



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

# Families Package 2021 Update

## Findings for Māori



# Background

The Families Package was introduced from 2018 to help improve incomes for low-and middle-income families with children. This is part of the Government's focus on reducing child poverty and ensuring children get the best start in life. The Package also introduced a new Winter Energy Payment.

The Families Package was the first stage of the Government's ongoing welfare overhaul work programme.

The package was mainly delivered through MSD and Inland Revenue. It was made up of the following changes.



Boosting incomes of low-and middle-income families by increasing the **Family Tax Credit** and raising the **Working for Families** abatement threshold.



Helping older New Zealanders and people receiving a main benefit heat their homes by introducing a **Winter Energy Payment**. This payment was **doubled** in 2020.



Helping families in a child's early years by introducing a **Best Start tax credit** (replacing the Parental Tax Credit) and increasing **paid parental leave** from 18 to 26 weeks.



Increasing the **Accommodation Supplement** and **Accommodation Benefit**, by implementing changes that had been announced in the 2017 Budget.



Increasing financial assistance for carers by increasing the rate of **Orphan's Benefit, Unsupported Child's Benefit** and **Foster Care Allowance**.

In our work to monitor and evaluate the changes, we are producing results specifically for Māori wherever possible. This document draws together the results so far.

While whānau are the cornerstone of Māori society, families and individuals tend to be the primary focus for public policy, including income support policy. For this reason, most of our work to date looks at families and individuals as they are defined for income support purposes (single people with and without children under 18, and couples with and without children under 18). Upcoming projects will be looking at whānau, and whānau wellbeing.

# The Families Package **helped lift incomes for Māori**

We can now see some of the effects these changes have had for Māori.

However the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns (2020 and 2021), and rising accommodation costs, have made achieving some of the Families Package's goals more challenging.

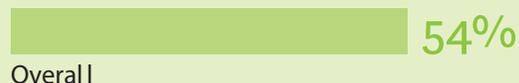
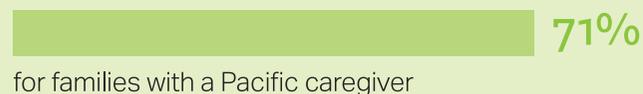
In its first year, an estimated

## 71%

of families with children with a Māori parent or caregiver received Families Package payments.



**Compared, the proportion who received Families Package payments was:**



On average, families with a Māori parent or caregiver who received the Families Package in its first year received

## \$59p/w

more in Families Package payments.



In the winter months of 2021, the Winter Energy Payment helped around

## 160,000

Māori receiving a main benefit, New Zealand Superannuation or Veteran's Pension.

**Compared, the average increase in Families Package payments for receiving families was:**

**\$66p/w** for families with a Pacific parent or caregiver.

**\$51p/w** for families without a Māori or Pacific parent or caregiver.

**\$55p/w** overall.

**Across all families, three quarters of the increase in average Families Package payments came from Family Tax Credit and Accommodation Supplement.**



# There were extra **income gains** **for families with** **pēpē**

## Early-years changes in the Families Package:

- a new Best Start tax credit of \$60p/w for each new pēpē born after July 2018 until they turn one. Best Start is then available to low- and middle-income families on an income-tested basis until the child turns three
- a four-week extension to the maximum length of paid parental leave for parents with pēpē born after July 2018, and another four-week extension in July 2020 (taking the maximum paid parental leave period from 18 weeks to 26 weeks).

Māori mothers (and Māori 'first parents' listed on birth certificates in same-sex couples), with pēpē who were in the first cohort to qualify for the early-years changes, gained an additional

**\$55p/w**

in the first six months post-birth, on average.

This is equivalent to an extra nine percent increase in their income, on top of income gains from other parts of the Families Package.



## These gains were broadly similar across **Māori, Pacific, and non-Māori, non-Pacific** **mothers/first parents**

**\$50p/w** for Pacific

**\$56p/w** for non-Māori non-Pacific

**\$55p/w** overall

For Māori mothers/first parents, around half the increase in payments came from increased paid parental leave income and half came from the new Best Start tax credit. Most of the additional income for non-Māori, non-Pacific mothers/first parents came from increases in paid parental leave income, and this was the group that appeared to have a small increase in time off work and at home as a result of the early-years changes.

