

# Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport

This factsheet presents an estimation of the number of people in New Zealand who had a medical problem but did not visit a GP due to a lack of transport over the previous 12 months.

## Key facts



In 2019/20, an estimated 123,000 New Zealanders (1.6% of children and 2.7% of adults) had experienced an unmet need for GP services in the past 12 months as they were unable to access transport.



Lack of transport was a major barrier to accessing GP services for disabled adults, with one in nine people affected in 2019/20. Disabled adults were 6.5 times as likely as non-disabled adults to be unable to access GP services due to a lack of transport.



In 2019/20, women were twice as likely as men to be unable to access GP services due to a lack of transport.



Lack of transport was also a barrier to Māori and Pacific people of all ages in 2019/20. Amongst adults in these groups, 6.6% could not visit a GP because of a lack of transport, as did 5.8% of Pacific children and 3.0% of Māori children.



In 2019/20, adults living in the most deprived areas were around four times more likely to have an unmet need for GP service due to a lack of transport than people living in the least deprived areas.

## How a lack of transport can affect health

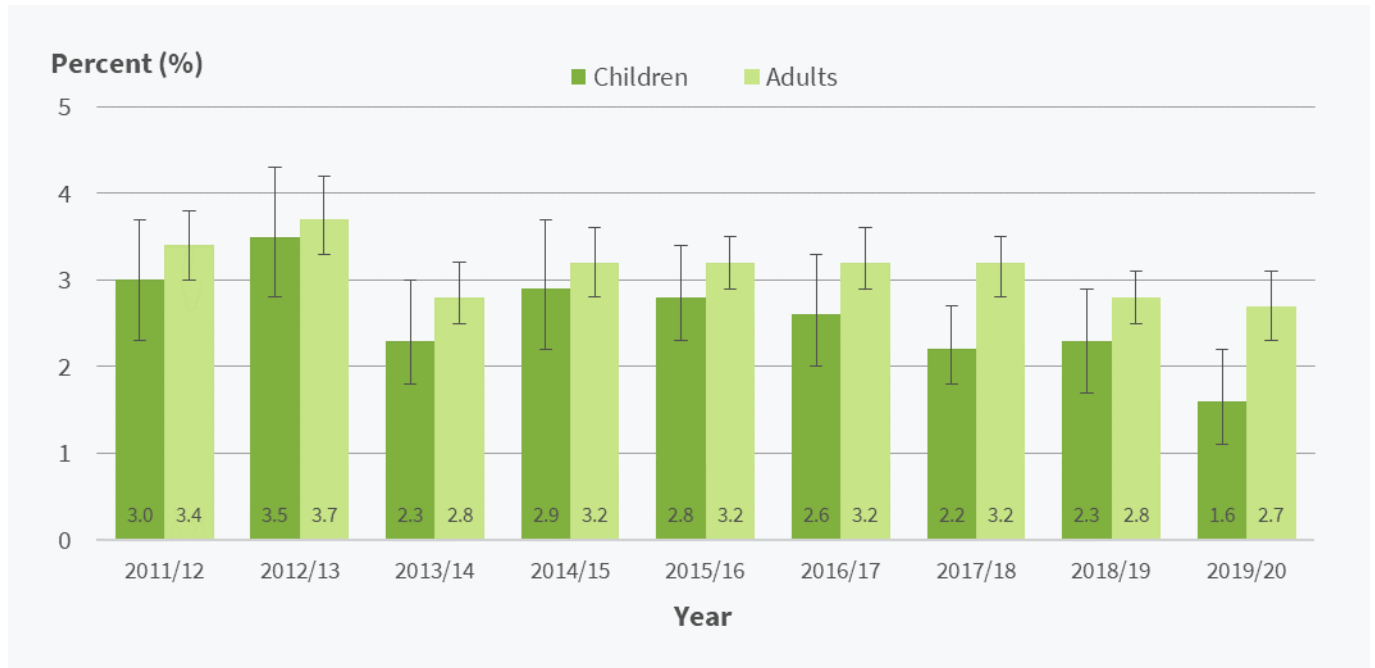
Transportation is a basic but essential requirement for access to healthcare services (Syed et al. 2013). Lack of access to transport (whether that be private vehicles or public transport) may lead to an inability to access medical advice or treatment, causing an ‘unmet healthcare need’ – that is, missing out on healthcare when it is needed, which can worsen health outcomes.

