



kore hiakai

Zero Hunger Collective

Exploring the Ongoing Need for Food Assistance

Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective report - April 2022

Introduction

He rongoā te kai, He kai te rongoā

As Aotearoa emerges from the Omicron outbreak we begin to look at what the future could be beyond these initial two years of COVID. Many of the underlying drivers of poverty have been highlighted or exacerbated by COVID lockdowns. We have the opportunity at this point to create systems and mechanisms to address the underlying deficits that see increasingly more people experiencing poverty across Aotearoa.

We know that the underlying drivers of poverty are:

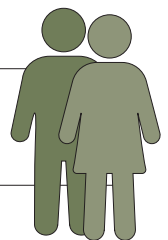
- the complexity of low wages,
- high cost of living, particularly housing,
- and systems that do not prioritise wellbeing over profit.

In order to understand what is shaping the experience of those currently living with poverty and what the appropriate immediate levers to respond to that are, Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective, and partners, engaged with whānau via survey.

Insight was gathered by surveying 149 people who have recently accessed support from one of the participating agencies, VisionWest Waka Whakakitenga, Auckland City Mission Te Tapui Atawhai and Salvation Army New Zealand Te Ope Whakaora. These surveys were carried out over the phone with a mix of food, building financial capability, and other clients. Those conducting the survey had some level of relationship with the respondents. The reach of these providers gives a good sample across the motū.

This report was originally prepared at the request of The Right Honourable Carmel Sepuloni, Minister of Social Development in April 2022. It was not initially intended for public release. A follow up report is being prepared for release in Aug 2022

92% of whānau regularly made a choice between food and other expenses. Of those who made this choice 82% had Work and Income Debt.



Executive summary of findings

These findings re-enforce what we have already understood to be the ongoing drivers of the need for food assistance. They indicate that:

- **Low incomes remain insufficient to meet basic living costs**

- **Whānau regularly use debt, especially Work and Income debt, to meet their basic living costs**

- **Currently whānau on low incomes are reliant on both regular Special Needs Grants AND regular Food Assistance to meet their basic living costs, in order to provide adequate kai for their whānau**

- **Whānau are deeply aware of the impact of ongoing poverty on them and their whānau in regard to physical and mental health.**

Inadequate income drives the experience of food insecurity for those who have participated in this survey with only 4% of those surveyed feeling that they always have enough to provide food after meeting their basic weekly costs. Housing continues to be a wicked problem, and the most dominant cost within these households. After housing whānau constantly juggle and choose to pay either food, debt or their basic utilities.

Inadequacy of income shows clearly in the data exploring what whānau have available to pay for kai once their weekly bills have been paid. Whānau with three or more members in their household struggle to have enough for affordable healthy kai. And yet the respondents recognised that food made a significant difference to the physical and mental wellbeing of their whānau. The struggle of not being able to provide what is known to be needed for wellbeing is taking a toll on the health of our low income families.

From this research it seems that accessing debt has been normalised in low income households as a way of meeting basic living costs. This also eats away at the ability for whānau to provide the basic necessities of life. Debt to Work and Income was a significant part of the debt whānau were servicing. We have assumed that this debt is through the high number of special needs grants whānau draw on, generally on a monthly basis. This again points to the inadequacy of income for whānau in this survey group.

We are interested in how the 1 April changes for many low income families might see a shift in the experience of whānau, particularly how these increases interact with inflationary pressures, reduced transport cost and the private rental market. Alongside increases to the baselines of all aspects of lower incomes, we conclude that addressing the Work and Income debt load that most whānau carry would make a significant change for whānau to be able to regularly access affordable healthy kai.

Tric Malcolm

Pou Ārahi, Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective

Context of this survey

We undertook this research to respond quickly to a question from Minister Sepuloni.

The main parameters for this survey are:

- That it is a snapshot of those accessing Food Assistance through the three participating organisations
- That whānau have an active current relationship with the organisation gathering the data
- That data was gathered between 29 March – 4 April 2022
- That we did not seek out specific populations or explore specific narratives.

Therefore the demographic data is incidental, a snapshot in time to gain indicative data from.

A significant number of this survey are receiving a Work and Income benefit. Because this is a snapshot of data, we cannot say if this proportion is an accurate reflection of the percentage of those accessing these services within the organisations carrying out the survey.

There are limitations around the data sought in regard to debt. We asked about the number and kind of debts whānau had but not the extent.

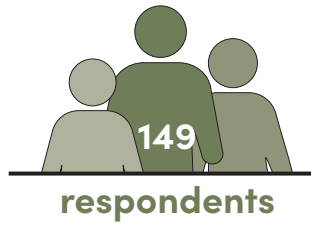
Whānau have shared their insights and data for the purposes of this research, knowing that their personal details will not be included. The insights of this research are only relevant to this point in time.

