

Pasifika worse off in several of the latest New Zealand health statistics



Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

The latest New Zealand health survey shows Pasifika are worse off, percentage wise, than the average population in several areas.

The survey for the period from July 2023 to July 2024 has just been released, and shows more children are going hungry and wait times for GPs continue to increase, along with rates of mental distress.

Health Minister Dr Shane Reti said the findings from the annual snapshot highlighted "the need to continue driving better health outcomes for New Zealanders".

The research found 27 percent of all New Zealand children live in homes where there is food insecurity, up from 21 percent in the previous year.

For Pacific children the figure was 54 percent.

The survey of 9719 adults (aged 15 and over) and 3062 children in 2023/24 found:

22.3 per cent of Pasifika adults - an estimated 65,000 people - had a medical problem but did not visit a GP because of cost, in the past 12 months

65 per cent of Pasifika (estimated 189,000 adults) classified as obese

12.7 per cent of Pasifika adults (estimated 37,000 people) had an unmet need for mental health or addiction services in the past 12 months

20 per cent of Pacific adults (estimated 58,000 people) experienced high or very high psychological distress in the past four weeks [scoring 12 or more on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale]

81.9 per cent of Pasifika (estimated 238,000 people) said their health in general was good, very good or excellent

Nearly half of adults (44.9 percent) reported unmet need for dental care due to cost. Rates were worse for Māori, Pacific, disabled, people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods and those aged 25-54 years

Fewer than half of adults (46.6 percent) met physical activity guidelines [at least 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity activity in the past week - down from 50.9 percent five years ago]

One in 11 adults (9.1 percent) and 8.2 percent of children aged 2-14 years ate the recommended amount of vegetables

Dr Reti said he is committed to strengthening the health workforce, particularly by training more doctors and primary care specialists.

"We want people to be able to access primary care, so they're not having to visit emergency departments in the first place, and we can reduce pressure on our hospital system."

He said by growing the broader economy and driving down inflation, the government was working to make it easier for New Zealanders to afford GP visits and buy food.

"Health New Zealand has faced a particularly challenging time during this survey period. I am encouraged to see that overall, 85.4 percent of New Zealanders report being in good health, and I acknowledge Health NZ's role in helping support that," Dr Reti said.

"I will continue working with associate ministers and agencies to address the challenges this survey identifies, and capitalise on the successes."