## About 123,000 New Zealanders could not visit a GP when they needed to as they lacked transport in 2019/20

In 2019/20, an estimated 108,000 adults (2.7% of the adult population) and a further 15,000 children aged 0–14 years (1.6% of all children) had a medical problem but did not visit a GP (i.e., they had ‘unmet GP need’) due to a lack of transport in the past 12 months (Figure 1).

The prevalence of unmet GP need among both children and adults decreased between 2011/12 and 2019/20. The prevalence among adults reduced by about one-fifth from 3.4% to 2.7%, while the prevalence among children reduced by almost half - from 3.0% to 1.6%.

**Figure 1: Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport in the last 12 months, in children aged 0–14 years and adults aged 15+ years, 2011/12–2019/20 (unadjusted prevalence)**



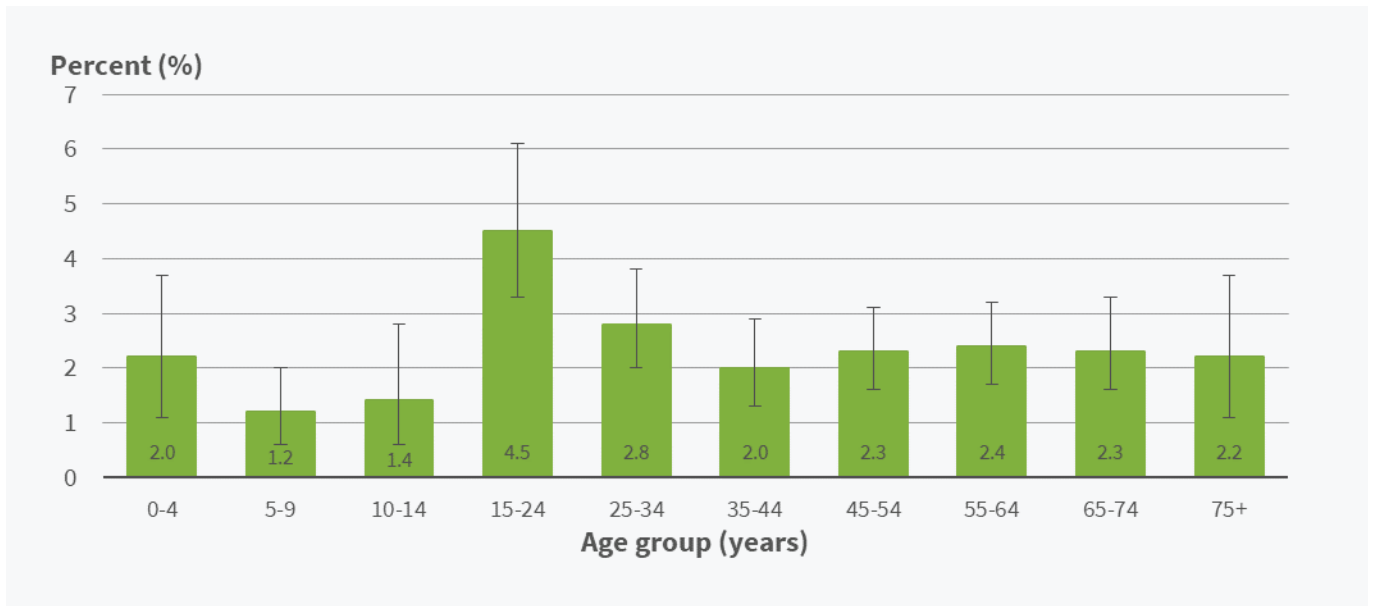
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020)

## The prevalence of unmet GP need varies by age group

Within the adult population in 2019/20, the highest prevalence of unmet GP need due to a lack of transport was found in young adults aged 15–24 years. As for children, young children aged 0–4 years were more likely to have unfulfilled GP need for the same reason (Figure 2).

The distribution of unmet GP need across age groups in 2019/20 was similar to the situation in 2018/19, though the highest prevalence among children was previously in those aged 5–9 years.