Whānau received a koha for their contribution.

The data was analysed by Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective and the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services.

It is important to note that increases in Work and Income benefits that came into affect on 1 April 2022 will not yet have affected the group this data was gathered from.

Survey sample (Q2, 3, 4, 6 & 7)

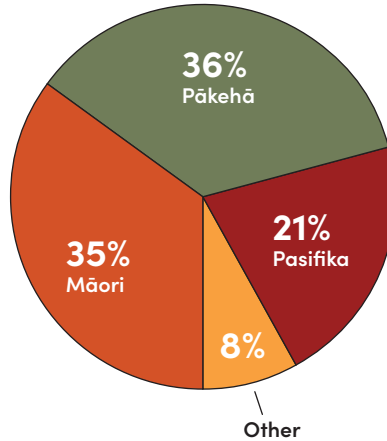


Gender:



Under 0% identified as Gender Diverse

Ethnicity:

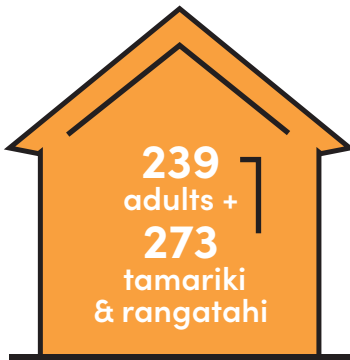


Location:



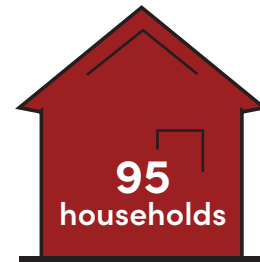
Households: (Q6 & 7).

Households in this survey included

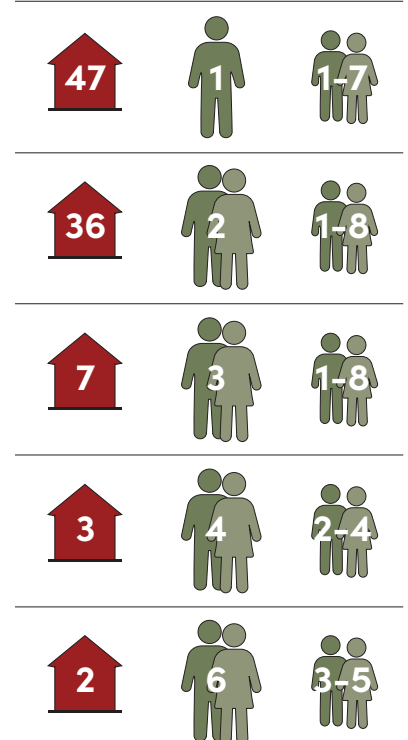


are adults living without children in their household:

- 38 live alone
- 14 have 2 adults
- one has 4 adults
- one has 5 adults.



live with children in their households:



A third of those surveyed are parenting alone. All of those parenting alone are women.



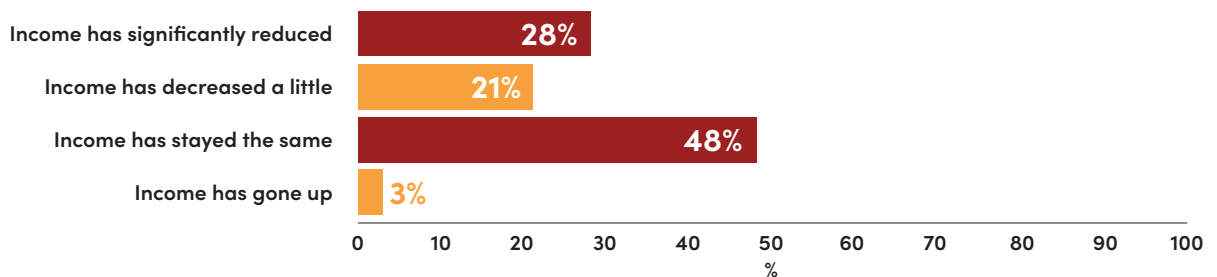
Income (Q8)



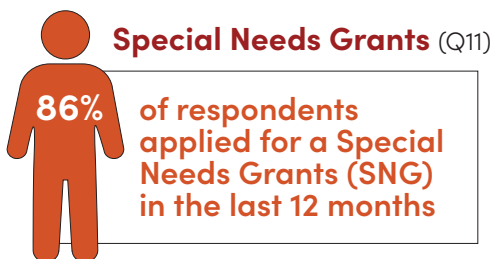
Because of the smaller proportion of salary or waged workers and superannuitants we are less able to gain deeper insights from their data. It could be helpful to specifically survey a large number from this group in order to understand their lived experience better.