**We plan to follow what happened as the tamariki in the first cohort to qualify reached age 2-3, to see how much extra income was received over a longer period. We will look at how the changes influenced employment, and some measures of health and wellbeing.**

# Rents have risen since the Families Package, but **there is little evidence that the extra accommodation support Māori received in the Families Package contributed to their rent rises**

The proportion of Māori Accommodation Supplement recipients receiving the maximum payment for their area was:



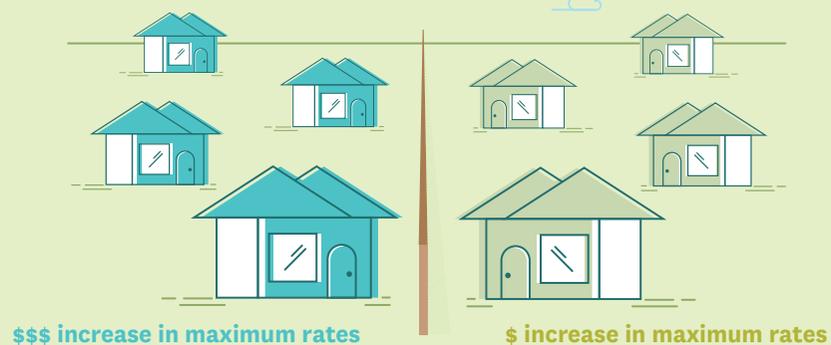
The rebound tells us that some of the income gains have been offset by increased accommodation costs since the Families Package was introduced.

From 1 April 2018, the maximum Accommodation Supplement rates were increased across all areas, and more places were zoned as areas qualifying for higher possible maximum rates.

An important question is:

## Did the Accommodation Supplement changes contribute to the increase in accommodation costs?

We commissioned Motu Economic and Public Policy Research to look at this question. They used unevenness in the size of the 2018 increase in maximum payments across different areas as the basis for their study. They looked at what happened to total accommodation support and what happened to rents paid by Accommodation Supplement recipients on each side of the boundaries between areas that got larger increases in maximum rates and areas that got smaller increases.



Their results suggest **the 2018 increases did not lead to a notable extra increase in rents, on top of rent increases that were occurring anyway.** Overall, around 90% of the extra increase in assistance was captured by Accommodation Supplement recipients as an extra increase in after-rent income.

**This broad finding held for Māori Accommodation Supplement recipients** – 87% of the extra increase in assistance for Māori was captured by Accommodation Supplement recipients as an extra increase in after-rent income.

Although recipients on the side with larger increases in maximum rates were estimated to have average 'raw' rent increases relative to recipients on the other side, once changes in the composition of recipients and the boundary areas were controlled for, these increases were very small. There was no evidence of any effect on the rent of recipients who didn't move house.

# Long-term trends show no noticeable change in overall average rents around the time of 2018 changes, or around the time of the previous 2005 adjustment to Accommodation Supplement maximum rates

Taken together with the new findings from the Motu study, longer-term trends suggest Accommodation Supplement increases are not an important driver of the growth in rents that is occurring.

This plot shows long-term trends based on:

