with 26.44 deaths per 100,000 people, followed by Buller District with 21.26 deaths per 100,000 people.

Growing rates of self-harm confirm the concerning trend of deteriorating mental health in New Zealand, with nearly 4,900 intentional self-harm hospitalisations in 2017. Self-harm hospitalisation rates have increased from a low of 66.75 per 100,000 people in 2011 to 93.14 per 100,000 people in 2017 (see Graph 6).

Graph 6



Regionally, Carterton District had the highest rate of self-harm hospitalisations in 2017, with 208 hospitalisations per 100,000 people. Grey District had the second-highest rate, with 206 hospitalisations per 100,000 people.

Focus on an area: Manawatū-Whanganui

The Manawatū-Whanganui Region has the second-worst **Health** outcomes in New Zealand, behind only the West Coast.

Suicide rate

The Manawatū-Whanganui Region has the second highest regional suicide rate in New Zealand, with 15.19 deaths per 100,000 people in 2015. Within the

Drinking water quality	Life expectancy	Mental health presentation rate	Suicide rate
Index (100 = best, 0 = worst)	Years at birth	% of pop. accessing services	Rate per 100,000 people
92.2	81.77	4.7%	11.3
2017	2017	2017	2015

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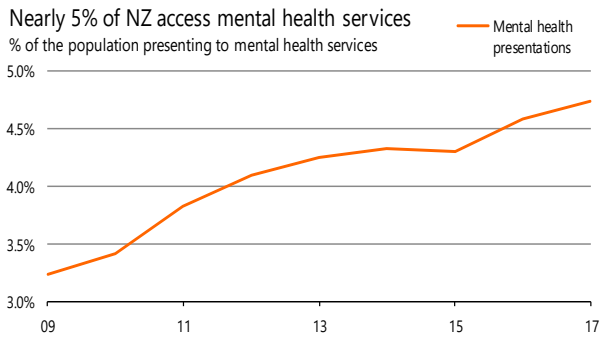
region, the Tararua District saw the highest rate of suicide, with 26.44 deaths per 100,000 people. Tararua's suicide rate was the second-highest of all 66 mainland territorial authorities. The Manawatū District had the 10th-worst suicide rate in New Zealand, with 19.11 deaths per 100,000 people.

Mental health presentation rate

The number of New Zealanders presenting to mental health and addiction services has risen from 3.2% of population in 2009 to 4.7% of the population in 2017 (see Graph 7). In 2017, nearly 227,000 people presented to mental health services, up from 139,000 in 2009.

Graph 7



Regionally, the highest proportion of the population accessing mental health services in 2017 was in Ōpōtiki District, at 8.4%. Manawatū-Whanganui had the fourth highest regional rate of mental health presentations, with 5.8% of the population accessing mental health services. Within the region, Whanganui District had the highest proportion of the population accessing services, with 7.8% of the population, making the District the second-highest ranked area around New Zealand for mental health presentations.

Life expectancy

The average person born in 2017 is expected to live for 80.25 years in the Manawatū-Whanganui Region, below the New Zealand average of 81.77. The region has the fifth-lowest life expectancy out of 16 regions. Within the region, the Whanganui District had the seventh-lowest life expectancy at birth, at 79.90 in 2017. In comparison, the lowest life expectancy in New Zealand was in the Far North, where life expectancy at birth in 2017 was 79.41.

Drinking water quality

Drinking water quality in the Manawatū-Whanganui region was the sixth worst in the country in 2017. Manawatū District's drinking water dragged down the regional rank, with the District recording the lowest drinking water quality in New Zealand. In 2017, Manawatū District's large water supply for Feilding, with 13,000 people connected to the water scheme, failed all three water standards (bacteria, protozoa, and chemical standards).

The Feilding water scheme accounts for 82% of the Manawatū District's population, giving the District an index score of 11.5 out of a maximum level of 100. Conversely, drinking water quality in both Palmerston North City and Whanganui District scored highly, with drinking water index scores of 97.9 and 100.0 (out of 100) in 2017. ■

Housing

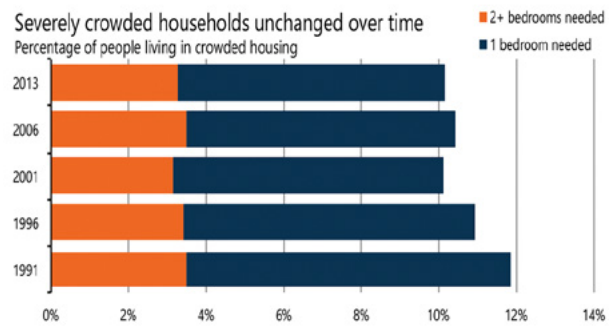
Housing wellbeing highlights people's ability to access and use suitable shelter, along with the extended benefits of satisfactory living conditions, including privacy, safety, personal space, and space for a family. Adequate housing allows security of living in an area, with a reasonable cost for the provision of shelter.

Focus on an indicator: Household crowding rate

Household crowding indicates a situation where either a household is trying to meet housing costs by spreading the costs over more people, or where the dwelling in question is ill-matched to the occupants. In other words, the composition of the household does not match the number and type of rooms available. Higher rates of household crowding have a detrimental impact on health, with infectious diseases more easily spread in crowded conditions.

New Zealand's household crowding rate, measured by the Canadian National Occupancy Standard, has changed little over the past 20 years, averaging 10.7% over the past five censuses (1991-2013). Over time, the percentage of people living in severely overcrowded housing (defined as needing two or more additional bedrooms) has remained stagnant at around 3.4% (see Graph 8).

Graph 8



Concerningly, Māori and Pasifika are mostly likely to live in crowded households, with 40% of Pasifika and 20% of Māori living in crowded households in 2013.

The North Island has greater levels of household crowding than the South Island. Of the North Island's population, 11.7% live in crowded conditions, compared to just 5.2% in the South Island.