**Figure 2: Unmet need for GP services due to lack of transport in the last 12 months, by age group, 2019/20 (unadjusted prevalence)**



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020)

## People with disabilities are far more likely to be unable to access GP services due to a lack of transport

In 2019/20, one in nine (11.0%, 8.5–14.2%) disabled adults had an unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport in the last 12 months. This is equivalent to an estimated 35,000 people.

After adjusting for age and gender differences, disabled adults were 6.5 times more likely than non-disabled adults to experience unmet GP need due to a lack of transport.

The Health Survey defines disabled people as “those who have at least a lot of difficulty seeing or hearing (even with glasses or hearing aids), walking or climbing stairs, remembering or concentrating, self-care, or communicating, as measured by the Washington Group Short Set.” (Ministry of Health 2020)

## Women were twice as likely to be unable to access GP services due to a lack of transport

In 2019/20, the prevalence of unmet GP need among women (3.6%, 3.1–4.3%) was almost double that of men (1.7%, 1.2–2.3%). After adjusting for age differences, women were twice as likely to experience unmet GP need due to lack of transport than men (adjusted rate ratio 2.1, 1.6–3.0).

## Māori and Pacific people have a greater prevalence of unmet GP need due to lack of transport

The prevalence of unmet GP need due to lack of transport varies by ethnic group. Among adults, Māori and Pacific had the highest prevalence, with 6.6% of adults in each group having been unable to access a GP in the previous 12 months because they had no transport. Among children, the greatest prevalence of unmet GP need due to a lack of transport was among Pacific children (5.8%).

**Table 1: Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport in the last 12 months, by ethnic group, 2019/20 (unadjusted prevalence and estimated number)**

Ethnic group (total response)	Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport (prevalence, 95% CI)		Estimated number of people affected	
	Children	Adults	Children	Adults
Māori	3.0 (1.8–4.8)	6.6 (5.2–8.4)	7,000	33,000
Pacific	5.8 (3.5–9.6)	6.6 (4.7–9.2)	8,000	17,000
Asian	0.5 (0.1–1.4)	1.8 (0.9–3.1)	1,000	10,000
European/Other	0.8 (0.4–1.2)	2.0 (1.6–2.4)	5,000	61,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1.6 (1.1–2.2)</b>	<b>2.7 (2.3–3.1)</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>108,000</b>

**Note:** Estimated numbers will add to more than the total due to 'total response' ethnic groups being used, where respondents are counted in every ethnic group they report.

**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020)

Māori adults and children were around three times more likely than non-Māori adults and children to have experienced an unmet GP need due to a lack of transport, after adjusting for age and sex (Table 2). Pacific children were over six times more likely than non-Pacific children to have experienced this unmet need, while Pacific adults were two-and-a-half times as likely as non-Pacific adults.

**Table 2: Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport, by ethnic group, 2019/20 (adjusted rate ratio)**

Ethnic group (total response)	Adjusted rate ratio (adjusted for sex and age)	
	Children	Adults
Māori vs. non-Māori	*2.8 (1.2–6.2)	*2.9 (2.1–4.0)
Pacific vs. non-Pacific	*6.2 (3.2–12.0)	*2.5 (1.7–3.7)
Asian vs. non-Asian	*0.3 (0.1–0.9)	0.6 (0.3–1.2)

**Note:** An asterisk (\*) indicates a statistically significant ratio. A ratio higher than 1.0 indicates the prevalence is higher in the group of interest than in the comparison group.

