

FOUNDATION

A THRIVING, INCLUSIVE
& EQUITABLE TARANAKI

TARANAKI REGIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

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Summary

This report is a partial update of a 2021 report that Infometrics prepared for Toi Foundation which looked at key indicators of Taranaki Region's economic performance and population wellbeing. In this 2024 report we present updates of all indicators in the 2021 report for which more recent data is available. Census data is the key omission. The 2021 report included data from the 2018 Census of Population and Dwellings. At the time of writing the 2024 report, 2023 Census data has not been released.

The data and analysis in the 2021 report covered the period up to 2020 – the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent years, as the pandemic ran its course, have arguably been some of the most tumultuous in Taranaki's history. From 2020 to 2022, New Zealand's regions, including Taranaki, were subject to various levels of constraints on social gatherings, the New Zealand border was closed to tourists and working migrants, and international and domestic supply chains were disrupted. The war in Ukraine, recent unrest in the Middle East and, much closer to home, Cyclone Gabrielle in early 2023 have added to supply chain disruptions.

More recently we have seen the emergence of price inflation in New Zealand caused by supply chain disruptions and fiscal and monetary economic stimulus. Price inflation has prompted the Reserve Bank of New Zealand to raise interest rates in a bid to lower inflation. New Zealand's price inflation rate fell from a high of 7.3%pa in June 2022 to 4.0%pa in March 2024. But the persistence of non-tradeable (domestic) inflation pressures means the Reserve Bank will not begin to cut interest rates until late 2024 or early 2025 to ensure inflation declines to its target of 2%pa.

Industries key to Taranaki's prosperity have also experienced volatile economic conditions. International dairy prices reached near record levels in 2022 but farm profitability was stifled by high input costs. Costs remain elevated in 2024 but prices have fallen. The dairy industry is also coming to terms with new regulations relating to freshwater standards. The forestry industry has faced a downturn in demand from the struggling Chinese construction industry.

In 2021, Taranaki's energy sector was still reeling from the then Labour Government's 2017 ban on new offshore oil and gas exploration permits. The decision to locate Ara Ake, the National New Energy Centre, in Taranaki was a signal that the region was willing to tackle head-on the long-term challenges of New Zealand's transition to a low emissions economy. Projects such as the South Taranaki Offshore Wind Project bring with them the potential to diversify the local energy sector and hasten the transition to low emissions. The new Coalition Government has committed to reversing the oil and gas exploration ban, which should bring new investment to the region.

Taranaki Port, a key player in the local economy, has seen its revenue increase in 2021/22 and 2022/23, making record profits in the 2022/23 financial year.¹ Along with an increase in ship visits, the closure of Marsden Point oil refinery in 2022 was a factor in the port's growth as it resulted in an increased number of part loads of refined fuel oils and bitumen coming to the port.

¹ Taranaki Port Annual Review 2023

Aside from its impact on food supplies, Cyclone Gabrielle saw central government funding being diverted to affected regions, which led to funding constraints for other regions such as Taranaki. This constrained fiscal environment is expected to continue into the near future with the new Coalition Government claiming that the previous government's policies and spending programmes were unfunded over the medium term, resulting in less room for the introduction of new spending priorities or tax cuts. Despite recent announcements around the Regional Infrastructure Fund, Infrastructure Acceleration Fund, and the Roads of National Significance we think the government's plans for capital expenditure will be unable to progress as quickly as desired.

Against this backdrop of tumultuous economic conditions, a comparison of key indicators across Taranaki's economy and population in 2023 with the same indicators in 2020 (the reporting period for the 2021 report) shows a mixed bag. There are improvements in some indicators and worsening in others. Given the challenges that Taranaki has faced during the past few years, a mixed result is a good result. Worsening conditions are understandable, though no less important to address, and improvements should be celebrated.

- 2023 general election turnout was lower than in the 2020 general election which suggests a worsening of civic engagement.
- Taranaki life expectancy has increased but remains below the national average, Taranaki Māori life expectancy is below Taranaki non-Māori life expectancy.
- Mental health presentation rates and ambulatory sensitive hospitalisation rates have improved recently but remain above the national average. Health workforce metrics suggest Taranaki is underserved relative to its population size.
- Housing and rental affordability in Taranaki are worse than pre-pandemic levels, state housing needs have stabilised albeit at elevated levels, the number of households receiving Emergency Housing Grants has fallen.
- Taranaki's benefit dependency rates spiked during the pandemic then declined, Māori remain over-represented in beneficiary numbers, there is a relatively high proportion of young people on a benefit, unemployment has been tracking downward since 2018 but has recently started to rise again, NEET rates have been volatile but are lower than they were in 2020.
- The early childhood education prior participation rate in Taranaki has risen, school leaver achievement has fallen, school leaver destinations have not changed, Western Institute of Technology enrolments have increased, but completions have fallen slightly, and industry training learner numbers have started to rise again.
- Crime rates have fallen, truancy rates are volatile but below the national average, and transient student rates have fallen.
- Driver license rates have increased marginally.
- Carbon emissions have fallen.
- The pandemic caused considerable economic volatility, which can be seen in housing affordability, benefit dependency rates, NEET rates, and truancy rates.

- Of the three Taranaki local authorities, New Plymouth tends to have better income, labour market and school outcomes. South Taranaki tends to have the worst outcomes in these areas as well as in safety outcomes. However, New Plymouth has the worst housing affordability and state housing needs outcomes.

Introduction

Toi Foundation asked Infometrics to update their 2021 Taranaki Regional Research Report to understand how key indicators of the region’s economic performance and population wellbeing had changed.

The 2024 report updates all indicators in the 2021 report for which more recent data is available. More recent Census data is a key omission from the 2024 report. The 2021 report used data from the 2018 Census of Population and Dwellings. Data from the 2023 Census of Population and Dwellings is yet to be released by Stats NZ.² Other omissions include the New Zealand Health Survey and Te Kupenga, Stats NZ’s survey of Māori wellbeing. Neither surveys are expected to produce more recent data for the foreseeable future.

Our analysis includes two sections.

Section 1 provides a data- and evidence-driven assessment of the social and economic factors at play in Taranaki and where there are areas of need.

Section 2 determines key trends emerging from the factors identified in Section 1 and provides an understandable narrative about what these factors are and how improvements in identified areas could support improved outcomes for people. As much as possible, key trends are structured around Toi Foundation’s strategic areas of focus.

- Enhanced Child and Youth Wellbeing
- Rangatiratanga | Empowering Māori aspiration
- Improved Environment

For some indicators that are based on Infometrics estimates, we have used improved data methodologies. Therefore, some of the data in this 2024 report is not strictly comparable with the 2021 report. Any changes to methodologies have been highlighted in the relevant section of this report.

² 2023 Census data will be published by Stats NZ in a series of key releases from May 2024 through to August 2025.

Section 1: Analysis of outcomes

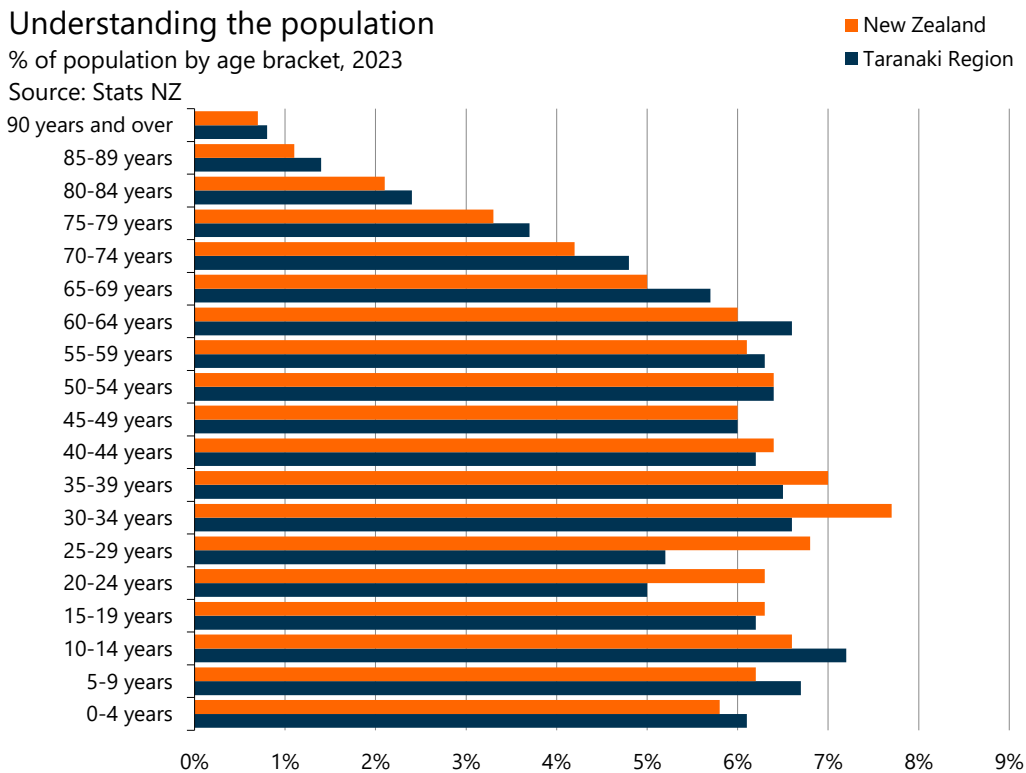
This section sets out the evidence from a range of indicators on social and economic outcomes across Taranaki Region, including local authority-level analysis.

Demographics

Taranaki’s population is older than the national median. In 2023, the median age in Taranaki Region was 40.4 years old, compared to 38 across New Zealand. New Plymouth was key to this older median age, with a median age locally of 40.8 years old. Stratford District had a lower median age of 39.5 years old. South Taranaki’s population had the youngest median age in the region, of 39.4 years. Although, the gap between New Plymouth and South Taranaki is narrowing.

The age distribution in Taranaki shows that the region has a lower proportion of the early-stage-working age group, with 36% of the population aged 15-44 in 2023 compared with 41% nationally (Chart 1). Taranaki has a higher population concentration of people aged 55 years old or older (32% compared with 29% nationally). Taranaki also has a slightly larger concentration of people aged 14 years or younger (20% compared with 19% nationally).

Chart 1



Taranaki has a larger population concentration of Māori than the national average. In 2023, 21% of the Taranaki Region population were Māori, compared with 17% of the

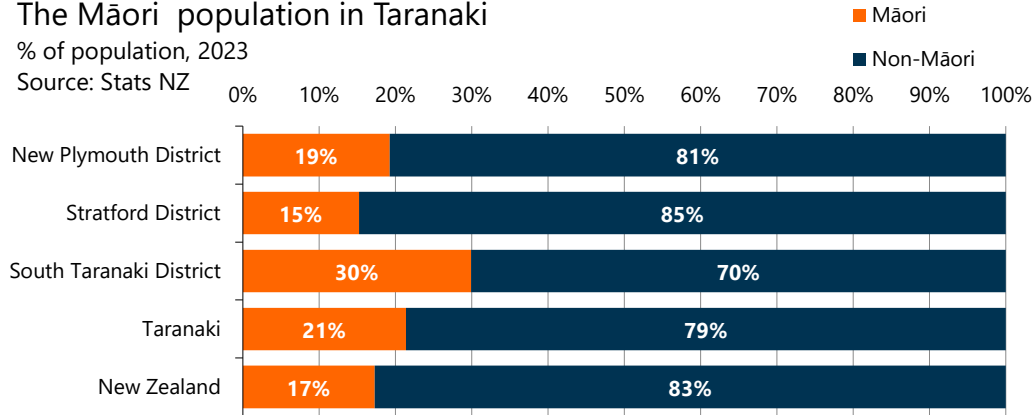
national population. At a local level, South Taranaki has a considerably larger Māori population concentration, with 30% of the population in the district being Māori. New Plymouth (19%) and Stratford (15%) have lower Māori population proportions.