Focus on an area: Bay of Plenty

Household crowding rate

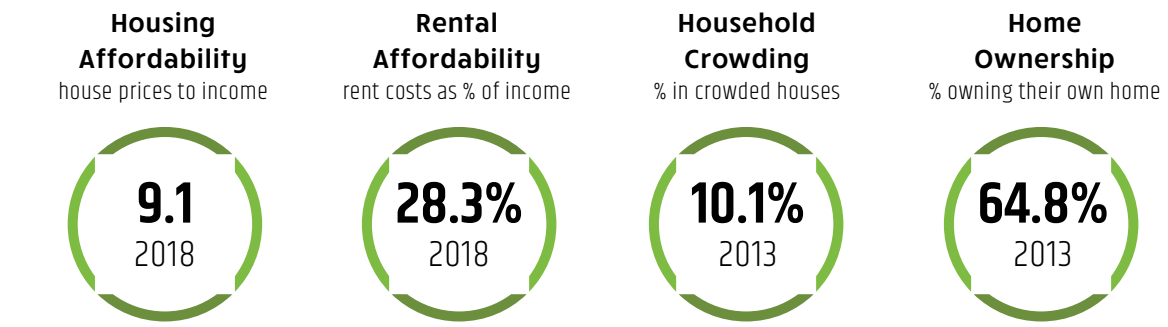
The Bay of Plenty Region has the fifth highest household crowding rate out of 16 regions, with 9.5% of people in the region living in crowded conditions. Within the region, Kawarau and Ōpōtiki have the highest rates of household crowding, with 17.3% and 16.7% respectively – also the highest and second-highest rates in the country. Lower incomes and a housing stock that isn't well matched with the needs of local households (for example, houses with too few bedrooms for the current occupants) have contributed to this rate of crowding.

Within the region, Tauranga City has the lowest crowding rate, with 6.9% of the population living in crowded housing. Even so, this rate is still the 28th highest in the country (out of 66 local council areas).

Home ownership rate

In 2013, the Bay of Plenty Region recorded the fourth-lowest home ownership rate out of New Zealand's 16 regions, with 64.7% of houses in the region occupied by their owners. The lowest rate of home ownership rate in New Zealand is in Gisborne, at just 59.2%.

The Ōpōtiki District has the lowest home ownership rate within the Bay of Plenty region and the sixth-lowest rate in the country, with home ownership of just under 59.2% compared to the national average of nearly 64.8%. Two of the larger population centres in the Bay of Plenty – Rotorua and Whakatāne – have home ownership rates well below the national average. In Rotorua 61.6% of houses are occupied by their owners, ranking



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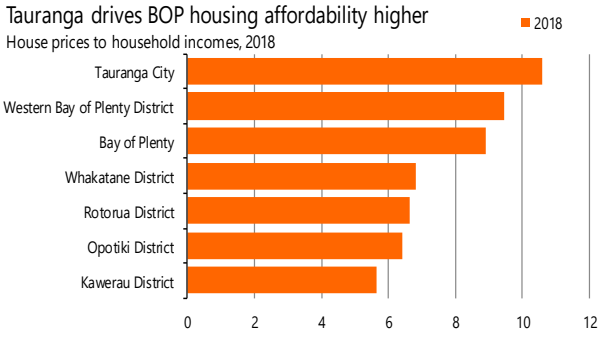
the areas as the 12th lowest rate in New Zealand. Whakatāne's rate is 63.1%, and even Tauranga is little better than the New Zealand average, with a home ownership rate of just above 65.1%, the 22nd lowest rate in the country.

Housing affordability ratio

In 2018, the Bay of Plenty Region was the second most expensive region for housing relative to household incomes. House prices in the region were estimated to be 8.9 times the median household income in the area. Auckland took out the bottom spot with a house-price-to-income ratio of 12.1.

Graph 9



Within the Bay of Plenty Region, Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty have worsened the region's housing affordability, with house prices in these areas rising far faster than incomes. Tauranga houses are estimated to cost 10.6 times the median household income, with the ratio being 9.5 in Western Bay of Plenty – both above the national average of 9.1.

House prices in Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty were the fifth and sixth highest in New Zealand in 2018, with prices growing at nearly double the rate of incomes in these two areas during 2018.

Rental affordability rate

Bay of Plenty was the second most expensive region in New Zealand to rent in 2018, with average rental costs making up 30.5% of estimated household incomes. Northland took the crown for most unaffordable rental costs, with 31.8% of household income spent on rental costs, as the cost of housing rose but incomes failed to keep pace.

Within the Bay of Plenty Region, Tauranga City recorded the highest rental cost burden, with 34.2% of household income spent covering rents – the second highest rate in the country. Tauranga City has held second place for rental costs relative to incomes since 2006, with the ratio of rents to household incomes rising from 29.4% in 2006 to 34.2% in 2018.

Income and consumption

Income and consumption wellbeing highlights people's ability to meet their everyday needs and achieve adequate living conditions, which provide a suitable level of living and comfort. This wellbeing includes independence and the ability to meet household costs such as heating, clothing, transport, and food costs, among others.

Focus on an indicator: median household income

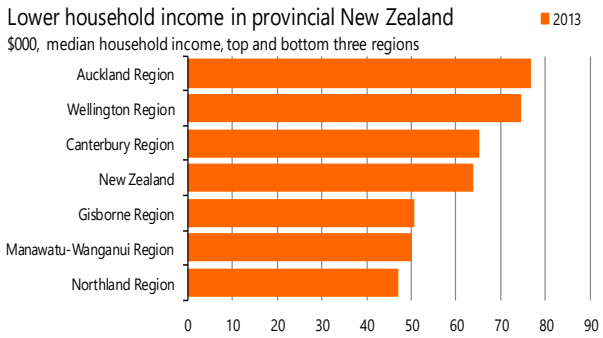
Higher incomes provide for both greater choice and greater consumption by households, with more spending possible on goods and services. First and foremost, spending will be on goods and services that meet basic needs and enable general sustenance and survival. Beyond this spending, there will be more discretionary spending that provides opportunities for enjoyment and leisure, extending the outcomes possible for households from surviving to thriving.

Comparing household incomes is an important distinction from personal earnings. Personal earnings provide an idea of the access potential for one person whereas, in real life, people within households generally pool resources for some or all spending. Household comparisons are thus useful to determine the purchasing potential of a group of people who spend together, helping to assess potential consumption outcomes.

Median household incomes are higher in areas with a greater urban concentration, with household incomes in metropolitan New Zealand in 2013 being 29% higher than in provincial New Zealand. This metro-provincial divide is due to a higher concentration of white-collar jobs in urban areas, which generally pay more. Professional, technical, and scientific services add to higher household incomes, alongside government-based and creative-based industries.