Although a smaller number of pensioners and wage/salary earners were included in the survey, there remains some indicative findings amongst both of these groups that warrant further investigation. That being - the inadequacy of pension levels to meet the rising costs of living - the frequency of low income families to Work and Income for Special Needs Grant Support and to Pataka Kai.

Income impacted by COVID (Q9)



When considered alongside increases in the cost of living this shows that over 97% of respondents are attempting to meet their increasing weekly costs without any increase to their income, and often a reduction in income.



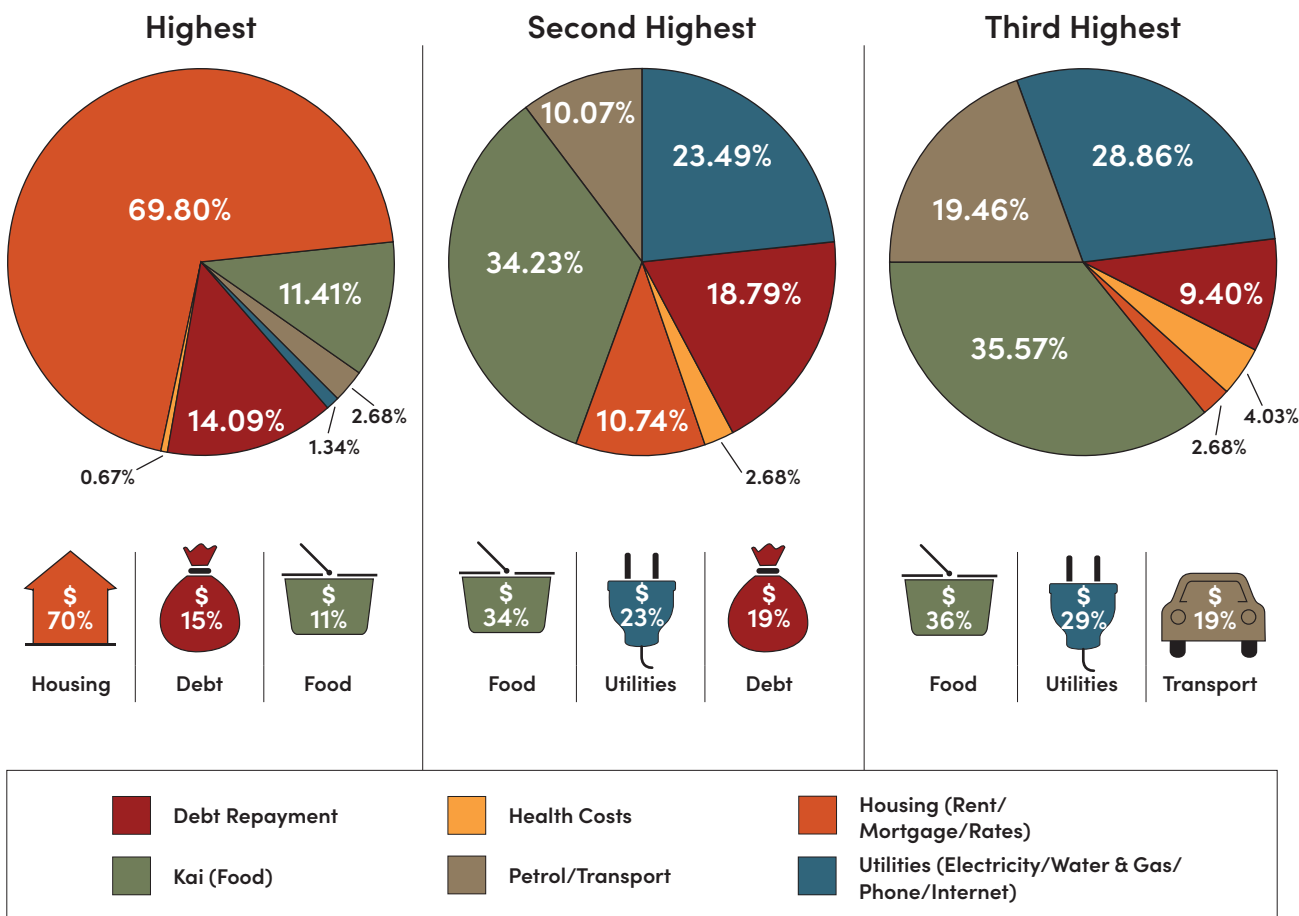
Consistently those receiving Special Needs Grants received a SNG more than once a month, monthly or every few months.

Considering the high number of respondents who receive a benefit as their main source of income, this shows that Special Needs Grants are regularly used to supplement income for those receiving a Work and Income benefit. Noting that they are also receiving food assistance would suggest that their income remains inadequate despite regular Special Needs Grants.

Superannuitants and salary or waged workers who accessed Special Needs Grants were also doing so every few months or monthly, but not significantly more frequently than monthly. This indicates that those on low incomes still also need their income supplemented to meet core expenses.