Chart 2

The Māori population in Taranaki

% of population, 2023

Source: Stats NZ



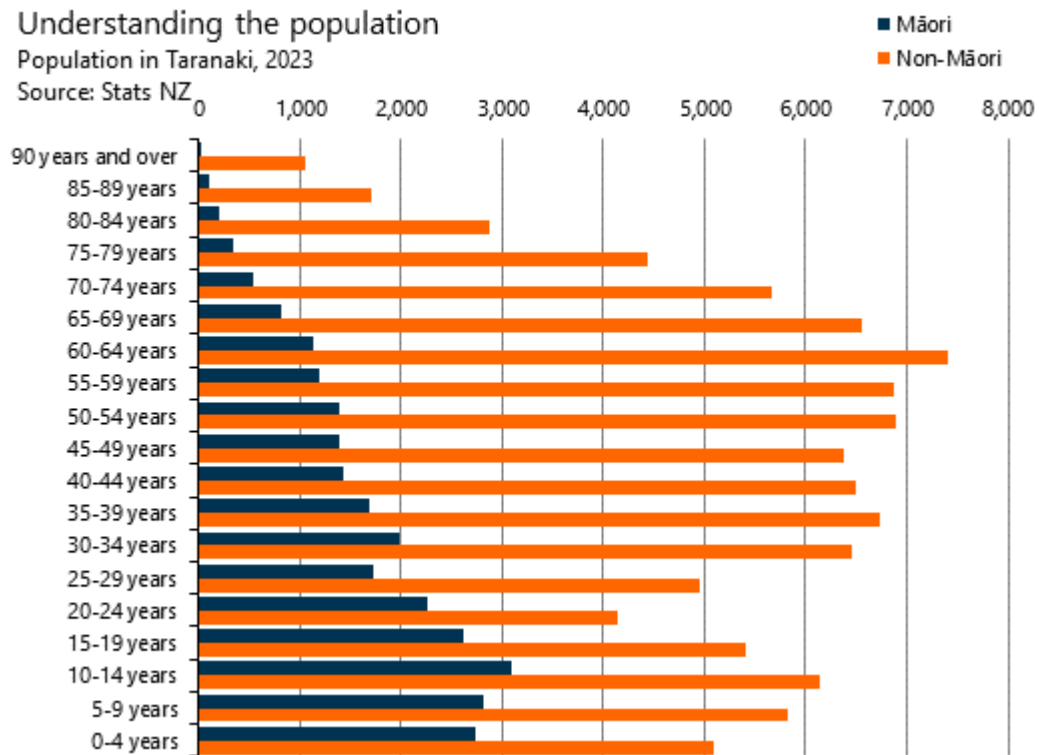
The Māori population in Taranaki is considerably younger than the non-Māori population (Chart 3). Almost half of all Māori in Taranaki were aged 24 years or younger in 2023, compared to just 26% of the non-Māori population.

Chart 3

Understanding the population

Population in Taranaki, 2023

Source: Stats NZ



Māori make up a smaller population of the older working age group (40-64), with 24% of Māori aged in this group in 2023 compared to 34% of non-Māori.

Given the considerably younger population of Māori in Taranaki, there is a much smaller group of older Māori compared to the non-Māori population. Just 7% of the Māori population in the region was aged 65 or above, compared with 22% of the non-Māori.

Stratford has the youngest Māori population of the three Taranaki local authorities with 52% aged 24 years or younger in 2023 compared with 50% in New Plymouth and 48% in South Taranaki (see Chart 32, Chart 33 and Chart 34 in Appendix 3: Local Māori age profile).

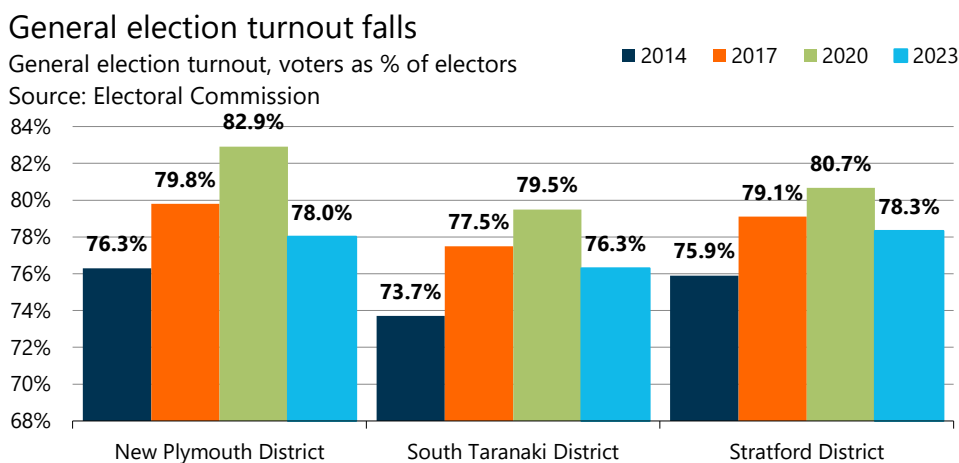
Civic Engagement and Governance

General election turnout falls

The 2023 general election turnout in Taranaki was lower than in the 2020 general election, reflecting a nationwide trend. A political analyst attributed the lower national turnout to a negative campaign that failed to inspire voters.³ In the 2023 General Election, 77.8% of registered voters in Taranaki region voted, slightly above the 77.3% national rate (Chart 4).

By area, Stratford had the highest turnout within Taranaki’s three local authority areas. In 2023, 78.3% of Stratford voters cast their vote, down from 80.7% in 2020. Voting in New Plymouth and South Taranaki showed a similar downward trend. In 2023, 78% of New Plymouth voters cast their vote, which was lower than the 82.9% in 2020. In 2023, 76.3% of South Taranaki District voters cast their vote, down from 79.5% in 2020.⁴

Chart 4



Māori turnout tends to be lower than non-Māori. For example, in the 2023 general election, Māori turnout in the New Plymouth electorate was 72% compared with 80% of non-Māori.

³ Source: Bay of Plenty Times, 13 October

⁴ Infometrics analysis of Electoral Commission data.

Health

Life expectancy increasing

Taranaki's life expectancy increased from 79.7 years for the grouped 2005-07 period to 81.1 years for the grouped 2017-19 period. However, Life expectancy in Taranaki Region is slightly below the national average of 81.8 years for the grouped 2017-19 period.

South Taranaki District had the lowest life expectancy across the region, with an expectancy of 80.1 years. Stratford's life expectancy was 81.1 years. New Plymouth's life expectancy was higher, at 81.5 years, but still below the national average.

At a regional level, Māori life expectancy remains considerably lower than the average. Taranaki Māori men and women have a life expectancy of around 6 years less than the Taranaki average (Chart 5).⁵

Chart 5

Life expectancy at birth

Taranaki Region, 2017-19 cohort by group

	Total	Māori	Non-Māori	Non-Māori - Māori difference
Male	79.3	74.2	80.2	6.0
Female	82.9	78.0	83.7	5.7
Total	81.1	76.1	82.0	5.9

Source: Stats NZ

Although the national average life expectancy is higher than in Taranaki, national average life expectancy for Māori is lower than for Taranaki Māori (75.4 years compared with 76.1 years for the grouped 2017-19 period). This difference means that Taranaki Māori live longer than Māori on average nationally.

Mental health presentations fall

Mental health presentation rates have fallen in Taranaki but remain higher than the national average (Chart 6). Between 2020 and 2023, the proportion of the Taranaki population that accessed mental health support fell from 5.3% to 4.7%. This compares with a fall from 4.8% to 4.4% nationally.⁶ The fall in mental health presentations could be the result of improvements in mental health, or it could be caused by people who need help not having access to the appropriate services.

⁵ Life expectancy by ethnicity for territorial authorities is not available, but regional life expectancy by ethnicity is available from [Stats NZ](#).

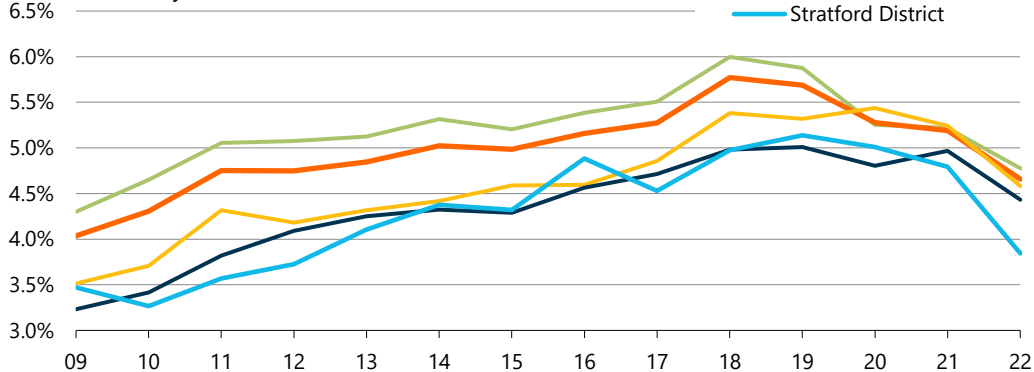
⁶ Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Health data.

Chart 6

Mental health presentations fall

Mental Health Presentation rate, % of population

Source: Ministry of Health



All three Taranaki local authorities saw falls in mental health presentation rates between 2020 and 2023. The biggest decline was in Stratford, where the mental health presentation rate fell from 5.0% in 2020 to 3.8% in 2023. Stratford's rate is now below the national average. In New Plymouth, the rate fell from 5.3% in 2020 to 4.8% in 2023. New Plymouth now has the highest rate of the three local authorities. South Taranaki's mental health presentation rate fell from 5.4% in 2020 to 4.6% in 2023.

Official suicide data is five years old. At 1.07 deaths per 1,000 people over the five years to 2018, Taranaki had a lower suicide rate than the national average of 1.15. Taranaki's suicide rate has fallen from 1.41 in the five years to 2014 taking it below the national average in 2018 for the first time since 2004.