Across New Zealand, Wellington City had the highest median household income in 2013, with $91,100. The New Zealand median was $63,800. Of New Zealand's 16 regions, Northland had the lowest household income, at $47,000 (see Graph 10).

Graph 10



It's also likely that as urban centres have higher living costs (certainly for housing), there is a greater proportion of households that contain higher numbers of earners. This trend will tend to push household incomes higher, but only to help the household meet its accommodation costs.

Focus on an area: Auckland

Auckland is the top ranked region, out of New Zealand's 16 regions, for the **income and consumption** domain, with the Wellington Region a close second.

Benefit dependency rate

In 2018, Auckland had the second-lowest benefit dependency rate, with 6.7% of Auckland's working-age population (aged 15-64) receiving a main benefit. Auckland narrowly missed out on the top spot to Tasman Region, which had a benefit dependency rate of 6.6%.

Looking at Auckland in more detail, benefit dependency rates among the area's local boards follow a broad north-south pattern. The benefit dependency rate in southern local boards (8.7%) was about 80% higher than the rate in northern local boards (4.7%) in 2018 (see Graph 11).

Benefit dependency rate
% of working age population

8.7%
2018

Median household income
NZ Dollars, household

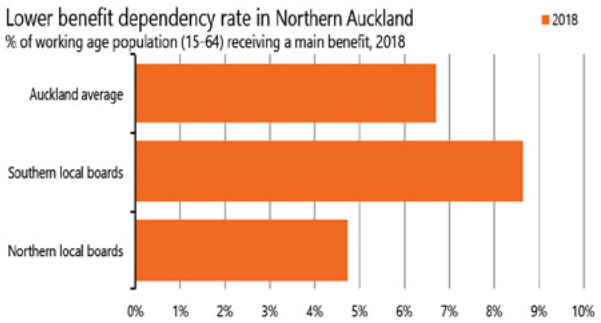
63,800
2013

Personal earnings
NZ Dollars, individual earner

60,891
2018

INCOME AND CONSUMPTION INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

Graph 11



Excluding the two island-based local boards, the Upper Harbour local board area had the lowest benefit dependency rate in Auckland, with just 2.2% of the working-age population receiving a main benefit in 2018. Conversely, Manurewa had the highest benefit dependency rate in Auckland in 2018, with 13% of the working-age population a main benefit recipient.

Median household income

Regionally, household incomes were highest in Auckland in 2013, with the median household income in the area sitting at $76,500. However, within the Auckland Region, household incomes differed significantly. The Ōrākei local board recorded the highest median household income in 2018, at $107,800. This median income was more than 2½ times the household income in lowest-ranked Great Barrier local board, at $30,500.

As with the benefit dependency rate, there is a broad north-south divide among Auckland's local boards when comparing household income, with a few exceptions. The two offshore islands rank at the bottom, while the southernmost local board, Franklin, has the sixth-highest median household income.

Personal earnings

In 2018, estimated personal annual earnings in Auckland were the highest in New Zealand, with the average person earning just over $66,200. Auckland has consistently been the top-ranked region for personal earnings, with earnings in the area rising by just over $20,000 during the last 12 years.

It is not possible to break down personal earnings further, preventing analysis of personal incomes across Auckland's local boards. However, across New Zealand, more urbanised areas unsurprisingly recorded higher personal earnings, with personal incomes in metropolitan New Zealand being 20% higher than provincial personal incomes in 2018.

Analysis at a territorial authority level is possible. This breakdown shows that Wellington City recorded the highest personal incomes in New Zealand in 2018, with $75,700 – well above the national average of $60,900.

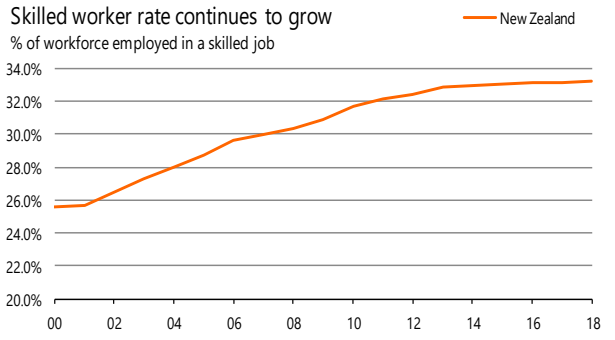
Jobs and earnings

Jobs and earnings wellbeing highlights people's ability to secure a stable source of income that can be used to support an individual or their family, whānau, or household. Having a job often provides people with a sense of purpose and increased self-esteem. In a regional context, the wider labour market provides an indication of the potential wellbeing outcomes for people within that area.

Focus on an indicator: Skilled worker rate

The share of skilled workers in the New Zealand economy has continued to increase since 2000, rising from one quarter of all workers (25.6%) in 2000 to one third (33.3%) in 2018 (see Graph 12). Nationally, over 830,000 workers now employed in a skilled job.

Graph 12



Metropolitan areas dominate those areas with the highest share of their workforce employed in skilled jobs. The skilled worker rate in metropolitan New Zealand in 2018 was 36% - one third higher than the provincial New Zealand rate of 27%. Of note, the highest provincial New Zealand skilled worker rate (27% in 2018) is still lower than the lowest recorded rate in metropolitan New Zealand back in 2000 (28%).

Regionally, the Wellington Region had the highest skilled worker rate in 2018, at 40%. Auckland came in second at 36%, followed by Nelson at 33%. The lowest regional rate was located next door to Nelson, with Tasman recording a skilled worker rate of 24%.

Focus on an area: Hawke's Bay

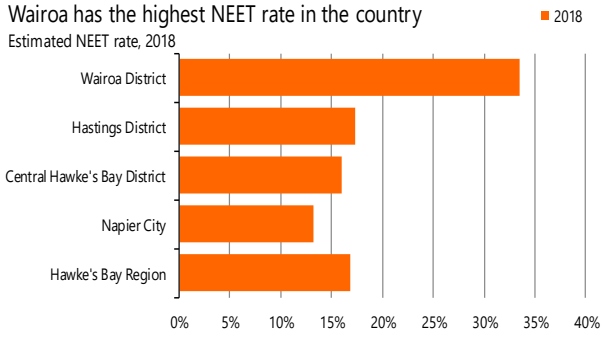
The Hawke's Bay Region had the fourth-lowest score for the **jobs and earning** domain in 2018. Neighbouring Gisborne had the lowest score of all regions. At the other end of the scale, Auckland was the top performing region in this domain, followed closely by the Wellington Region.