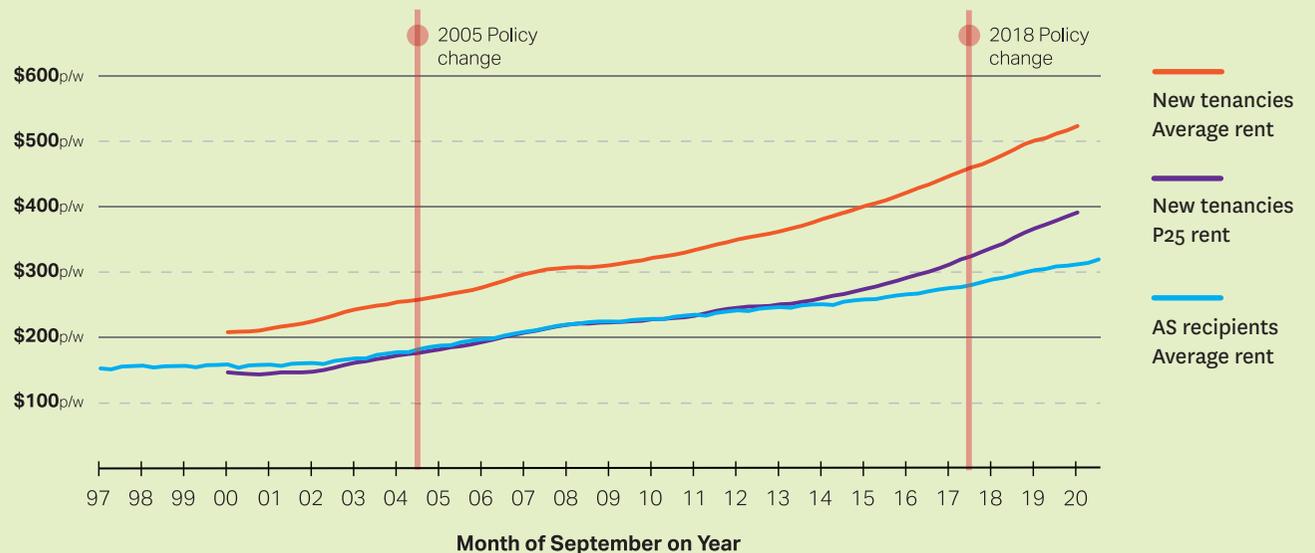
- rents paid by Accommodation Supplement (AS) recipients
- rents paid in new tenancies, from Tenancy Bonds data – the 25th percentile (P25) marks the top of the bottom quarter of new tenancy rents.

The average rent of AS recipients corresponds closely to the 25th percentile of new tenancy rents until about 2013. After that the 25th percentile of new tenancy rents increased faster than the average rent of AS recipients.

Over the 20 years to September 2020, the average annual increase in rents for AS recipients was 3.4%, compared to 5.0% for the 25th percentile of new tenancy rents and 4.7% for the average new tenancy rents.

Accommodation Supplement increases do not appear to be an important driver of the long-term growth in rents that is occurring. There is no noticeable change around the time of 2018 changes, or around the time of the previous 2005 adjustment to Accommodation Supplement maximum rates. Instead, it appears trend increases in rents started 2-3 years before each of these dates.

Average Weekly Accommodation Supplement and New Tenancy Rents - All areas



# Child poverty measures for children overall trended down in the two years that followed the Families Package

Steps towards reducing child poverty continue.

Other income support changes introduced since 2018 have included raising abatement thresholds, lifting main benefits and Working for Families tax credits, indexing main benefits, and removing some obligations and related sanctions.

Other recent actions to support low-income families and children, like healthy free lunches in schools and free doctors' visits for under 14s, have aimed to take pressure off household budgets and improve childrens' quality of life.

The next update on child poverty trends will be in February 2022.

The Government has made reducing child poverty a priority. In the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, the Government sets out three primary measures of child poverty and six supplementary measures. These measures are considered together because no single measure tells a complete story of child poverty.

## The primary measures are:

The number of children in households with incomes much lower than a typical ('fixed line') 2018 household, **after they pay for housing costs.**

in 2019/20

**18.4%**

of all children were living in poverty on this measure

The number of children in households with much lower incomes than a typical household, **before they pay for housing costs.**

in 2019/20

**13.8%**

of all children were living in poverty on this measure

A measure of lack of access to the essential items for living – **material hardship.**

in 2019/20

**11.3%**

of all children were living in poverty on this measure

**In 2019/20, almost 1 in 5 Māori children (19.5%) lived in households experiencing material hardship (going without 6 or more of 17 essential items).** The rate was one in four for Pacific children (26.1%). These rates compared with 11.3% for all New Zealand children.