Avoidable hospitalisations fall

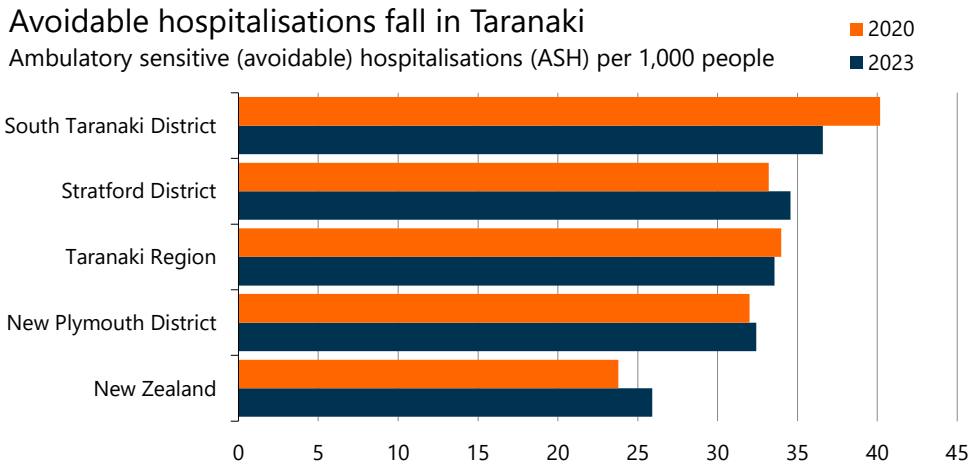
Despite a recent fall, Taranaki has one of the highest rate of ambulatory sensitive hospitalisations (ASHs) of all New Zealand regions.⁷ ASHs are avoidable hospitalisations that could have been prevented with earlier intervention, often through primary care. Between 2020 and 2023, the number of ASH events per 1,000 people in Taranaki had fell from 34.0 to 33.6. This compares with a national average increase of 23.8 to 25.9 over the same period.

ASH rates are high across the three Taranaki local authorities, especially so in South Taranaki with 36.6 ASH events per 1,000 people in 2023 – although this is a big improvement on the 40.2 events in 2020. Stratford's rate increased slightly from 33.2 in 2020 to 34.6 in 2023. New Plymouth's rate is the lowest of the three local authorities but also rose slightly from 32.0 in 2020 to 32.4 in 2023.

More detailed information about high ASH rates in Taranaki is not currently available to allow for a more detailed understanding of why Taranaki is higher than the national average. However, as the next section shows, health workforce indicators in Taranaki indicate lower-than-average levels of health support relative to the population size.

⁷ Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Health hospitalisations data

Chart 7



Lower levels of health support

Data from the Medical Council of New Zealand shows that Taranaki has lower levels of health support. Analysis of results from the *New Zealand Medical Workforce in 2022* survey shows that Taranaki has a lower proportion of GPs relative to the population size. The 2022 survey shows the Taranaki DHB area with 2.5% of the nationwide population, but only 2.2% of national GP numbers. However, this is an improvement from the 2.0% of national GP numbers in 2018.

High level workforce analysis reinforces the evidence that the Taranaki population is underserved by health workforce numbers. Infometrics employment and population data shows that in the year to March 2023 there were 45.6 healthcare workers in Taranaki region for every 1,000 people, compared with 46.7 nationally. At a local authority level, New Plymouth’s hospital provides a large boost to this metric, with 56.5 healthcare workers per 1,000 people. In Stratford and South Taranaki, there were 24.6 and 20.1 healthcare workers per 1,000 people, respectively.

The past four years have seen improvements. The number of healthcare workers per 1,000 people in Taranaki increased from 42.5 in the year to March 2020 to 45.6 in the year to March 2023. New Plymouth saw an increase from 52.5 to 56.5, Stratford from 22.9 to 24.6 and South Taranaki from 19.2 to 20.1. These figures are not comparable with the 2021 report due to changes in the methodology.⁸

Housing

Housing affordability worsens then improves

Taranaki’s housing affordability remained consistently better than the national average during the pandemic. However, the region experienced a significant worsening of affordability then an improvement, albeit not back to pre-pandemic levels. The ratio of

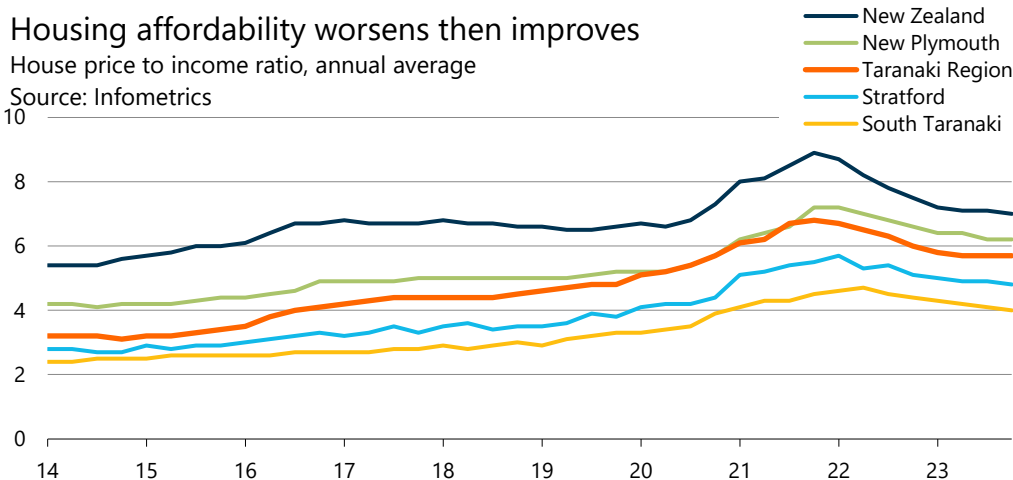
⁸ Figures include all Q: Healthcare and Social Assistance ANZSIC codes except Q871000 Child Care Services and Q879000 Other Social Assistance Services

average house prices to average household incomes in Taranaki rose from 4.8 over the year to December 2019 to a peak of 6.8 over the year to December 2021 before falling back to 5.7 over the year to December 2023 (Chart 8).⁹

Housing affordability across New Zealand rose from 6.6 over the year to December 2019, to 8.9 over the year to December 2021, before falling back to 7.0 over the year to December 2023. Our estimates of housing affordability in this report are not comparable to our estimates in the 2021 report because here we use an improved method for estimating average household incomes.

Similar worsening then improvement in housing affordability is evident across Taranaki’s three local authorities (Chart 8). Affordability in New Plymouth remains above the regional average but below the national average. Affordability in Stratford and South Taranaki remain below the regional average.

Chart 8



Rental affordability worsens

Rental affordability in Taranaki steadily worsened during the pandemic with affordability in Taranaki Region, New Plymouth and Stratford now significantly worse than the national average. Affordability in South Taranaki has closed the gap with the national average (Chart 9). Our estimates of rental affordability in this report are not comparable to our estimates in the 2021 report because here we use an improved method for estimating average household incomes.

Between the year to December 2019 and the year to December 2023, the average rent as a proportion of the average income rose from 19% to 23.5% in Taranaki – an increase of 4.5 percentage points. Nationally the proportion edged up from 21% to 22% - an increase of just 0.4 percentage points. Rental affordability worsened the most in Stratford, increasing 6.7 percentage points, followed by 4.4 percentage points in New Plymouth and 4.3 percentage points in South Taranaki.

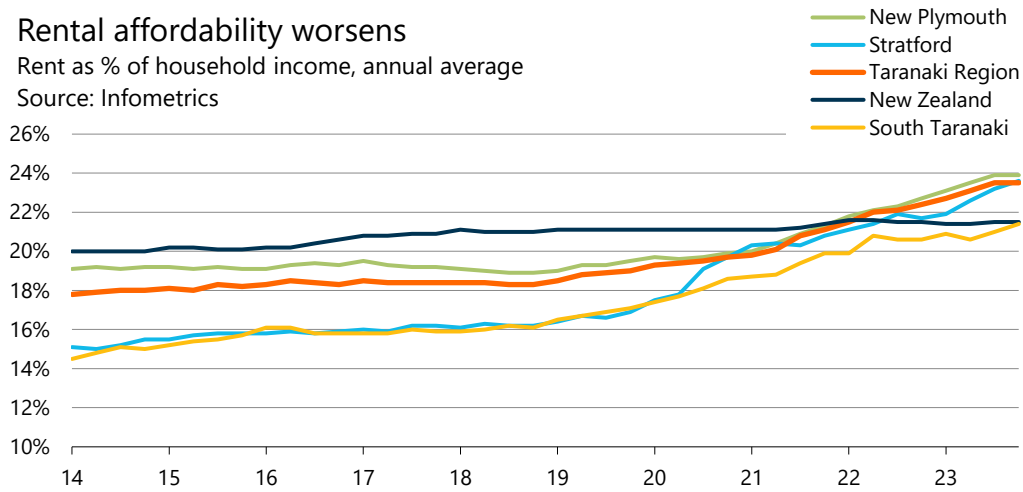
⁹ Infometrics estimates of average house prices from Core Logic data, and Infometrics estimates of average local household income.

Chart 9

Rental affordability worsens

Rent as % of household income, annual average

Source: Infometrics



State housing needs stabilise

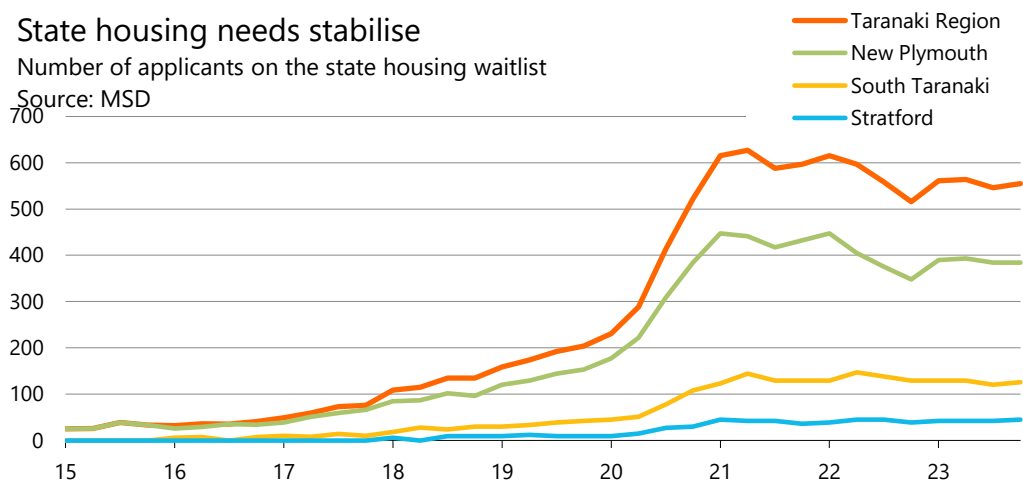
State housing needs across Taranaki have broadly stabilised, albeit at an elevated level, reflecting the national trend. The number of households on the state housing waitlist in Taranaki rose from 25 in March 2015 to 615 in March 2021 before falling back to 555 in December 2023. New Plymouth, as the largest population centre in Taranaki, saw by far the largest rise in applicants, from 32 in March 2015 to 447 in March 2021 with applicant numbers falling back to 384 in December 2023.¹⁰

Chart 10

State housing needs stabilise

Number of applicants on the state housing waitlist

Source: MSD



Although much lower, housing needs in South Taranaki and Stratford are substantial relative to the state housing stock. South Taranaki and Stratford are two of only 15 areas across New Zealand where Housing Register numbers are larger than the number of already-occupied state houses.