Expenditure (Q12, 13, 14)

Highest household expenses



As expected, housing is the highest expense for 70% of households. What has surprised us is the role that debt plays as a priority for whānau. When housing is taken out, debt and food featured within the top three priorities for the highest and second highest expense for households.

Debt is not a 'core' essential. A 'core essential' is something that is required in order to thrive (food, shelter, warmth, compassion, connectivity). Yet it features within the highest expense in many households. It is obviously being used as a tool to be able to afford core essentials.

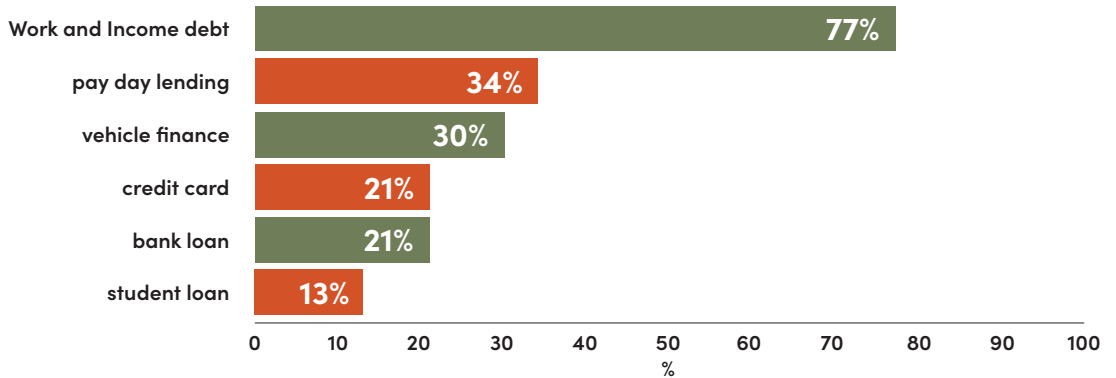
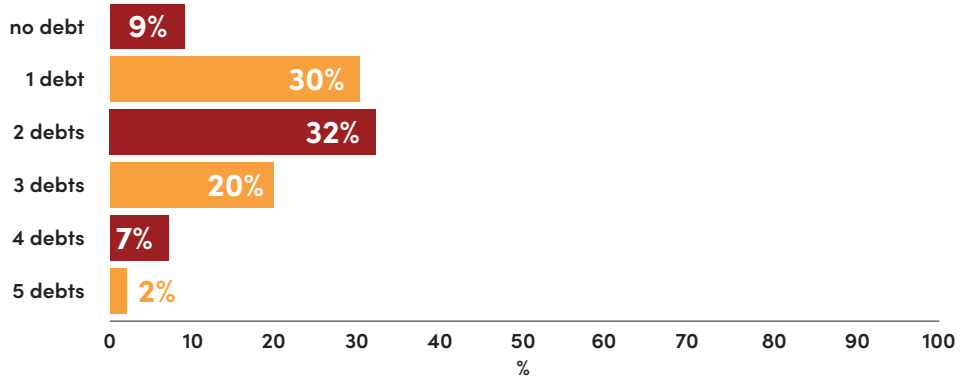
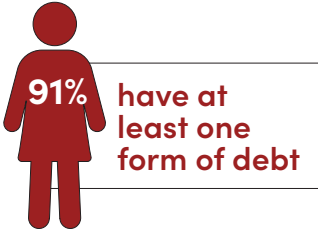
Although social housing is meant to enable those on low incomes to better afford their other living costs, housing is still the most common highest expense for those receiving Work and Income benefits. Despite accommodation supplements and other housing assistance (Housing New Zealand, social housing providers etc) this cost materially dominates within household budgets, increasing pressure on the ability to purchase food.

It would be interesting to understand what portion of income is spent on housing and therefore how much is left for the remaining living costs. The modelling from the Kore Hiakai Ka Mākona 2021 report suggests it could be as high as 80%.¹

¹ Kore Hiakai Ka Mākona 2021 Report into Income Adequacy in Aotearoa New Zealand: Three Household Scenarios