NEET rate

In 2018, the Hawke's Bay Region had the second-highest NEET rate[3] out of New Zealand's 16 regions, according to estimates from Infometrics. The NEET rate in the region has trended down slightly over the last six years, from 18.2% in 2013 to 16.8% in 2018.

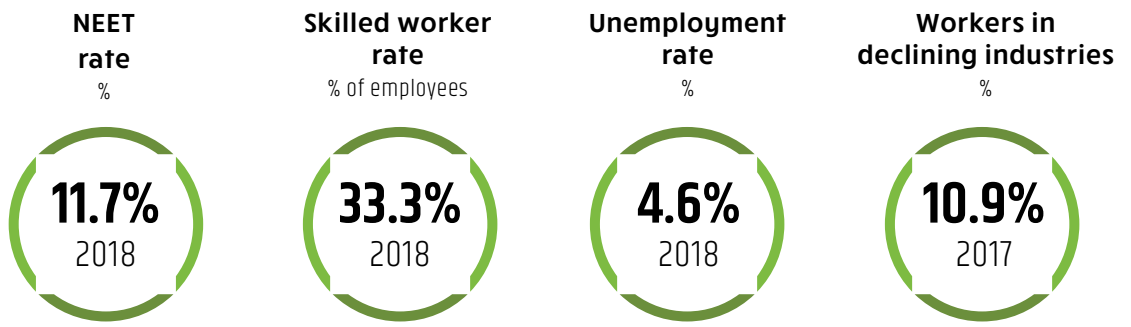
Wairoa District recorded the highest NEET rate in Hawke's Bay and New Zealand, at 33.5%. Infometrics' estimates show the NEET rate in Wairoa has increased from 29.8% since 2013.

Graph 13



The remaining areas within the Hawke's Bay region have lower NEET rates, but all are still above the national average. Hastings had the second-highest rate in the region in 2018, and the 18th highest in the country, at 17.4% (see Graph 13). Hastings was followed by Central Hawke's Bay (16.0%, 23rd highest) and Napier City (13.2%, 33rd highest).

3 The NEET rate is the proportion of people aged 15-24 who are not in education, employment or training.



JOBS AND EARNINGS INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

By way of comparison, the lowest estimated NEET rate in the country was in the Queenstown-Lakes District, with a rate of 5.1% in 2018.

Skilled worker rate

Hawke's Bay sits in the lower half of regions when it comes to the skilled worker rate. In 2018, 29.3% of the region's employees were in a skilled job – the sixth-lowest rate out of New Zealand's 16 regions.

Within Hawke's Bay, the skilled worker rate varies widely. The urban nature of Napier City provides the environment for skilled jobs and helps attract skilled workers. The city's skilled worker rate is 31.8% - the 14th highest in New Zealand. Hastings District is the second-highest in the region, at 29.4%. The more rural nature of Wairoa and Central Hawke's Bay limits the opportunities for more skilled workers, with skilled worker rates of 24.9% and 20.6% respectively.

Unemployment rate

Unemployment in Hawke's Bay was the third highest out of New Zealand's 16 regions in 2018 but has been falling over the last nine years. Following the Global Financial Crisis, the unemployment rate in the region peaked at 7.4% in 2010 but has since fallen to 5.7% in 2018.

Unemployment rates across the local authority areas within the Hawke's Bay Region remain among the highest in the country. However, Central Hawke's Bay bucks this trend, with its unemployment rate of 3.6% below the New Zealand average of 4.6% during 2018.

However, at the other end of the scale, Wairoa chalked up the second-highest rate in the country, with an unemployment rate estimated at 9.4%.

Workers in declining industries

Hawke's Bay sits around the middle of the pack regionally for the percentage of workers employed in declining industries. A higher proportion indicates less employment security over the medium term, with current jobs possibly not being available in future years.

Within the region, there is again significant variation. Central Hawke's Bay has the second-highest proportion of workers employed in declining industries, at 27.6%, while Hastings has the 11th-lowest proportion, with just 8.9% of the workforce employed in declining industries. ■

Knowledge and skills

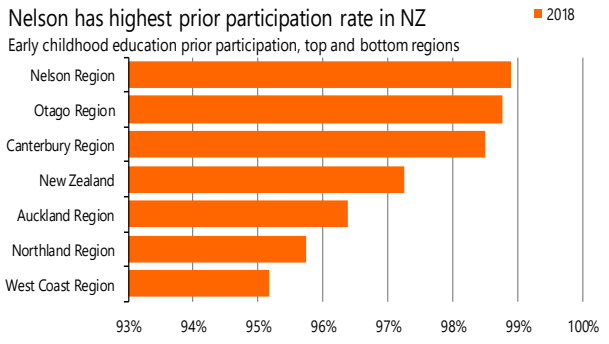
Knowledge and skills wellbeing highlights people's ability to acquire and use information to increase their wellbeing in other areas of their life, particularly regarding employment. Measuring the level and types of formal qualifications people have provides an understanding of the access that a person has to higher education and employment. Higher qualifications and educational attainment provide a greater ability to access additional opportunities and allow for social mobility.

Focus on an indicator: ECE participation

The percentage of children who enter school having attended early childhood education (ECE) continues to rise, up from 94.7% in 2011 to 97.3% in 2018. Since 2001, government spending on ECE has grown nearly fivefold, with over 214,000 funded places in 2018.

There is very little difference between ECE participation rates in metropolitan and provincial New Zealand – in 2018, provincial New Zealand lagged metropolitan areas by just 0.1 percentage point.

Graph 14



Nelson Region had the highest ECE participation rate in 2018, with 98.9% of those starting school in the region attending ECE in the previous six months. At the other end of the spectrum, the West Coast Region had the lowest ECE participation rate out of New Zealand's 16 regions, with a rate of 95.2%. Northland had the second-lowest regional rate, at 95.7% (see Graph 14).

Higher rates of prior participation in ECE can indicate better preparedness for school-based education and usually translate into better educational attainment throughout the education system. Prior participation in ECE is a significant factor in supporting vulnerable children and children from lower socioeconomic communities.

Focus on an area: Otago

ECE participation

Otago Region had the second-highest rate of ECE participation out of New Zealand's 16 regions in 2018, with 98.8% of children starting school having attended ECE in the previous six months.