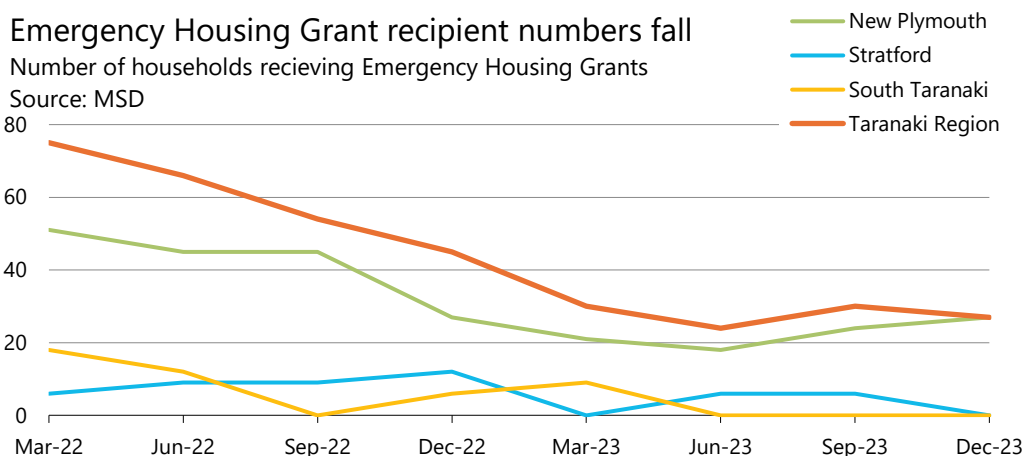
¹⁰ Infometrics analysis of MSD [Housing Register data](#)

In December 2023, there were 126 households on the state housing waitlist in South Taranaki and 118 state housing places already occupied. In Stratford, there were 45 households on the state housing waitlist in December 2023 compared with 39 state housing places already occupied. New Plymouth has a higher total number of households on the waitlist, but that number is well below the number of already-occupied state houses. In December, there were 384 families on the state housing waitlist in New Plymouth, compared with 964 state housing places already in use.

Emergency Housing Grant recipient numbers fall

The number of households receiving Emergency Housing Grants fell in Taranaki Region from 75 in the March 2022 quarter to 27 in the December 2023 quarter (the period for which data is available) (Chart 11). Emergency Housing Grant recipients are households living in motels or similar temporary housing arrangements. Households living in emergency housing could be on the housing register, waiting for state housing to become available, and/or trying to find a suitable private market rental. The fact that grant numbers are falling suggests these households are either entering state housing or finding suitable private market rental accommodation.

Chart 11



Income, consumption, jobs, and earnings

Median household income remains below the national average

In 2023, Taranaki Region's median household income of \$89,903 was 18% lower than the national average of \$109,044 (Table 1). Median incomes across the three local authorities were all below the national average. New Plymouth's was highest at \$92,251 which was 15% below the national average. The median household income in Stratford and South Taranaki were very similar at \$85,460 and \$85,500 respectively and were 22% below the national average. Our estimates of average household income in this report are not comparable to our estimates in the 2021 report because here we use an improved estimation method.

Table 1

Median household income remains below the national average

December 2023, median household income

Area	Income	% of NZ
New Zealand	\$ 109,044	
New Plymouth	\$ 92,251	-15%
Taranaki Region	\$ 89,903	-18%
Stratford	\$ 85,460	-22%
South Taranaki	\$ 85,500	-22%

Source: Infometrics

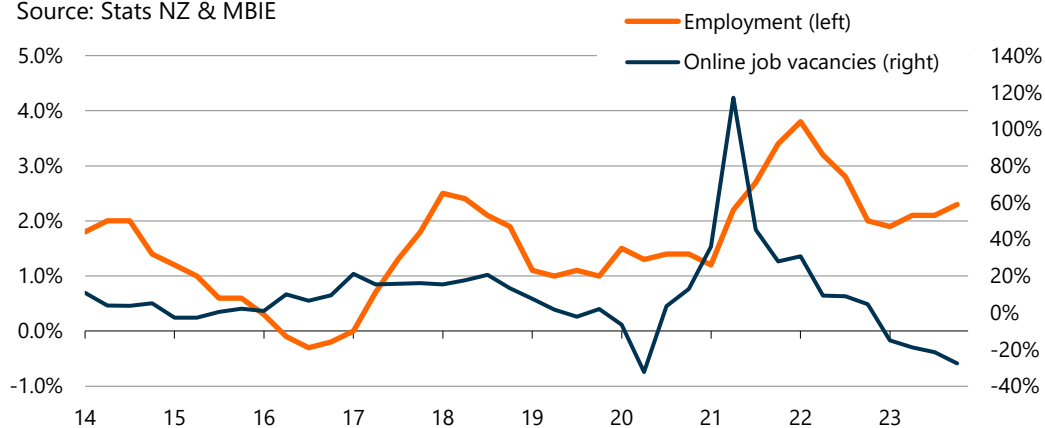
Labour market volatility

Government attempts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic caused considerable volatility in the Taranaki labour market, reflecting trends across the whole of New Zealand. The initial lockdown period brought with it great uncertainty for businesses which resulted in vacancy numbers declining. Then, as the New Zealand economy benefitted from the lack of COVID-19 in the community and New Zealand’s borders remained closed to working migrants, vacancy numbers spiked as businesses tried to take on additional staff from a constrained labour pool, followed about a year later by a spike in employment growth (Chart 12). The emergence of price inflation in the New Zealand economy, and the Reserve Bank’s subsequent interest rates increases, has constrained household spending, making businesses more cautious about taking on additional staff. Growth in vacancy numbers and employment have weakened as a result, with vacancies declining in 2023.

Chart 12

Employment growth weakens as vacancies decline

Employment of Taranaki residents, ann ave % change pa
 ManawatuWhanganui/Taranaki Online Job Vacancy index (sa), % change pa
 Source: Stats NZ & MBIE

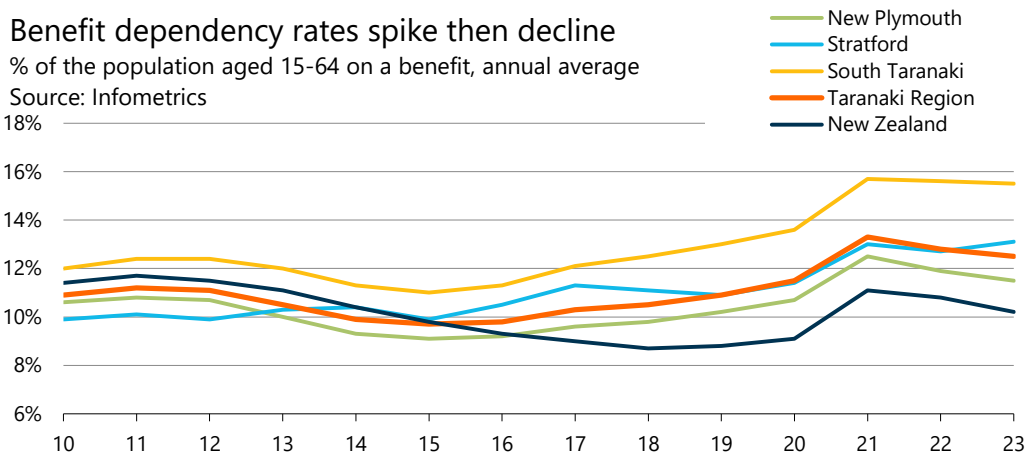


Benefit dependency rates spike then decline

The pandemic saw benefit dependency rates spike across all regions in 2021 in response to COVID-19 related lockdowns before declining slightly in 2022 and 2023, albeit not back to pre-pandemic levels, as the economy began to grow again. Both the Taranaki Region and the national average benefit dependency rates were higher in 2023 than they were in 2020 (Chart 13). The proportion of the population aged 16 to 64 being supported by a benefit in Taranaki rose from 11.5% in 2020 to 12.5% in 2023. The national average rose from 9.1% to 10.2%.¹¹

Benefit dependency rates in New Plymouth were the lowest across Taranaki with 11.5% of the local population aged 15 to 64 supported by a main benefit in 2023, up from 10.7% in 2020. South Taranaki’s benefit rate was much higher at 15.5% in 2023, up from 13.6% in 2020. Stratford’s benefit dependency rate was close to the Taranaki Regional average.

Chart 13



Māori remain over-represented in beneficiary numbers

In 2023, Māori were estimated to make up 21% of the Taranaki population. But they made up 39% of all main benefit recipients in the region in the December 2023 quarter (Chart 14). Comparing the three local authorities, Māori made up the highest share of both the population and beneficiaries in South Taranaki in 2023: 30% of the population, but 44% of main benefit recipients, followed by New Plymouth (19% vs 38%), and Stratford (15% vs 26%).

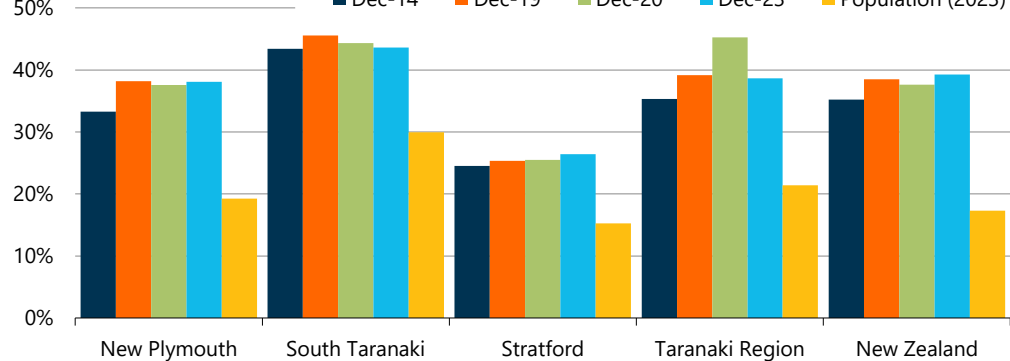
¹¹ Infometrics analysis of MSD benefit counts and Stats NZ population data

Chart 14

Māori remain over-represented in beneficiary numbers

Māori as % of main benefit recipients, Māori as % of total population

Source: MSD & Stats NZ



High proportion of young people on a benefit

Taranaki Region has a higher proportion of young people on a main benefit compared with the national average. Some 12% of young people aged below 24 were on a main benefit in Taranaki region in the December 2023 quarter, compared with 10% nationally. Stratford has the highest proportion of the three local authorities, with 14% of the local population under 24 on a main benefit in the December 2023 quarter.

Across the region, the proportion of young people on a benefit fell from 14% of people aged below 24 in the December 2020 quarter to 12% in the December 2023 quarter. New Plymouth and South Taranaki both saw falls. The proportion rose slightly in Stratford.

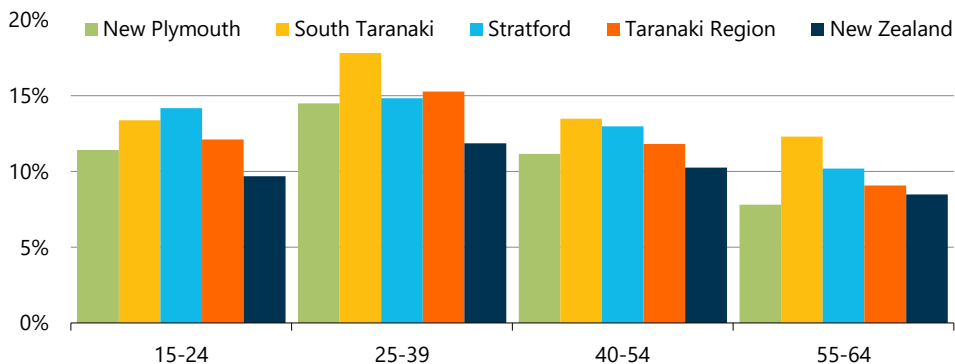
Among 25–39-year-olds, 15% in Taranaki were on a main benefit, compared to 12% of the national population. The proportion is highest in South Taranaki at 18%.