Debt

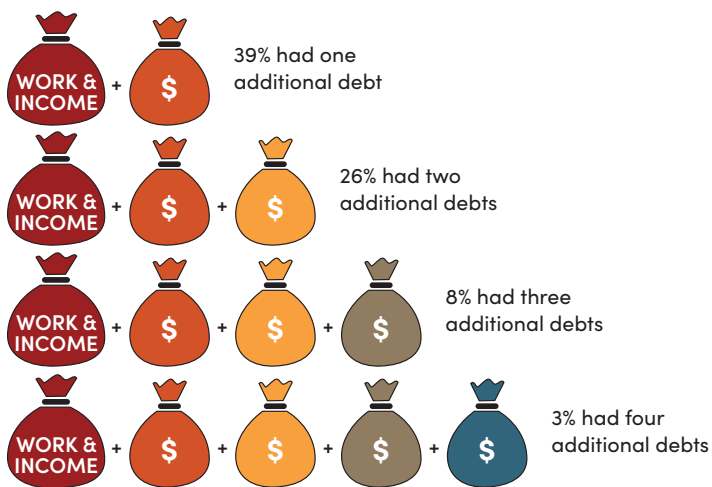
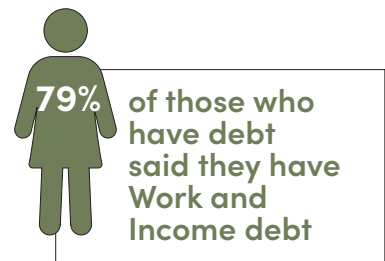
What debt are you paying off? (Q18)



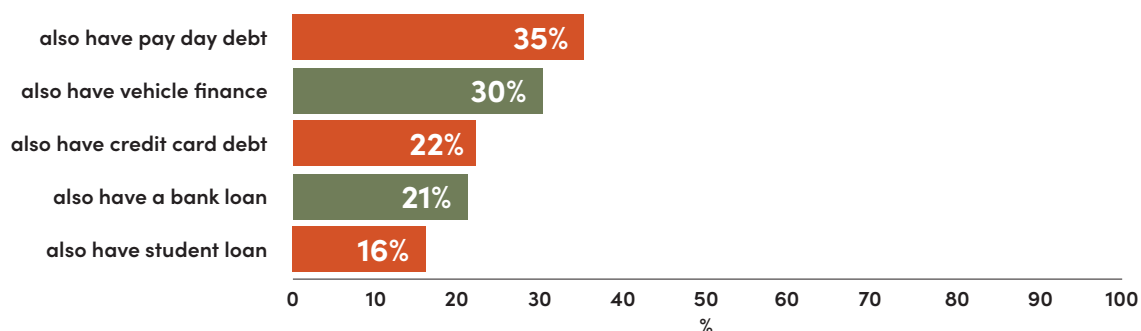
Work and Income debt and the number of other debts

Of those with debt 23% have only Work and Income debt and nothing else.

Of those who had another debt alongside their Work and Income debt:



What are the co-existing debts with Work and Income debt?



For women parenting alone, 91% have debt, 79% have Work and Income debt.

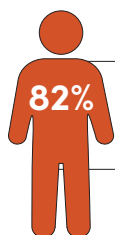
64% of those debts were being carried by Māori or Pasifika women parenting alone. (Māori and Pasifika make up 56% of the total cohort).

Of those parenting alone households, those with two children hold the most number of debts. Note we did not seek the amount of those debts, only the number of debts.

This evidence reinforces research done by Kore Hiakai in 2019 which showed that Māori and Pasifika women with two children parenting alone are most likely to be food insecure in Aotearoa.

We are also wondering how levels of interest on these debts form a regular part of core household expenses, further increasing weekly expenses.

Delaying paying debt to provide adequate food (Q17)



delayed debt repayments to provide adequate food each week for their families

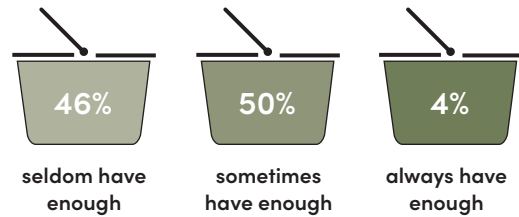
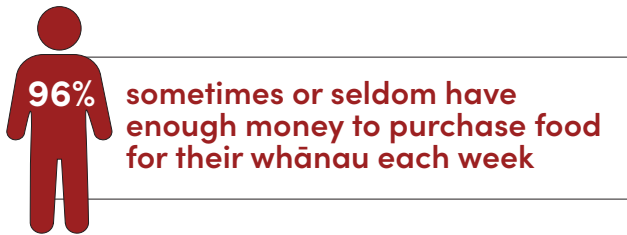
- 84% receiving a Work and Income benefit delayed paying debt
- 75% receiving salary or wages delayed paying debt
- 67% receiving superannuation delayed paying debt

Our insight is that those on low incomes are already in debt and struggling to service it and would rather compromise or increase their debt than not provide food for their whānau.

The level of Work and Income debt, accompanied by the level of Special Needs Grant frequency, suggests there is value in investigating the options to interrupt this pattern, such as a pilot where whānau have their Work and Income debt forgiven, and then monitor whether Special Needs Grant frequency reduces.