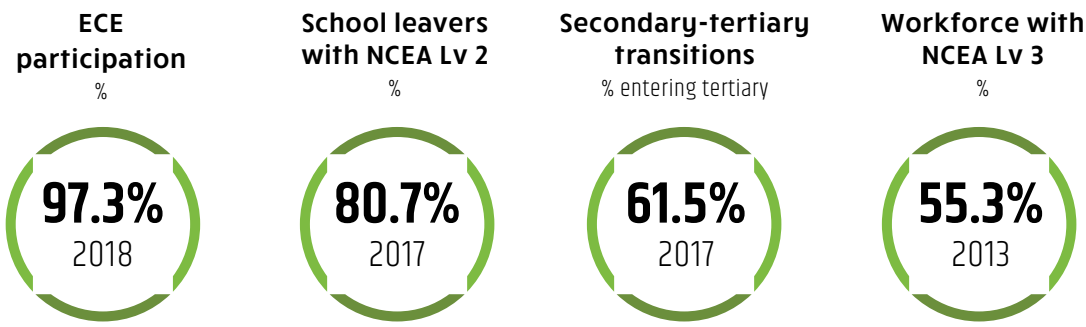
Within Otago, Queenstown-Lakes has the highest ECE participation rate, with 99.6% of school children starting school having attended ECE – the second-highest rate in the country.

Central Otago has the second-highest rate in the Otago Region, at 99.1%, followed by Dunedin City with 98.7%. Clutha District had the fourth-highest rate in the Otago Region, but has also improved the most within the region since 2011. ECE participation in Clutha has increased by nearly six percentage points, from 92.6% in 2011 to 98.4% in 2018.

School leavers with NCEA Level 2

In 2017, Otago had the highest proportion of school leavers who left with NCEA Level 2 or above, at 86%. This proportion has risen from 75% in 2009. However, Otago's 10-percentage point gain is actually the second-smallest gain over the last eight years. Southland saw the largest improvement, increasing 15 percentage points since 2009 to reach 82%.

Queenstown-Lakes was the fifth-ranked area in New Zealand in 2017 for the proportion of school leavers with NCEA Level 2 or above, hitting 90%. However, after growing strongly between 2009



KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

and 2013, Queenstown-Lakes has bobbed around either side of 90%. Dunedin City has made more sustained progress, with an 11-percentage point increase since 2009, to 87% in 2017.

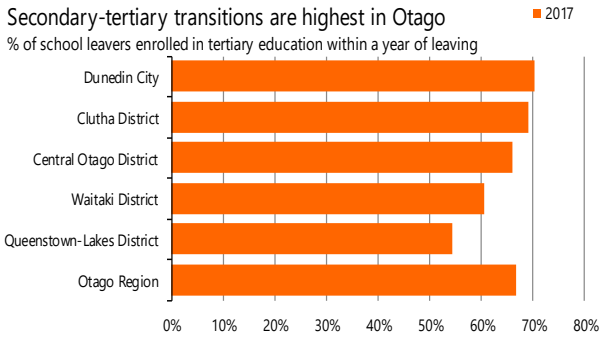
Clutha District was the worst-performing area within the Otago region in 2017. The District's rate of school leavers with an NCEA Level 2 qualification or above decreased from 87% in 2016 to 79% in 2017.

Secondary-tertiary transitions

Two-thirds (67%) of students enrolled in tertiary education within a year of leaving school in Otago in 2017, the highest regional enrolment rate in the country.

Graph 15

Dunedin City had the highest enrolment rate in the Otago Region in 2017, at 70% (see Graph 15). This rate was the second highest in New Zealand, behind Stratford with 71%.



Having a major tertiary institution in Dunedin (the University of Otago) helps bolster Dunedin's score. Nearby areas such as Clutha are close behind the Dunedin rate, which has 69% of students enrolling in tertiary education with a year of leaving school.

Workforce with NCEA Level 3

The workforce education level looks at the percentage of workers in the working age population (15-64) who have an NCEA Level 3 equivalent or higher qualification.

Otago Region had the third-highest regional workforce education level in New Zealand in 2013, with 59% of workers having an NCEA Level 3 or higher qualification. Otago was slightly behind the Wellington Region (63%) and Auckland (62%).

Within Otago, Queenstown-Lakes took out the top spot, having 67% of workers with a Level 3 qualification or higher – the second-best rate in the country. Close behind was Dunedin City, at 64% – the third-highest rate in the country.

Unsurprisingly, metropolitan New Zealand had a higher workforce education level than provincial New Zealand, with the metropolitan rate of 60% being about one third higher than the 45% provincial rate. ■

Safety

Safety wellbeing highlights people's ability to live a life free from threat, danger, crime, abuse, and violence. Safety is necessary in all facets of life: at work, at home, and out and about. Lower safety outcomes provide an understanding of the risks faced by people living in a particular region.

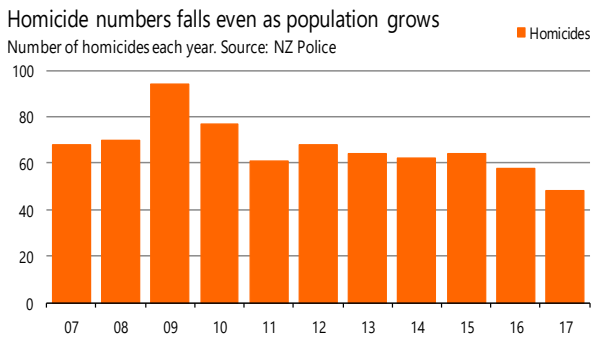
Focus on an indicator: Crime rate

New Zealand's crime rate is low by international standards, with New Zealand being ranked second in the Global Peace Index 2018 behind Iceland.

Recorded crimes continued to fall over the year to June 2018, with total reported crime dropping 7% from a year before. Over this period, there were 153,800 criminal proceedings underway, down from 165,000 in the previous year.

The number of murders in New Zealand has fallen in the last two years of reporting, with just 48 murders reported in 2017 (see Graph 16).

Graph 16



Drilling down into detailed crime data, proceedings related to thefts and burglary have fallen 10% after peaking in October 2016. Violent crimes, including assault, sexual assault, and homicide-related offences, fell 3%.