Chart 15

High proportion of young people on a benefit

Main benefit recipients Dec-23 as % of 2023 population

Source: Infometrics



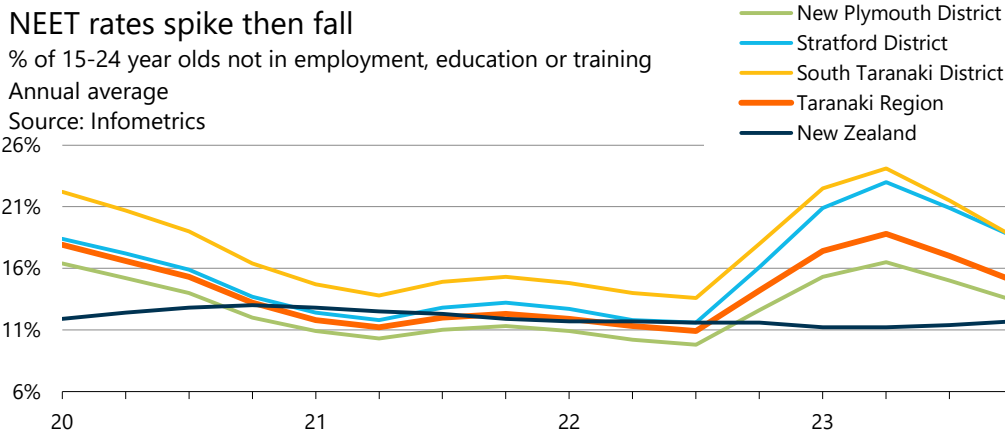
NEET rates spike then fall

NEET rates (the proportion of young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment, or training) have been volatile in the past few years, spiking at 18.8% in Taranaki as recently as the year to the June 2023 quarter before falling to 15% over the year to December 2023. The December 2023 NEET rate was lower than the 17.9% rate over the year to the March 2020 quarter (Chart 16).

The spike was not reflected nationwide and did not coincide with an increase in benefit recipient numbers in this age group in Taranaki. Perhaps the return of migrants to New Zealand (including Working Holiday Scheme visa holders) following the opening of the New Zealand border in mid-2022 resulted in some migrants taking up the kinds of jobs that 15–24-year-olds would normally do.

The Taranaki NEET rate of 15% remains well above the national average of 11.7% over the year to December 2023. Across local authorities, South Taranaki has persistently had the highest NEET rate in recent years of just above 18% over the year to December 2023. Stratford's NEET rate has recently risen to rival's South Taranaki's. Despite experiencing a spike in mid-2023, New Plymouth's NEET rate is estimated to have fallen back to close the national average.

Chart 16



Unemployment begins to climb again

Taranaki's unemployment rate has been broadly tracking downward since 2018, although it did rise in late 2020 and early 2021 in response to COVID-19 related lockdowns. More recently, as rising interest rates have weakened employment growth and caused vacancy numbers fall, unemployment has started to climb again. Although, the Taranaki Regional unemployment rate remains low by historical standards, reflecting the region's tight labour market. Over the year to December 2023, Taranaki's unemployment rate of 3.8% was close to the national average of 3.7%.

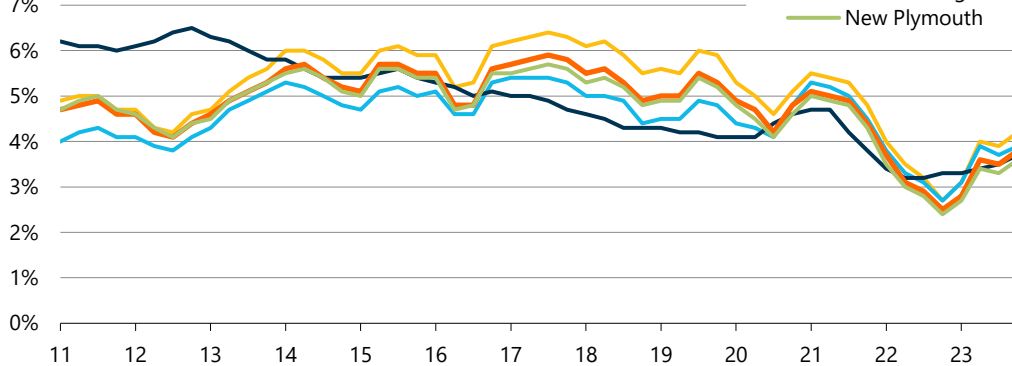
Stratford's unemployment rate of 3.9% over the year to December 2023 recently rose above the regional average, although not by much. New Plymouth's unemployment rate of 3.6% sits close to the regional and national averages. South Taranaki's unemployment rate of 4.2% continues to be the highest across the region, although the gap with the regional average has narrowed.

Chart 17

Unemployment begins to climb again

Unemployment rate, annual average

Source: Infometrics



Knowledge and skills

ECE prior participation rate slightly above national average

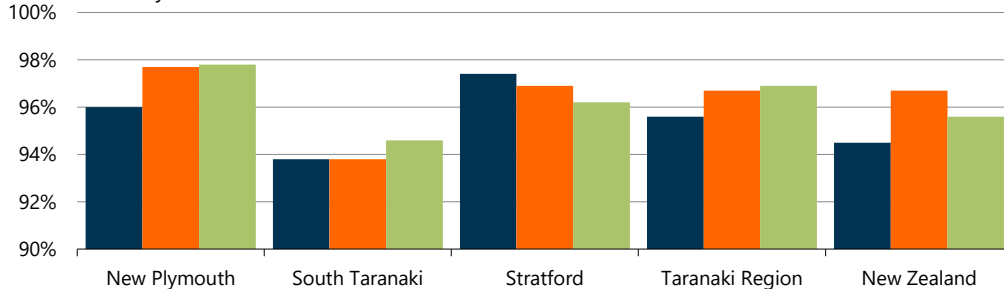
In the September 2023 quarter, 96.9% of young people starting school in Taranaki had participated in early childhood education – above the 95.6% national average (Chart 18).¹² Taranaki’s prior participation rate has risen from 96.7% in the September 2021 quarter. In contrast, the national average fell between the 2021 and 2023 September quarters, most likely because of disruptions to ECE services brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 18

Taranaki ECE prior participation above national average

ECE prior participation rate, % of children who have regularly attended ECE in the 6 months prior to starting school

Source: Ministry of Education



New Plymouth’s prior participation rate of 97.8% in the September 2023 quarter was the highest across Taranaki. Stratford’s prior participation rate stood at 96.2% in the September 2023 quarter. Stratford was the only local authority to see a decline since

¹² Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Education [early childhood education data](#)

2021. South Taranaki’s prior participation rate was the lowest in the region, at 94.6% in the September 2023 quarter.

ECE prior participation rate lower among Māori

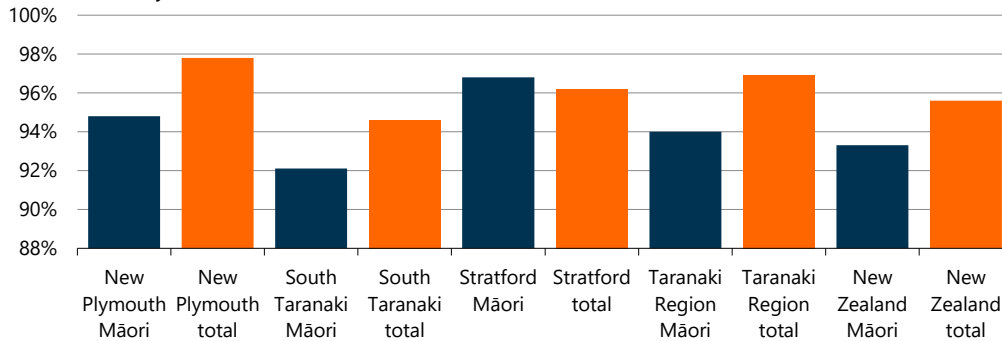
Across all Taranaki local authorities, the proportion of young people starting school who had participated in early childhood education was lower among Māori (Chart 19). The gap was widest in New Plymouth District where 94.8% of young Māori starting school had participated in early childhood education compared with 97.8% of all young people – a gap of 3 percentage points. Across Taranaki Region the gap was 2.9 percentage points. The national average gap was 2.3 percentage points.

Chart 19

ECE prior participation lower among Māori

ECE prior participation rate, % of children who have regularly attended ECE in the 6 months prior to starting school, September 2023 quarter

Source: Ministry of Education



School leaver attainment worsens

In 2022, 73% of Taranaki school leavers had an NCEA Level 2 qualification or above. Nationally, the achievement rate was slightly higher at 75% (Chart 20).¹³ Achievement rates have declined nationally and across Taranaki Region since 2020 due, in part at least, to disruptions to learning from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of the three local authorities, achievement rates were highest in New Plymouth with 75% of school leavers achieving NCEA Level 2 qualification or above in 2022 compared with 69% in South Taranaki and just 64% in Stratford. Stratford attainment has been lower than the other two local authorities throughout the last decade.

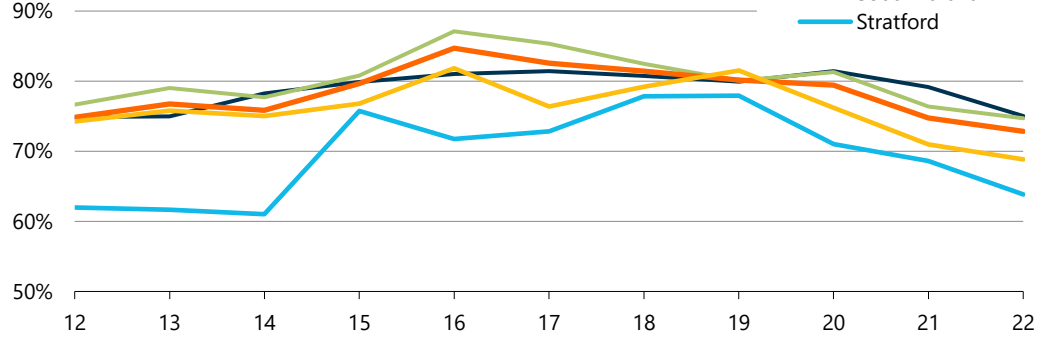
¹³ Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Education [school leaver data](#)

Chart 20

School leaver attainment worsens

% of school leavers with NZEA 2+

Source: Ministry of Education



Māori school leaver attainment worse than non-Māori

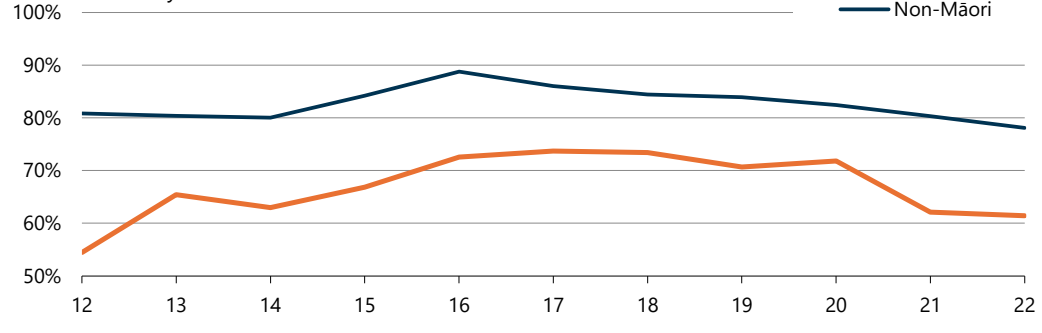
Māori school leaver attainment in Taranaki is consistently worse than non-Māori. In 2022, 78% of non-Māori school leavers had an NCEA Level 2 qualification or above compared with 61% of Māori school leavers, a gap of 17 percentage points (Chart 21). The gap had narrowed from 17 percentage points in 2015 to 11 percentage points in 2018 and 2020. However, the decline in attainment of all students in 2021 and 2022 has been more acute among Māori.