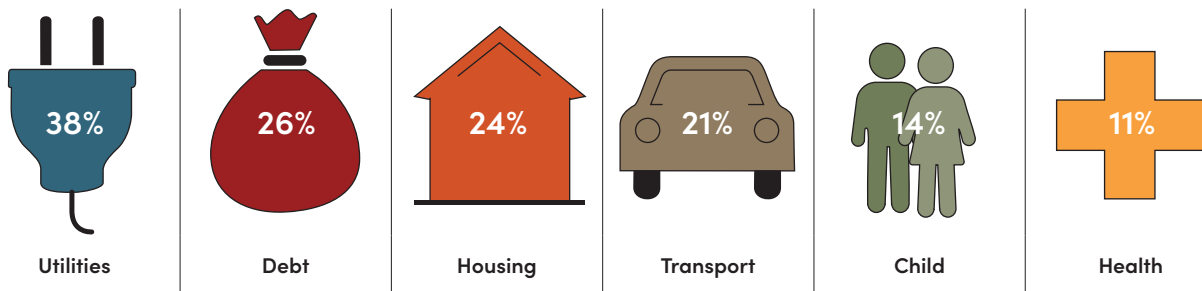
Food insecurity

Not enough to buy food (Q19)

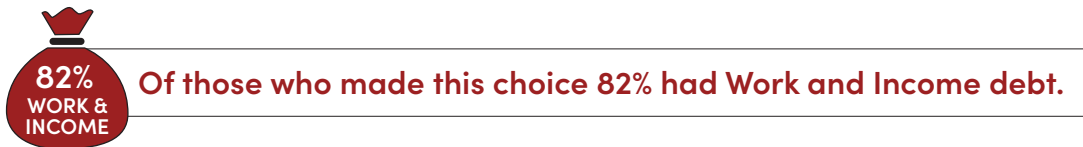


Choose between food and other expenses (Q15, 16)

In the last month 92% indicated that they had to choose between buying food and paying other expenses.



When people chose between food and other expenses the most common chosen alternative was utilities, closely followed by debt. It is notable that debt features so high on the list. It is obvious that while housing is the single biggest expense, when people have to choose they will pay for housing over food.



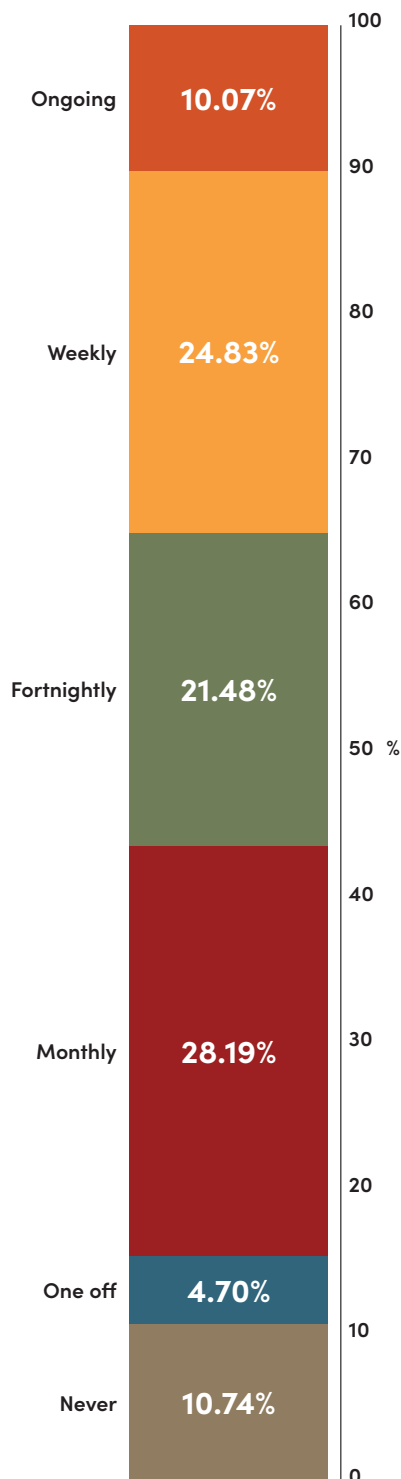
We are also surprised by the frequency with which transport is chosen.²

What do you go without? (Q22)

Whānau indicated that general food is the first thing that they go without, followed by meat, which was identified as a separate item for many whānau. Personal hygiene items, medical items and clothing came next, followed by transport.

² We note that this data does not take into account the changes in public transport charges that took effect on 1 April 2022.

How often do you need to go to a Pātaka Kai/Foodbank for support? (Q20)



74%

access a Pātaka Kai/Foodbank between weekly and monthly

The regularity of accessing Pātaka Kai/Foodbank suggests that food assistance is factored in to the household economy as part of the system for affording regular costs of living for these whānau.