The Gisborne Region had the highest regional crime rate in 2018, with 6,810 crimes per 100,000 people, followed by Hawke's Bay, with 5,159 crimes per 100,000 people. At a territorial authority level, Ōpōtiki had the highest crime rate in New Zealand, with 7,431 crimes per 100,000 people. Ōpōtiki's rate was down from 7,836 crimes per 100,000 people the year before.

The South Island has lower crime rates than the North Island. The lowest crime rate in the country in 2018 was in Selwyn, with just 812 crimes per 100,000 people. Neighbouring Waimakariri had the second-lowest crime rate in 2018, with 1,507 crimes per 100,000 people.

Nationally, the crime rate continues to fall, from 3,756 crimes per 100,000 people in 2015 to 3,148 crimes per 100,000 people in 2018. This decline in crime rate comes as police numbers rose 1% over the same period, to 9,011 sworn officers in 2018.

Across New Zealand, metropolitan areas have a lower crime rate than provincial areas, with 2,877 crimes per 100,000 people in metropolitan areas in 2018, compared to 3,680 crimes per 100,000 people in provincial New Zealand. For the four years that detailed data is available, the provincial crime rate (3,680 in 2018) has never gone lower than the highest metropolitan crime rate (3,536 in 2015).

Focus on an area: Wellington

Wellington was the top-performing region in the **Safety** domain, just ahead of Auckland. A high proportion of the Wellington Region's population lives in urban centres, with the prevalence of white-collar jobs in urban areas contributing to workplace safety. Crime rates and road fatalities also tend to be lower in urban areas..

Crime rate

In 2018, Wellington had the second-lowest regional crime rate, with 2,337 crimes per 100,000 people. Tasman Region took out the top spot, with 2,221 crimes per 100,000 people. Over the past four years, the Wellington Region's crime rate has

Crime rate
Crimes per 100,000 people

3,148
2018

Road fatalities rate
Deaths per billion VKT

15
2018

Workplace injury rate
% of workers

9.48%
2017

SAFETY INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

continually declined, down from 2,979 crimes per 100,000 people in 2015.

Higher incomes across Wellington have helped to keep crime rates low. Half of the territorial authorities within Wellington Region are in the top ten for lowest crime rates in New Zealand. Wellington City has the lowest crime rate in the region, and the third-lowest in New Zealand, with 1,767 crimes per 100,00 people in 2018.

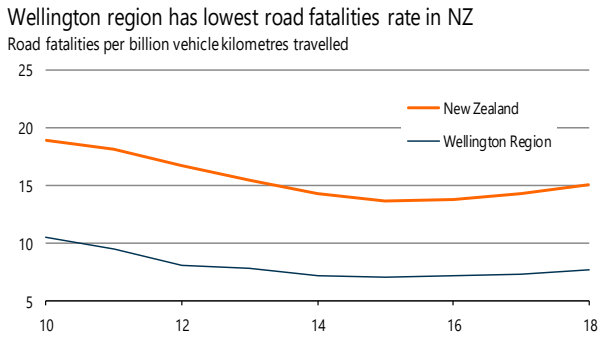
All eight areas within Wellington Region saw a decline in the crime rate in 2018, while 11 out of 66 territorial authorities across the country saw an increase in crime. The largest regional grouping to record an increased crime rate was in Otago, where three local authority areas saw increased crime rates in 2018.

Road fatalities rate

Wellington Region also had the second-lowest regional road fatalities rate in 2018, with an estimated 7.60 road deaths per billion vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT). Auckland had the lowest rate, at 6.16 road deaths per billion VKT. However, Wellington's road fatality rate has been increasing over the past four years, edging up from 6.96 road deaths per billion VKT in 2015 (see Graph 17).

Within the Wellington region, all areas have low road fatality rates. Carterton has the lowest rate in the country, with 3.01 road deaths per billion VKT, followed by second-ranked South Wairarapa (5.26) and third-ranked Lower Hutt City (5.34). Wellington City had the seventh-lowest rate in New Zealand, with 6.86 road deaths per billion VKT, having fallen below the nine-year average of 10.99.

Graph 17



Workplace injury rate

The higher rate of office-based working in the Wellington region contributes to the region having the lowest proportion of workers injured in 2018, with 6.4% of the workforce claiming ACC for workplace injuries. Office work is less risky than jobs with more manual labour, helping to keep the workplace injury rate lower.

Wellington City had the lowest workplace injury rate in the country in 2018, with 4.6% of workers injured. Wellington City's rate has fallen from 7.5% since 2000, a 60% decline. Lower Hutt had the second-lowest rate in the country, with 6.5%, although this rate has increased over the past six years from a low of 5.4% in 2012. ■

Social connections

Social connections wellbeing highlights people's ability to contribute to, and be a part of, a community and interact within society. Social contact allows people to socialise and interact with others, which reduces isolation and exclusion, and better enables support to be accessed, and resilience to be built.

Focus on an indicator: Truancy rate

Higher levels of truancy indicate both the lower connection that students have with their local school – often the largest community that many young people have in their early years – and the potential for poorer educational and employment outcomes later in life, with a consequential lower income potential.

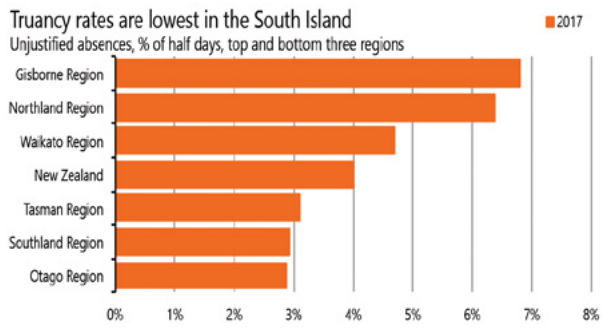
Truancy rates broadly align with transient students, with both activities (not attending school and moving schools often) contributing to poorer learning outcomes, because students are not engaged at school. Higher truancy rates also reduce the ability to access related support and build social networks through school.

The national truancy rate in 2017 was 4.00%, having increased from 3.20% in 2011. The South Island performs well – Otago has the lowest regional truancy rate, with just 2.88% of students having an unjustified absence recorded in 2017. Southland Region had the second-lowest region rate, at 2.93% (see Graph 18).

Truancy rates are lower in metropolitan New Zealand, with 3.85% of students recording an unjustified absence in 2017 in metro areas, compared to 4.29% for provincial areas.

