

# Regional profile Te Tai Tokerau

Foundation North Strategy Review -  
Evidence Review

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# Summary

This report provides a summary regional data profile of Te Tai Tokerau (Northland). It includes an analysis of population, social and environmental indicator data, including changes since 2018. The full regional profile is available on request.

## Key findings

- The Northland Region has a less dense population and an older demographic profile than the national average. The population is predominantly Māori and European, with Māori making up a higher percentage of Northland's population (37%) than across Aotearoa New Zealand overall (17%).
- Northland is internationally recognised for its unique ecosystems, and biodiversity is increasing in many areas. The region tends to have lower levels of air and recreational water pollution than national levels, and a high percentage of indigenous forest cover.
- Northland is significantly more economically deprived in comparison to the national average, with lower overall rates of employment, income, and educational attainment.
- Māori and Pacific Peoples are disproportionately represented across several indicators of disadvantage within Northland and nationwide. These include socioeconomic deprivation, employment, income, education, housing deprivation, access to amenities and health equity.
- The Far North is consistently represented across these same areas of disadvantage.
- People in Northland tend to report higher overall levels of wellbeing than the national average, and participation in sports and the arts is high and rising.

## Summary of key data

### Population

- Home to around 4% of New Zealanders, Northland has a low population density, although it has grown slightly faster than the national average since 2018. The population is expected to grow by 23% by 2053, with the fastest growth in Kaipara and Whangārei.
- Northland has a high proportion of Māori people - 37% of Northland's population identify as Māori. Pacific Peoples are 5% of the regional population.
- The greatest numbers of Māori and Pacific Peoples live in Whangārei Urban, Te Hiku and the Bay of Islands.
- Northland has an older demographic profile than the national average, but its high Māori population has a younger age profile. While the proportion of children aged 0-14 is comparable with the national average, there are fewer young people aged 15-24 than nationally.
- Northland has proportionately few overseas-born residents compared with the national average, and 3% of the population are recent migrants. The area with the highest proportion of overseas-born residents is Whangārei.
- 5% of New Zealand's population identifies as LGBTQ+, but this figure is lower throughout Northland.

## Social Indicators

- Northland is significantly more economically deprived than the national average, with 40% of the population living in deciles 9-10, and 62% of Māori people. This is most pronounced in the Far North district, where 57% of the population and 76% of Māori people live in the most deprived deciles.
- Employment is lower in Northland than in Aotearoa New Zealand overall, with particularly low employment in the Far North (54%), with 37% of people receiving Government assistance.
- Māori, Pacific Peoples and young people are less likely to be in employment than the general population. In the Far North, 9% of Māori, 10% of Pacific Peoples and 11% of young people are unemployed.
- Median income is lower for Māori, Pacific Peoples and young people in most parts of Northland. Overall, median incomes for Northland are much lower than the national average, at under \$30,000 per year in parts of the Far North.
- Participation in ECE is lower in the Far North than the national average and tends to be lower for Māori and Pacific Peoples than the overall population. School transience rates are much higher across Northland than the national average, with the highest in the Far North District.
- Since 2018, fewer students are achieving NCEA Levels 2 and 3, and more are achieving Level 1 or below. Māori and Pacific students are more likely than the general population to achieve Level 1 or below, but this varies substantially by area. In Northland, achievement rates tend to be lower than the overall population, particularly in Whangārei and the Far North. Note that Māori learners do significantly better in Māori medium education, with the Ministry of Education recognising that the mainstream education system has historically underserved Māori learners (Ministry of Education 2024<sup>1</sup>).
- In Northland, 15% of young people are not in education, employment or training. This is higher than the national average and has increased by 3.6% since 2018.
- Northland has a higher rate of severe housing deprivation than the national average, and this has risen since 2018. This is the highest in the Far North district, at around 5% of the population severely housing-deprived. Māori and Pacific Peoples are more likely to be housing-deprived than the general population, and this has risen more sharply since 2018.
- Regionally, the number of people with access to less than seven basic amenities is comparable to the national average of 7%, but this figure is greater in the Far North (9%). Māori and Pacific Peoples are more likely to lack access to basic amenities than the general population, particularly in areas with high overall rates.
- Public housing has increased in Northland slowly since 2018 in comparison with the national total, but the number of applicants on the housing register has risen by 140%. There are now around a third as many people on the housing register in Northland as the total number of homes available. Transitional housing has increased by 62%, well below the national total of 127%. Māori and Pacific Peoples are disproportionately represented on the housing register.
- The percentage of people with unmet health needs due to costs or wait time has increased since 2018, and Māori and Pacific People in Northland were more likely to have unmet health needs than the general population.
- 17% of the Northland population, including 24% of Māori, 21% of Pacific Peoples and 10% of children have a disability. Disabled people are more likely to experience adverse outcomes in

<sup>1</sup> <https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2024-05/BN-1321550-Maori-education-overview.pdf>.

several areas of wellbeing, including housing, employment, income, social wellbeing, and discrimination.

- Voter participation was 4% lower in 2023 than in 2020 but was slightly higher in Northland than in Aotearoa New Zealand overall. Turnout was higher for Māori in Northland than nationally, but lower for young people.
- Reports of discrimination are rising in Aotearoa (22% of people report experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months nationally in 2023), and 24% of people in Te Tai Tokerau. Māori and Pacific Peoples were both more likely to experience discrimination than the general population.
- People in Northland report a higher sense of belonging and lower levels of loneliness than the general New Zealand population, but lower levels of trust in other New Zealanders and in Parliament.
- Northland residents rate higher in several measures of wellbeing (such as life satisfaction and community support) than the general population.
- Most of Northland is fairly remote, with low access to both health-promoting and health-adverse amenities, except Whangārei Heads and Urban wards, which have a high degree of accessibility to health-promoting amenities and high to medium access to health-adverse amenities.
- A higher proportion of adults and young people in Northland reported being recently active than the general New Zealand population but are less likely to be members of a club or gym. In particular, far fewer young people are members of a club or gym outside of school.
- Participation in culture and the arts is comparable to national averages and has risen since 2022, with 86% of people in Northland attending at least one event in 2025. Nationally, more Māori, Pacific Peoples and younger people attended arts and culture events than the general population. Key barriers to attendance in Northland included a lack of options close to home, and a lack of information.

## Environmental Indicators

- Northland's recreational water sites (i.e. rivers, lakes, beaches) show low levels of pollution compared with the national average, with the exception of the Whangārei Urban Ward, which is highly polluted.
- PM10 concentrations (concentrations of harmful dust, mould, exhaust, etc., in the air) are low throughout Northland compared with the national average.
- Northland has fairly high coverage of indigenous forest and scrubland, particularly in the Far North District and Whangārei Heads.
- Northland has exceptional biodiversity and is home to a number of internationally recognised unique ecosystems. These are under pressure from pests and human activity, and recent declines in native forest cover and increases in plantation forestry could increase this pressure.
- Around 13% of Northland's land area constitutes public access parks, reserves, easements or other conservation land. However, this is highly concentrated in the Far North District, while Kaipara has especially low access.
- Farming land use practices have had negative impacts on soil health in the region, though stock numbers have decreased recently. Sedimentation is a long-standing issue at coastal

sites, and sites surrounding heavy industry are impacted by metals and contamination. However, there is little pollution outside of urban and industrial areas.