Chart 21

Taranaki Māori school leaver attainment worse than non-Māori

% of school leavers with NZEA 2+

Source: Ministry of Education



School leaver destinations show little change

Some 58% of Taranaki students who left school in 2021 were enrolled in tertiary education one year later – close to the national average of 59% (Chart 22) and down only slightly on the 59% of Taranaki school leavers in 2019 who went into tertiary education.¹⁴

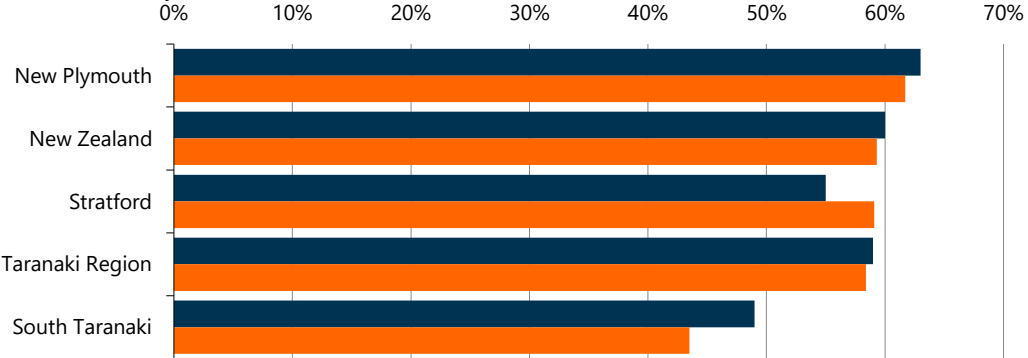
¹⁴ Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Education [school leaver data](#)

Chart 22

School leaver destinations show little change

% of school leavers in 2019 and 2021 enrolled in tertiary education in their first year after leaving school

Source: Ministry of Education



New Plymouth’s 2021 school leavers had the highest tertiary participation rate across Taranaki’s local authorities, with 62% entering tertiary education the year after leaving school, which keeps New Plymouth in the top third of the country. Stratford had a lower rate, with 59% of 2021 school leavers entering tertiary education the year after leaving school – although Stratford’s rate has risen from 55% of 2019 school leavers. Worryingly, South Taranaki school leaver tertiary participation fell from 49% of 2019 school leavers to 44% of 2021 school leavers.

WITT enrolments and completions rise then fall

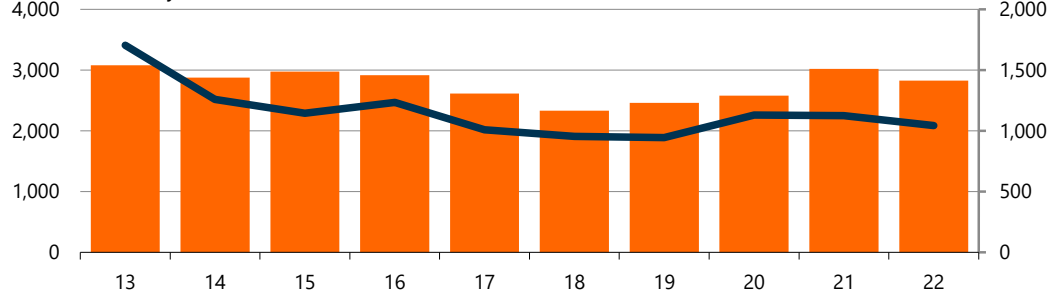
Qualification completions data is not available by local area. However, local education provision at the Western Institute of Technology Taranaki (WITT) can be examined as a proxy for local activity. WITT enrolments peaked at just over 3,000 in 2021 during the pandemic before falling back to just over 2,800 in 2023 (Chart 23). Completions were maintained at around 1,130 in 2020 and 2021. In fact, 2020 saw the highest number of completions since 2016 before they fell away slightly to just under 1,050 in 2022.

Chart 23

WITT enrolments and completion rise then fall

Students enrolled and completing qualifications at WITT

Source: Ministry of Education

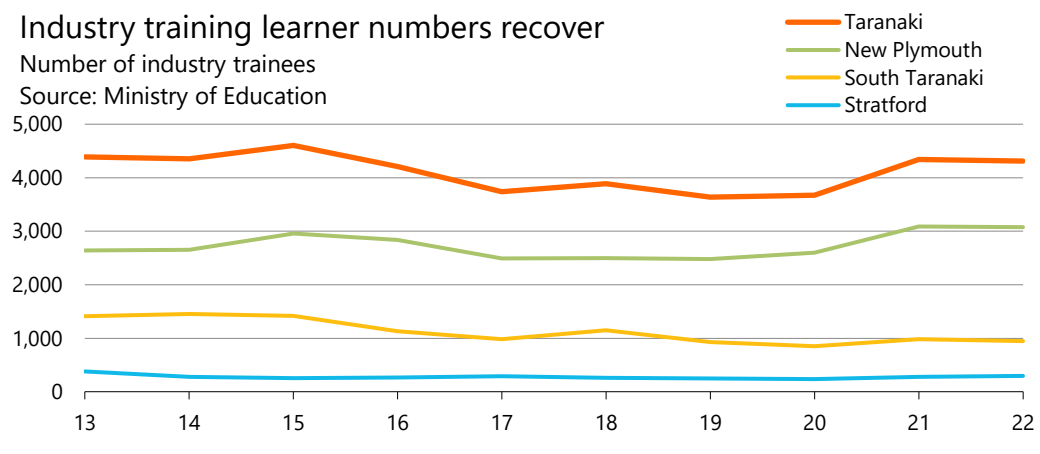


The pandemic saw disruptions to teaching as courses were taken online to meet social distancing requirements. However, tertiary education was popular with job opportunities scarce at times and the government offering funding for tertiary education under schemes such as Fees Free.

Industry training learner numbers recover

The number of industry training learners (which includes Industry Trainees and Apprentices) at employers located in Taranaki Region recovered during the pandemic, having been on a downward trend since 2015. The rise in 2021 was particularly notable in New Plymouth where the number of industry training learners rose 19% from 2,600 in 2020 to just under 3,100 in 2021. Government funding of industry training and apprenticeships through the Apprenticeship Boost Scheme and the Target Training and Apprenticeship Fund helped support training numbers during the pandemic.

Chart 24



These industry training learner numbers are all the more encouraging when one considers that the tertiary education sector was undergoing significant change through the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE) process at this time.

Safety

Crime rates fall

Annual criminal proceedings across Taranaki fell during the pandemic, although they started to edge up again from around mid-2022. This decline then slight increase reflects the national trend. The Taranaki Region crime rate remains higher than the national average, but the gap has narrowed (Chart 25).

Over the year to the June 2020 quarter, the Taranaki Region crime rate peaked at 39.7 crimes committed and recorded per 1,000 people, fell to a low of 25.8 over the year to the September 2022 quarter, then rose to 27.1 over the year to December 2023.¹⁵

¹⁵ Infometrics analysis of Police recorded crime data and Stats NZ population data

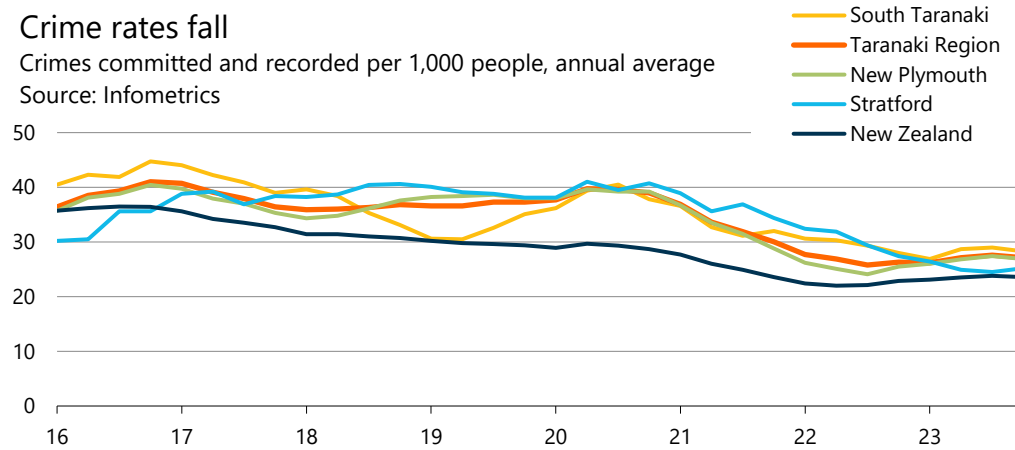
Over the year to December 2023, the New Plymouth and Stratford crime rates were slightly lower than the regional average at 26.9 and 25.2 respectively. The South Taranaki crime rate was higher than the regional average at 28.3.

Chart 25

Crime rates fall

Crimes committed and recorded per 1,000 people, annual average

Source: Infometrics



Social connections

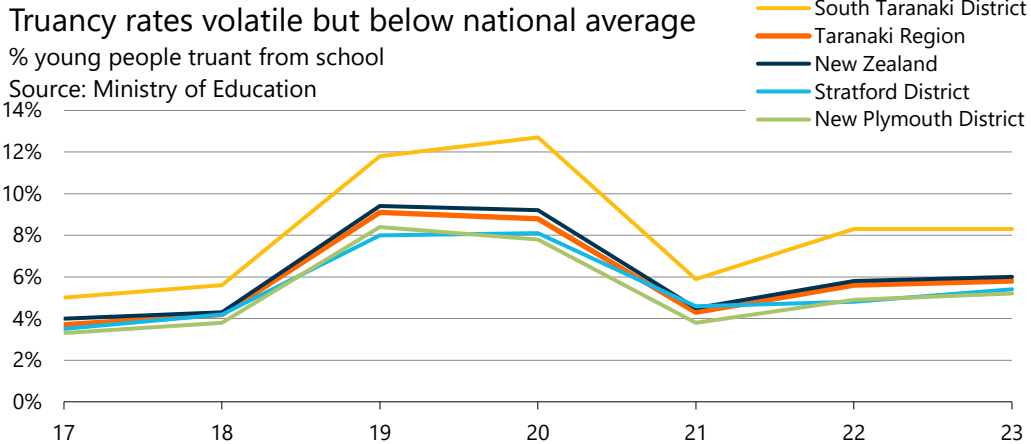
Truancy rate volatile but below the national average

The truancy rate measures the proportion of time that students are absent from school for an unjustified absence. Truancy rates have been volatile in recent years, due partly to the effects of the pandemic which arguably normalised regular non-attendance at school. In Taranaki, the proportion of young people truant from school rose from 3.7% in 2017 to 9.1% in 2019, fell to 4.3% in 2021 then rose again to 5.8% in 2023. This rollercoaster trend was reflected across New Zealand. However, the Taranaki truancy rate remains slightly lower than the national average (as has been since 2012).¹⁶

Both New Plymouth (5.2%) and Stratford (5.4%) had truancy rates that were lower than both the national and Taranaki Regional average in 2023. South Taranaki's truancy rate was considerably higher at 8.3%.