When matched with the frequency of seeking a Special Needs Grant, both of these mechanisms are used regularly for obtaining healthy affordable kai for whānau. This would indicate at the time of the research that both methods were needed to meet standard costs of living for these whānau.



85%

of whānau access both Pātaka Kai/Foodbank and Special Needs Grants



54%

of those who access Pātaka Kai/Foodbank weekly, fortnightly or monthly, also access Special Needs Grants fortnightly, monthly or every few months

From working deeply in this space we know that many whānau struggle to initially reach out for food support. Going to a charity for food can be associated to whakamā, that is, shame, guilt, and an admission of failure to provide for one's family. Previous research, especially that of Auckland City Missioner Helen Robinson, shows how deep this whakamā is and how it affects health and wellbeing.^{3,4} It is far more likely, that their need for both Work and Income and Pātaka Kai/Foodbank support represents the widening gap in low income households' capability to meet their basic needs.

3 Auckland City Mission Shine the Light Report 2020.

4 Shining a Light on Food Insecurity in Aotearoa New Zealand research by Helen Robinson, University of Auckland, 2019.

After essential bills – how much is left for food? (Q23)

When we look at the amount required to meet the basic cost of a food budget for the families in this survey, very few were able to meet their basic costs from what was left when they had paid their other bills.

The Otago University study into the cost of food estimate the cost of a basic weekly shop. We acknowledge that this is not intended to be extravagant in any way. Other research into the average weekly shop for a family of four in Aotearoa is significantly higher.

The weekly estimates just for food, it does not include hygiene or other non-food items:⁵

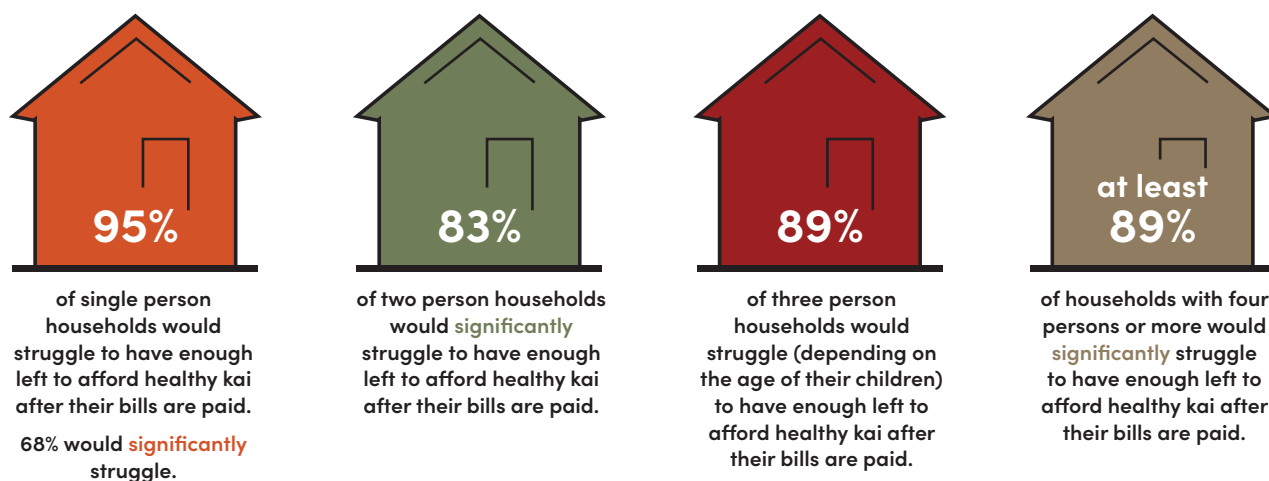
Average single adult aged 19 years and above	\$68
Pre-school child aged 0-4 years	\$32
Primary school aged child aged 5-10 years	\$48
Adolescent aged 11-18 years	\$69

***Otago University figures are for Q1 2021. Kore Hiakai has averaged the male and female amount. There isn't a specific amount for older people, pregnant or breast-feeding people, for special dietary requirements*

Food Costs for household combinations:

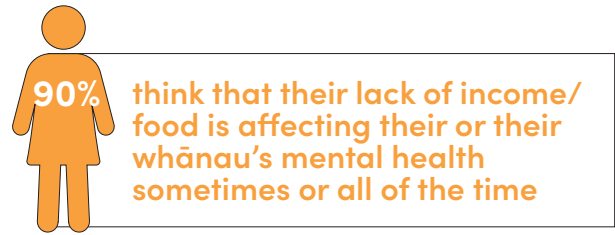
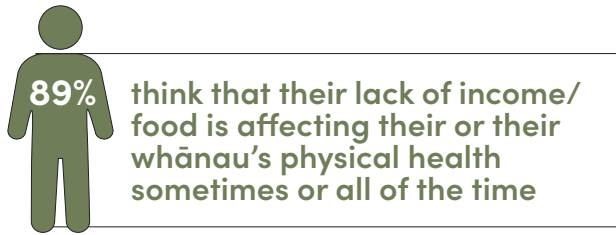
1 person household	\$68*
2 person household	\$100 – \$137
3 person household	\$132 – \$205
4 person household	\$164 – \$274 (2 adults + 2 children \$200+)
5 person household	\$196 – \$343 (2 adults + children \$232+)
6 person household	\$228 – \$412 (2 adult + children \$264+)