Our truancy rate includes "other unjustified absences", such as students who miss school for family holidays. However, this wider rate captures where students are not engaged in the classroom, which limits their learning and diminishes the potential for them to obtain and retain transferable skills.

Graph 18



Focus on an area: Northland

Northland has the second-lowest regional score in New Zealand for the **Social Connections** domain, with only Gisborne Region having worse outcomes.

Dependency ratio

A higher dependency ratio indicates that the working-age population in a given area faces a greater burden in supporting its dependents, whether they be children or retirees. New Zealand's aging population means that the dependency ratio is expected to continue rising over coming years.

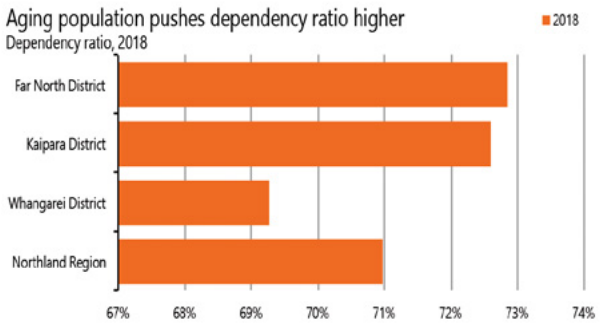
The more rural areas of Northland have higher dependency ratios. In 2018, the Far North District had the seventh highest ratio in New Zealand, at 72.8%. Kaipara ranked eighth highest, at 72.6%. Whāngārei, with a greater urban concentration, had a lower dependency ratio, although the ratio had still risen from 59.6% in 2006 to 69.3% in 2018 (see Graph 19).

As with other regions, Northland faces an aging population, driving the dependency ratio up from 60% in 2006 to 71% in 2018. Since 2006, people aged 65 or over, as a share of the non-working-age population, have risen from 39% to 49% in 2018. Increased numbers of retirees will create greater fiscal pressures in terms of health and superannuation spending, as well as potentially requiring a different range of services from local government and the private sector.

Dependency ratio %	Internet access rate % of households	Truancy rate Unjustified absences, % of half days	Work commuting time Minutes
53% 2018	77% 2013	4% 2017	13.03 2013

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS INDICATORS FOR NEW ZEALAND

Graph 19



Internet access rate

In 2013, 76.8% of New Zealand had access to the internet at home. Internet access is unsurprisingly higher in metropolitan areas (80.2%) than in provincial areas (71.0%). Northland's more dispersed population contributed to the region having the second-worst regional rate of internet access, with just 68% of households able to access the internet at home. Only Gisborne Region had a lower rate of access, at 63.2%.

The more sparsely populated Far North and Kaipara Districts had lower rates of access than Whāngārei. In 2013, the Far North had the ninth-lowest internet access rate in New Zealand, with just 63.8% of households having access. Kaipara was ranked 15th from bottom, with 66% of households having internet access. Whāngārei, with an access rate of 71.5%, was ranked 35th lowest out of 66 local authorities.

Truancy rate

Northland's truancy rate in 2017 was the second-worst regional rate in New Zealand. Higher levels of truancy highlights issues at home which make it more difficult for students to remain at school, leading to poorer educational outcomes generally. The Far North had the fourth-highest truancy rate in the country, at 8.40%. Whāngārei (5.20%) and Kaipara (4.60%) had lower rates of unjustified absences, but both were still above the nationwide average.

Work commuting time

In 2013, Northlanders faced the third longest regional commute to work, taking a best-case average of 14.6 minutes to get from home to work. Reversing the usual trend of metropolitan areas doing better than provincial New Zealand, metro commuters took 3% longer to get to work than those in provincial areas.

Modelling by Infometrics using 2013 Census home and work locations allowed for an indication of the commuting times taken in different areas. Across Northland, commuting times varied. Kaipara had the 12th fastest commute in New Zealand, taking 9.27 minutes, whereas the Whāngārei commute was the 13th longest in New Zealand, taking 14.91 minutes. The Far North had the longest commute within the Northland Region, taking 16.01 minutes. ■

Improving the assessment of wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing requires a suite of indicators to assess progress and outcomes in the community. No list of indicators is exhaustive, and our coverage of wellbeing indicators has obvious limitations, as do other attempts to measure wellbeing.

Some of the reasons behind the indicators we have chosen include data availability, public understanding, ability for indicators to be influenced by policy, and having indicators that are, as much as possible, outcome-focused.

Additional indicators could add to our understanding of wellbeing and provide a more robust and well-rounded assessment and discussion of wellbeing across New Zealand. Below we highlight some potential areas for future consideration, and where possible, discuss some of the possible limitations.

Additional indicators

Local government satisfaction: understanding how the community rates their local government's performance could provide a richer picture of Civic engagement and governance than simply looking at local election turnout. The link between rates and representation is often confused, with residents who don't directly pay rates feeling less connected to local authority influence. And voter turnout could conceivably be high at a local authority's election because people are dissatisfied with their local government outcomes and feel strongly that the current councillors need to be replaced.

Volunteer hours: measuring how people within a community give back could assist with determining Civic engagement and governance outcomes, by assessing actual engagement in grassroots activities. However, measuring the number of people, or hours volunteered, may only provide an insight by giving a quantity, not quality, assessment of engagement.

Air quality: a measure of the air quality in different areas would seem to be a critical part of environmental wellbeing around New Zealand. However, air-quality monitoring is only performed in 52% of the 66 local authorities across New Zealand, with entire regions such as Taranaki not currently undertaking any air monitoring.

Waterway quality: another measure to better understand environmental wellbeing, measuring water quality is important, but difficult. Water quality data ranges across many variables, including nitrogen loading, phosphorous loading, E. coli, or the macroinvertebrate community index (MCI). Some measures might be better suited to different bodies of water or in different areas. A "swimmability" measure could also be considered. However, measuring water quality across areas within New Zealand is difficult, with a need to determine the correct area to allocate a water quality measurement to, and the difficulty in accounting for upstream and downstream effects of pollution.

Non-mental health measures: although not completely outcomes-based, measures of contagious diseases, such as meningococcal disease, could provide a broader picture of the health of a population, with an understanding of the prevalence of illness in certain areas. This prevalence could work as a proxy to determine areas of greater need for measures that are harder to determine accurately, such as housing quality (see below) and basic health needs.