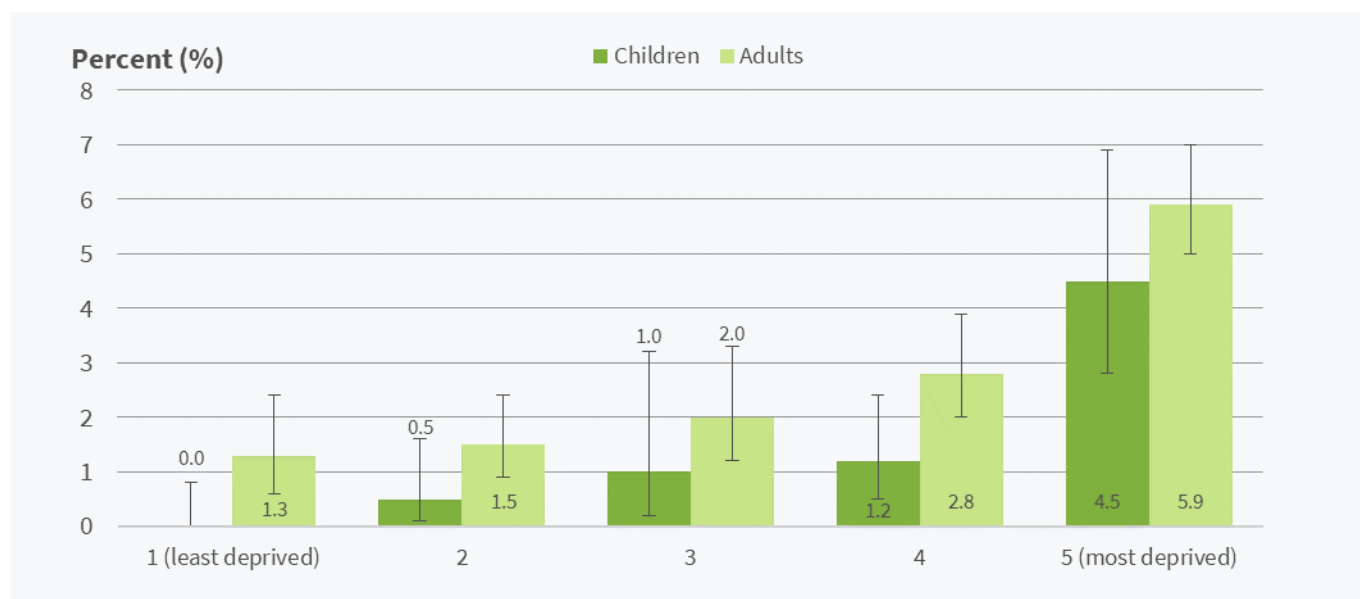
**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020)

## Lack of transport was a significant barrier to healthcare for people living in high deprivation areas

In 2019/20, children and adults living in the most deprived areas were far more likely than those living in the least deprived areas to have had an unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport.

More precisely, 4.5% of children and 5.9% of adults in the most deprived areas had experienced this unmet GP need in the past 12 months (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport in the last 12 months, by NZDep2018 quintile, 2019/20 (unadjusted prevalence)**



**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020)

In 2019/20, adults in the most deprived areas were 4.1 times as likely as those in the least deprived to have unmet GP need due to a lack of transport. The Health Survey did not report the equivalent ratio for children in 2019/20. However, in 2018/19, children in the most deprived areas were almost seven times as likely as those in the least deprived areas to have experienced unmet GP need (adjusted rate ratio 6.9, 2.3–20.6).

## Hawke's Bay and Northland DHBs had higher levels of unmet GP need in 2014–17

In 2014–17, there were geographical differences in the prevalence of unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport (Figure 4).