¹⁶ Infometrics analysis of Ministry of Education data

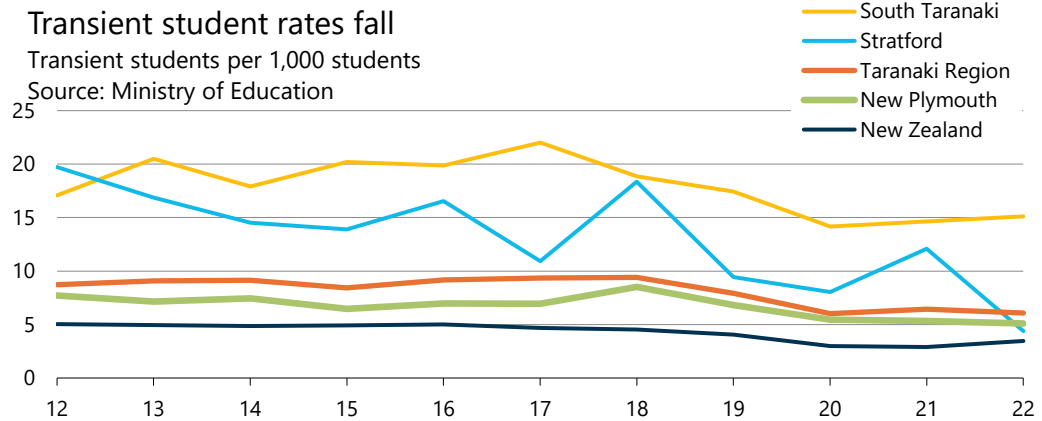
Chart 26



Transient student rates fall

Transient students move school twice or more between 1st of March and 1st November each year. Higher truancy in South Taranaki aligns with a higher rate of transient students in this local authority with 15.1 transient students per 1,000 students in 2023. South Taranaki’s transiency rate has fallen from a high of 22 in 2017, a trend which reflects falls across the region and nationally (Chart 27). The Taranaki regional average was 6.1 in 2023 down from 9.4 in 2018. New Plymouth (5.1) and Stratford at (4.4) remained below the regional average in 2023. But transient rates across all three local authorities remained above the national average of 3.5 in 2023.

Chart 27

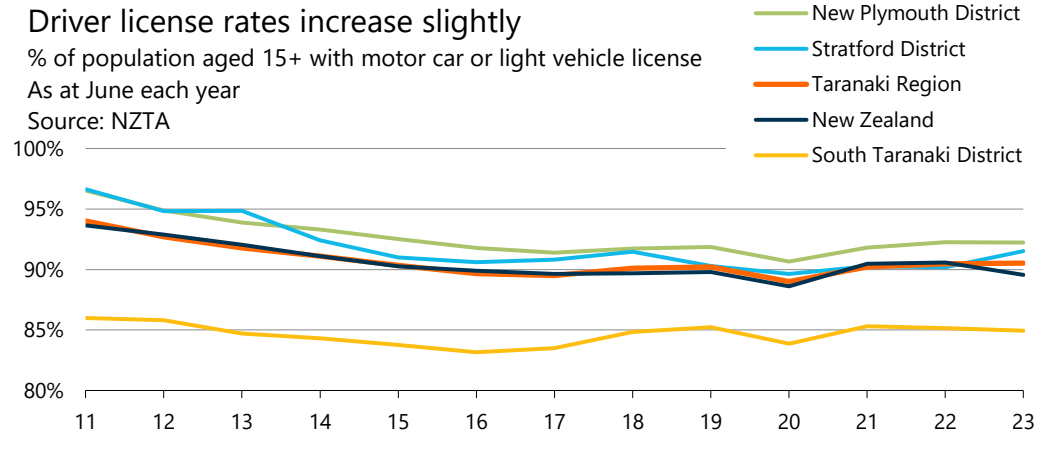


Driver license rates increase slightly

Driver license rates have increased slightly across Taranaki Region since 2018 but are lower in New Plymouth and Stratford than they were ten years ago. Some 90.5% of Taranaki’s population aged 15+ had a driver licence in 2023 compared with 90.1% in 2018 and 91.8% in 2013. Taranaki’s rate was slightly above to the national average of 89.5% in 2023.

New Plymouth’s driver license rate was 92.2% in 2023 compared with 91.7% in 2018 and 93.9% in 2013. Stratford’s was 91.5% in 2023, the same as in 2018, compared with 94.8% in 2013. South Taranaki is a clear outlier with notably lower rates than the national average and the other Taranaki local authorities over time. However, South Taranaki’s rate has recovered in recent years from a low of 83.2% in 2016 to 84.9% in 2023.

Chart 28

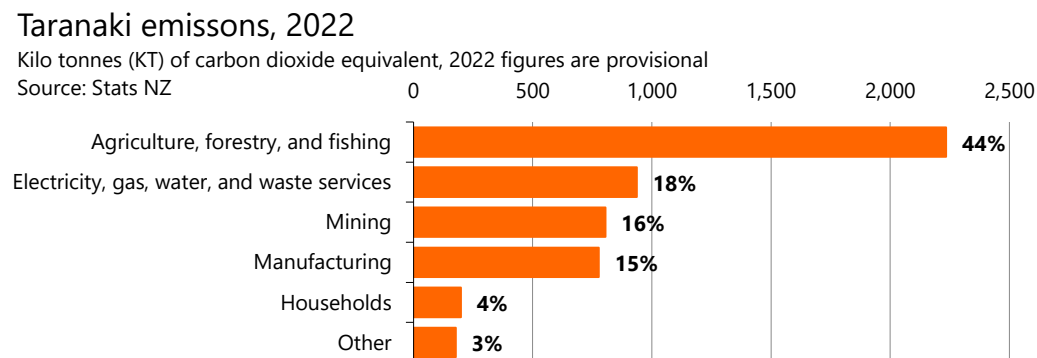


Environment

Emissions decrease

Taranaki was the second most emissions intensive region in 2022 emitting 40.3 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per capita behind Southland Region on 57 tonnes (figures are provisional).¹⁷ Agriculture, forestry and fishing contributed 44% of Taranaki region’s carbon emissions, electricity, gas, water, and waste services contributed 18%, mining 16% and manufacturing 15%. (Chart 29).

Chart 29



¹⁷ Stats NZ. (2023). [Greenhouse gas emissions by region \(industry and household\): Year ended 2022](#)

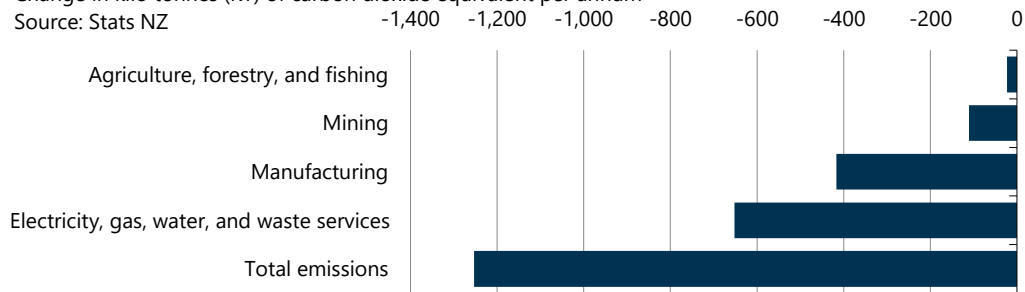
Taranaki’s total emissions have fallen 20% from almost 6,400 kilo tonnes (KT) of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2017 to 5,130 KT in 2022 (provisional), having hovered at around 6,000 KT from 2010 to 2017. A 41% (652 KT) fall in emissions from electricity, gas, water, and waste services, a 35% (417 KT) fall in emissions from manufacturing, and a 12% (111 KT) fall in emissions from mining all made significant contributions to the overall reduction (Chart 30). Infometrics analysis of industrial activity in Taranaki suggests that these falls in industry emissions have happened despite a 13% increase in electricity, gas, water, and waste services GDP between 2017 and 2023, and an increase in manufacturing GDP of 2%. Mining GDP fell 39% during this time which will have contributed to the fall in emissions from this industry.

Taranaki’s 20% fall in emissions between 2017 and 2022 was second only to Northland’s 24% fall and was well above the national average fall of 5%.

Chart 30

Contributions to falling emissions in Taranaki, 2017-22

Change in kilo tonnes (KT) of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum
 Source: Stats NZ



Section 2: Key trends and focus areas

This section looks at key trends emerging from the data analysed in section 1. The focus of this section is to outline a profile of Taranaki's people and economy, identify where the areas of greatest need are, and understand how improvements in identified areas could support improved outcomes for people. The narrative is centred around Toi Foundation's strategic areas of focus.

Enhanced Child and Youth Wellbeing

There are several areas where child and youth wellbeing can be directly enhanced in Taranaki such as taking steps to:

- further increase the Early Childhood Education (ECE) prior participation rate, especially in Stratford and South Taranaki,
- continue to reduce truancy and transient student rates,
- turn around recent declines in school leaver attainment, and
- increase the proportion of school leavers enrolling in tertiary education, especially in Stratford and South Taranaki.

Improving educational outcomes is crucial but complex

ECE participation, truancy, transient students, school leaver achievement and school leaver destinations are all connected. Children who participate in ECE tend to achieve better outcomes at school. Raising school attendance rates, renewing the focus on educational outcomes, and ensuring that students remain in school as long as possible are crucial to raising school leaver attainment and improving destinations.

There may be economic and cultural barriers to children's participation in early childhood education, and issues around truancy and transient students are highly complex. But improving educational outcomes can have benefits well beyond children's early years. The complex issues surrounding poor outcomes and barriers to improving them need to be understood and there should be engagement to improve outcomes across the entire age span from infants to school leavers and beyond.

The Ministry of Education funds local providers to deliver the Engaging Priority Families initiative to help families with children aged 3-4 to attend an early learning service. Poipoia te Mokopuna is a similar local service for Māori whānau with tamariki up to 36 months old. There are currently no providers of either initiative in Taranaki. The Coalition Government's focus on school attendance through its Attendance Action Plan could help support local efforts to reduce truancy rates through community engagement. At the very least, the government's plan will raise awareness and increase reporting of non-attendance. Media coverage of school principals' actions to reduce truancy have

focussed on the need for schools to be given more resources to work with and support families to improve attendance.¹⁸

In Taranaki, Manaiaikalani Education Trust is supporting schools in lower socio-economic communities. Initiatives such as Kindergarten Taranaki, which has included upgrades to facilities funded by Toi Foundation, have helped increase the availability of ECE in Taranaki. MB3 is improving connectivity in Taranaki homes, which makes it easier for young people to continue learning outside the classroom.

Broader outcomes affect young people indirectly

In addition to areas that can directly affect child and youth educational outcomes, arguably every other outcome covered in this report including health, housing, incomes and jobs, safety, social connections and the environment will indirectly affect child and youth wellbeing to varying degrees.