Unmet need for healthcare: determining the unmet need for general practitioner services and prescriptions provides a way to determine the burden on those unable to access the services they need. However, unmet need must be measured by asking people directly, meaning that consistent and reliable disaggregated data is not available.

Material hardship of children: measuring how many children live in conditions where they do not have access to basic amenities and the fundamentals of life provides insights into the vulnerability of children during their developmental stages. These measures could include establishing how many young people go without food regularly, or how many have inadequate shelter, clothing, or other necessitates.

Housing quality: a measure of the standard of housing would provide a better understanding of the conditions that people around the country live in. However, determining how quality is measured is difficult. The addition of certain building materials may not lead to better housing outcomes: a heater being present in a house may indicate better quality, but not if the heater is never used, for example.

Adjusted crime tracking: crude crime rates can only track the quantity of crimes committed, but without a "quality" adjustment, a murder is counted the same as a burglary, meaning more serious crimes are not distinguished from less serious crimes. Infometrics is working on establishing an adjusted measure of crime across New Zealand.

Work and leisure outcomes: understanding how New Zealanders work, and if different people are overexerted at work, and thus not able to enjoy leisure time, can inform wellbeing discussions. A possible solution is to measure average hours worked around New Zealand, compared to a national or international average, or a standard working week of 40 hours.

Parental choice: unpaid parental work, such as staying at home and looking after children is absent from traditional GDP measures but could factor into an assessment of wellbeing. Measuring the ability for parents to stay at home (and whether that choice is available to them) could be considered.

Access to amenities: determining access is fraught with issues, including how to measure access: physical distance, ability to pay, or actual visits? However, some measure of access to core civic and social amenities, possibly including hospitals, community facilities such as libraries, retail facilities such as supermarkets, and transport options such as public transport and airports, can provide insights into community interactions, social connections, and personal welfare outcomes.

We note the work on additional measurement of wellbeing by Statistics NZ and The Treasury. Our list of possible additional indicators is by no means exhaustive but is instead designed to pique interest and spark discussion. ■

Where to from here?

One of the limitations of comparing aspects of wellbeing across different parts of the country is that it doesn't provide any context for how New Zealand compares internationally. However, the United Nations has compiled a World Happiness Index, while the OECD publishes a Better Life Index, and both can give indications for how wellbeing in New Zealand compares with other countries.

For example, New Zealand's civic engagement is good by international standards, so the fact that Auckland's civic engagement outcomes are poor compared to other parts of New Zealand might not be particularly concerning. In contrast, the OECD highlights that New Zealand's housing affordability is the lowest of the 40 countries it covers, implying that Auckland's low scores in our Housing domain should be an area for significant political attention.

Nevertheless, care should be taken when interpreting the international figures. Two areas that the OECD scores New Zealand highly on are health and community. Yet New Zealand's strong health score in the Better Life Index is largely a result of self-reported health outcomes, while the community domain is entirely based on a very high proportion of New Zealanders believing "that they know someone they could rely on in a time of need". In our view, these two survey-based indicators are at odds with New Zealand's relatively high rate of suicide, especially among young people.

Shaping policy and responding to evidence

One of the roles of central government and policymakers is to put topics on the agenda and lead the debate about what aspects of life we, as a nation, could improve. Ahead of this year's budget, Finance Minister Grant Robertson highlighted a range of wellbeing priorities for the government that included moving towards a low-emissions economy, improving child wellbeing, and supporting mental wellbeing.

Given these priorities, the regional nature of our Wellbeing Framework highlights where the government's efforts should be most concentrated. For example, the higher suicide rates in provincial areas suggest that the government should particularly consider funding support networks outside the main centres to improve outcomes for young people in the provinces. Similarly, the relatively high levels of carbon dioxide emissions in many rural areas imply that one of the focuses to improve environmental outcomes could be the reduction of emissions related to the agricultural sector.

The regional aspect of our Wellbeing Framework also provides the opportunity for lessons from those areas that are performing well so that we can

potentially replicate their success elsewhere. Are there different systems in place that have led to high levels of participation in early childhood education in Buller and Central Otago that are missing in Waitomo and Ōtorohanga? Why are waste diversion rates so good in Christchurch and Auckland but so poor in Wellington and Dunedin?

Addressing provincial problems

Throughout most of the domains in our Wellbeing Framework, the theme of higher wellbeing in the urban areas is apparent. The Framework indicates that the underperformance of provincial areas, on average, is not limited to the traditional economic measure of relative incomes. In this regard, the Framework provides some justification for central government having a policy focus of improving outcomes in the provinces.

Recent media attention on the high homicide rate in areas such as Ōpōtiki, Kawerau, and Ruapehu linked the problems to socioeconomic deprivation, stating that factors such as "a lack of education, unemployment, low incomes and high rates of crime perpetuate a cycle of poverty."[4] Our Wellbeing Framework is consistent with that assessment.

In this respect, the stated goal of the government's Provincial Growth Fund to "accelerate regional development, increase regional productivity, and contribute to more, better-paying jobs" is admirable. But we see two problems with the Fund as it stands. Firstly, we are not convinced about the Fund's actual effectiveness in meeting its stated goals. Secondly, and more importantly, we believe that any initiatives in the business or economic sphere need to be coupled with broader social policies over a long period of time.

These social policies must address the intergenerational problems that seem to be undermining wellbeing in some provincial areas. Simply creating jobs in these regions is of limited use to the community if there remains a significant proportion of people who are not ready or able to work. Poor scores for indicators such as early childhood education, truancy rates, secondary school qualifications, and benefit dependency all point towards underlying social issues that are preventing these provincial areas from realising their economic potential. We believe our Wellbeing Framework provides the basis for local and central government policy that can be more effectively targeted to make a meaningful and lasting difference to societal outcomes around New Zealand. ■

4 Donna-Lee Biddle. (2019). The struggle for Ōpōtiki, the homicide capital of New Zealand Stuff. www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/111129704/the-struggle-for-opotiki-the-homicide-capital-of-new-zealand (accessed 24 May 2019).

Infometrics' Regional Wellbeing Framework is available via subscription to our Regional Economic Profiles. Current clients can access the Framework through their existing log-in to the Infometrics Portal. For more information, please head to our Regional Wellbeing Framework webpage to contact us.

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