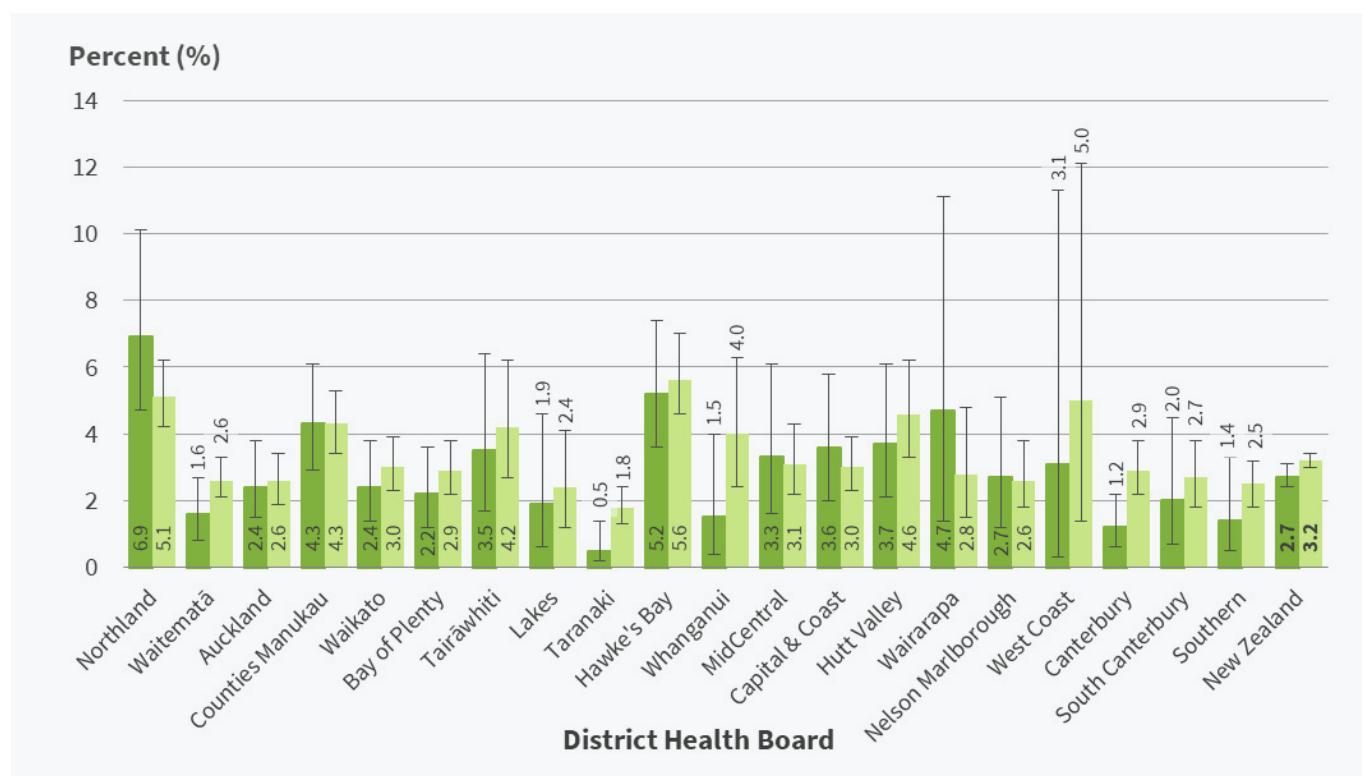
For children, the following District Health Boards (DHBs) had significantly higher rates of unmet GP need due to a lack of transport:

- Northland (6.9%, 4.7–10.1)
- Hawke's Bay (5.2%, 3.6–7.4).

For adults, rates of unmet GP need due to a lack of transport were significantly higher than the national rate in the following DHBs:

- Hawke's Bay (5.6%, 4.6–7.0)
- Northland (5.1%, 4.2–6.2)
- Counties Manukau (4.3%, 3.4–5.3).

**Figure 4: Unmet need for GP services due to a lack of transport in the last 12 months, by District Health Board, children aged 0–14 years and adults 15+ years, 2014–17 (unadjusted prevalence)**



**Note:** Confidence intervals were calculated by the Ministry of Health. More recent data is not available at the regional or DHB level.  
**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2018)

## Data for this indicator

Data for this indicator is sourced from the 2019/20 New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2020) and the 2014–17 regional results from the same source (Ministry of Health 2018). All 95% confidence intervals are presented as error bars on graphs. Unless otherwise stated, all differences mentioned in the text between two values are statistically significant at the 5% level or less.

The 2019/20 New Zealand Health Survey dataset only includes data for three-quarters of the survey year (July 2019 to March 2020). On 19 March 2020, the interviewing for the New Zealand Health Survey was suspended to reduce any risks of transmitting COVID-19 between interviewers and respondents. No adjustments or imputations have been done to account for the impact this has had on the 2019/20 data (Ministry of Health 2020).

For additional information, see the metadata link below.

## References

Ministry of Health. 2018. *Regional Results 2014–2017: New Zealand Health Survey*. URL: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/regional-results-2014-2017-new-zealand-health-survey> (accessed 11/06/2018). Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. 2020. *New Zealand Health Survey Annual Data Explorer*. URL: <https://minhealthnz.shinyapps.io/nz-health-survey-2019-20-annual-data-explorer> (accessed 20/02/21). Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Syed S T, Gerber B S, & Sharp L K. 2013. *Traveling towards disease: transportation barriers to health care access*. *Journal of Community Health*, 38(5): 976-93.

## Other related topics include:

[Household travel time by mode of transport](#)

[Number of motor vehicles](#)

[Population vulnerability](#)

## Author

The author of this factsheet is Patrick Hipgrave [ehinz@massey.ac.nz](mailto:ehinz@massey.ac.nz)

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