Improving mental health presentation rates and ambulatory sensitive hospitalisation rates are encouraging but Taranaki remains above the national average on both measures. Health workforce metrics suggest Taranaki is underserved relative to its population size. Infants (and the elderly) tend to require more health care than other age groups, and mental health among adolescents is a concern in New Zealand. The Coalition government has committed to making cancer treatment faster, improving immunisation among children, shorter stays in Emergency Departments, shorter wait times for specialist assessments and shorter wait times for treatments. The new government has also committed to building a new medical school in Waikato. However, none of these initiatives are going to improve access to primary care (which could help lower ambulatory sensitive hospitalisations) or mental health care in Taranaki in the near term.

The government has disestablished the Māori Health Authority but has signalled that it wants Iwi Māori Partnership Boards (IMPBs) to do more, including playing an important role in monitoring how well health care and services are working at the local level in support of better outcomes for whānau and communities.

Improving housing affordability and quality will ensure that whānau have access to quality and stable home environments and will help reduce demand for state housing and Emergency Housing Grants. New Zealand has several initiatives to help address housing affordability. Initiatives such as the First Home Grant are designed to help families afford to buy their first home. But they don't deal with the underlying causes of unaffordable housing such as the supply of land for residential development, the pipeline of residential properties and associated infrastructure, and the cost of building residential properties and associated infrastructure.

The Coalition Government has said it will increase the supply of land for residential development by requiring councils in major towns and cities to zone land for 30 years' worth of housing demand. The Government has also committed to reducing red tape for developers to fund infrastructure and to establishing a \$1billion fund for 'Build-for-Growth' incentive payments for councils to deliver more new housing. In Taranaki, the Wise Charitable Trust's work to insulate homes is helping whānau to raise children in homes that are healthy and safe.

¹⁸ Source: RNZ, [School principals and the truth behind truancy](#)

Increasing the number of quality, highly paid jobs available in the local economy, and ensuring the local workforce has the skills to do these jobs, will ensure that whānau benefit from improved and sustainable economic outcomes such as reducing the number of benefit-dependent households and helping break cycles of inter-generational unemployment. The relatively large cohort of young people currently aged under 15 years in Taranaki is a valuable resource for the region. Any improvements in their educational outcomes, aligned with opportunities to become employed in skilled jobs in Taranaki's industries after they leave education is a sound investment for the region and its people.

A weak economic outlook means job creation will be challenging in the near term. A constrained fiscal environment limits both local and central government's capacity to stimulate job growth with spending increases. But measures to ensure unemployed people remain motivated and work-ready will help them take advantage of job opportunities when they arise and minimise the length of time they remain out of work. The Mayors Taskforce for Jobs Community Employment Programme is an example of a programme designed to help disadvantaged people into work. The Coalition Government's 'tough love' approach to beneficiaries could moderate any rises in beneficiary numbers although it remains to be seen whether this approach will lead to positive outcomes for individuals.

Falling crime rates also benefit whānau because they reduce the number of people made victims of crime and add to a general sense of safety in the community. Local efforts to understand the complex causes of crime and address these causes should be supported, reinforced by the Coalition Government's focus on law and order.

Increasing driver licencing rates might increase people's ability to move around and access services and educational and job opportunities, especially in more rural areas such as South Taranaki.

Rangatiratanga | Empowering Māori aspiration

This report has demonstrated that in many areas, the social and economic outcomes of Taranaki Māori are below those of non-Māori. Taranaki Māori have lower ECE participation, poorer school leaver attainment, a higher benefit dependency, lower voter turnout and, perhaps most concerning of all, a lower life expectancy than non-Māori.

The reasons for these poorer outcomes are complex, interconnected, and often multi-generational, and should be addressed in a holistic manner within a Māori cultural framework that covers housing, ECE, schooling, tertiary education and training, the labour market and health outcomes. Te Aranga o Taranaki is an example of an initiative that is about developing a Māori housing strategy for the Taranaki Region. The Mayors Taskforce for Jobs Tuia Programme is about developing leadership skills among young Māori that they can use to support their local communities.

With a younger age profile than the non-Māori population, improving outcomes for Māori is an opportunity to improve the economic and social wellbeing not just of Taranaki Māori, but the entire Taranaki community.

Improved Environment

Taranaki's falling carbon emissions is certainly a welcome outcome. But more work needs to be done. Regional emissions profiles are determined to a large degree by an area's industry structure. Taranaki's large primary sector and carbon-intensive energy, mining and manufacturing sectors, have contributed to the high regional emissions profile. Substantial changes to energy use and industrial production methods, alongside adjustments in the primary sector, will be needed to further reduce this carbon emissions profile.

The Waipipi windfarm, plans for offshore windfarms, hosting of major events such as the inaugural New Zealand offshore wind forum in 2020 and the Offshore Future Energy Forum in 2021, the H2 Taranaki Roadmap, and locating the Ara Ake Future Energy Centre in Taranaki are all positive moves. The Coalition Government's plan to commence an independent review of the methane science and targets for consistency with no additional warming from agricultural methane emissions will have implications for the region.¹⁹ The Coalition Government's commitment to reverse the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration has the potential reverse some of Taranaki's progress in reducing emissions and the perception of Taranaki as being at the forefront of New Zealand's energy transition.

¹⁹ Source: [Coalition Government's Action Plan For New Zealand, 1 April to 30 June](#)

Appendix 3: Local Māori age profile

The Taranaki Māori population is younger than the non-Māori population. In 2023, 63% of the Taranaki Māori population was aged under 35 years compared with just 38% of non-Māori (Chart 31). These statistics are similar across all three of Taranaki’s local authorities (Chart 32, Chart 33 and Chart 34).

Chart 31

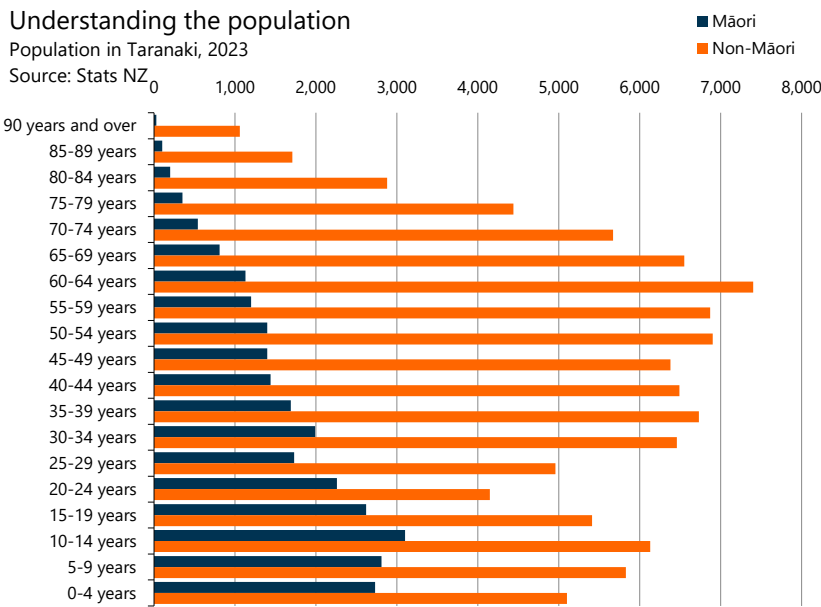


Chart 32

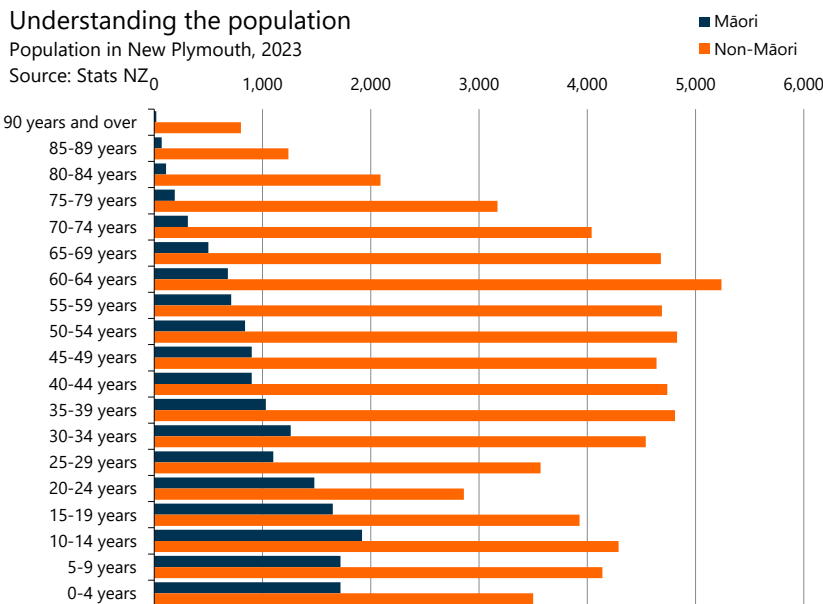


Chart 33

Understanding the population

Population in Stratford, 2023

Source: Stats NZ

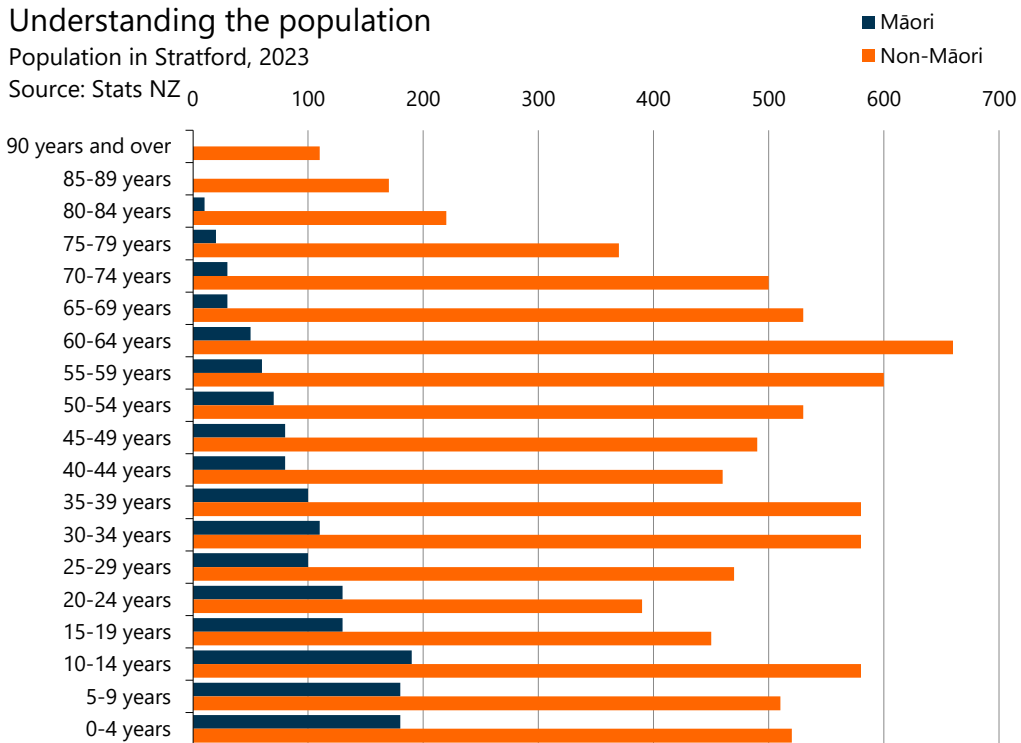


Chart 34

Understanding the population

Population in South Taranaki, 2023

Source: Stats NZ