**for all combinations of households with only adult members multiply this number.*

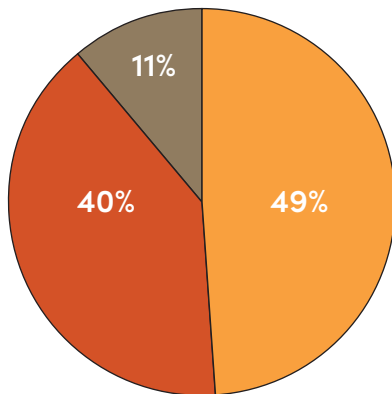


⁵ University of Otago Department of Human Nutrition New Zealand Estimated Food Costs 2020 and 2021

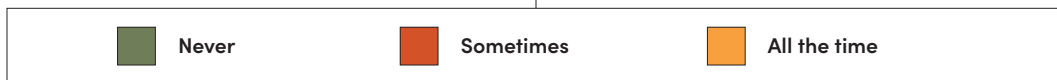
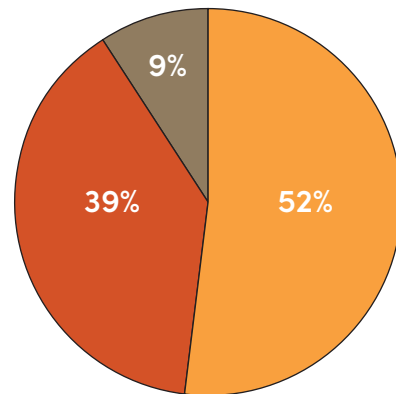
Does lack of income/food affect your or your whānau physical and mental health? (Q21)



Affects physical health



Affects mental health



Our insight is that whānau are deeply aware of how being food insecure and living in poverty affects both the physical and mental health.

Hope: what the future holds (Q24)

29% perceived that their financial situation would improve once the COVID crisis is over



29% did not know if their financial situation would improve once the COVID crisis is over.

We expected that this question might show indications of the hope those currently accessing food assistance have for their futures being different and more empowering. From their answers this doesn't look apparent.

Concluding thoughts

The weight of carrying food insecurity shows not only in the inability to pay for food but also in the on-going stress it creates for whānau. This shows up in both physical and mental health impacts. The impacts of on-going long-term food insecurity are well documented in Aotearoa. We commend low income whānau for their resourcefulness and resilience in the way they navigate such relentless circumstances.

Inadequate income, along with the weight of debt, drives the need for people to return to community food providers to supplement their weekly income in order to provide healthy kai for their whānau. The Government has implemented initial measures intended to shift low-income levels towards meeting basic cost-of-living for whānau. There remains a material gap between low-incomes and the ability to meet basic cost-of-living. Alleviating the weight of debt, particularly, Work and Income debt, for low-income families would shift their weekly expenses and create greater access to provide food for their whānau from their own income. If assistance is needed for food provision, no debt should be incurred. When food assistance is needed in a long term ongoing way, basic income needs to be increased in order to allow whānau to afford adequate kai and maintain their own mana.

Ngā mihi maioha

Ngā mihi to all those whānau who shared their wisdom and experience with us creating a rich and deep resource to draw from. Your voice and insight is deeply important for shaping a fair and accessible Aotearoa where all can thrive.

Ngā mihi to all the kaimahi who sat alongside whānau listening to their stories and precious insights in order for them to be collated, so that we might inform our leaders and the decision they make.

Ngā mihi to VisionWest Waka Whakakitenga, Auckland City Mission Te Tāpui Atawhai and Salvation Army NZ Te Ope Whakaora who have contributed their time and skill to craft and gather this survey, and to the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services for assisting with this analysis so that we might have this story to offer.

Nga mihi maioha to Rebecca Wedge of Bunkhouse Graphic Design for capturing and interpreting these insights so beautifully.



Kore Hiakai are committed to treating data and the people held within data with mana and compassion. This project has been audited and guided by the data risk analysis framework 'Ngā Kete o te Wānanga.'

The Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective is a collective of six social service agencies who have joined forces to bring about change. They are: The Salvation Army, Christchurch City Mission, Wellington City Mission, Auckland City Mission, VisionWest, and the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services.

kore hiakai

Zero Hunger Collective
www.zerohunger.org.nz