**Across children overall, all measures of child poverty trended downwards between 2017/18 and 2019/20.** As of 2019/20, there were 43,000 fewer children in low-income households on the after-housing-costs child poverty measure than in 2017/18, 26,000 fewer on the before-housing-cost measure, and 18,000 fewer children experiencing material hardship.

Stats NZ has produced child poverty statistics for different ethnic groups only in 2018/19 and 2019/20, so **we can't see how the fall in child poverty between 2017/18 and 2018/19 affected tamariki Māori.**

However, tamariki Māori made up nearly half of the annual fall in the number of children in material hardship between 2018/19 and 2019/20. Across other child poverty measures, the rates remained relatively unchanged between those two years.

**The data used for these statistics pre-dates COVID-19.** The economic impact of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, together with rising accommodation costs, may have since increased financial pressure on some families.

# We looked at research on client experience of the income support system from before the Families Package

Findings from this ‘**Baseline Synthesis**’ of client experience research were similar to themes from MSD’s ‘Voices’ consultations in 2018 and 2019, and from the Welfare Expert Advisory Group’s 2018 consultations.

Lack of awareness of entitlements, the complexity of the application process, lack of alignment with Māori and Pacific values and culture, and the inadequacy of assistance provided by the income support system emerged as key issues for recipients before the Families Package.

These findings affirm the importance of **MSD’s Te Pae Tawhiti shifts and Te Pae Tata and Pacific Prosperity, our Māori and Pacific Strategies and Action Plans.**

## Te Pae Tawhiti and the Te Pae Tata Strategy and Action Plan set a new direction for MSD

In the years since the Families Package was introduced, MSD has developed and implemented our strategic direction, Te Pae Tawhiti – Our Future, which is supported by Te Pae Tata and Pacific Prosperity, our Māori and Pacific Strategies and Action Plans. These sit at the heart of the work we need to do to help New Zealanders to be safe, strong and independent.

The Ministry’s Statement of Intent refers to three key shifts, which we collectively refer to as **Te Pae Tawhiti – Our Future.**

**Te Pae Tawhiti** signals the strategic intentions and the direction the organisation is heading towards to achieve better outcomes for all New Zealanders.

**Te Pae Tata**, our Māori Strategy and Action Plan, contributes to Te Pae Tawhiti by setting out how we intend to achieve better outcomes specifically for Māori.

Te Pae Tata embraces the same key shifts, however each shift is defined for Māori in accordance with what whānau, hapū and iwi have told us we need to be better at.

### Key shift 1



#### Mana manaaki

A positive experience every time  
*We will respect Maori*

### Key shift 2



#### Kotahitanga

Partnering for greater impact  
*We will trust Māori*

### Key shift 3



#### Kia Takatū Tātou

Supporting long-term social and economic development  
*We will help Māori to succeed.*

Measures of success for Te Pae Tata are whānau-centred. We want all Māori to experience good health, success, aroha, economic security, and connectedness. Implementing the Families Package and other income support changes contributes to these outcomes.

# Work is underway to understand **how Māori are experiencing the income support changes**

Studies coming up in 2022 are gathering evidence on how MSD and Inland Revenue's efforts are tracking, and whether lack of awareness and low take-up of payments are still factors that might be limiting the success of income support reforms in achieving their aims.

A small, in-depth qualitative study will be listening to **young Māori and Pacific mothers** talk about their experiences.

**A large national survey** will be asking **low-and middle-income people** about their awareness, understanding, take-up, and experience of income support payments. This is a joint MSD-Inland Revenue study. It will have a focus on producing evidence for Māori.

At AUT, Massey University, and the University of Auckland, researchers are working on a three-year project using qualitative and

quantitative methods to look at the experiences of **low-income working whānau and their neighbours** (other people with whom they share their everyday life). This research focuses on the differences that increased minimum wages, the Families Package and other government initiatives are having on reducing or redressing in-work poverty.

Oranga Tamariki have recently completed an engagement with **caregivers receiving an Orphan's or Unsupported Child's benefit**. The caregivers gave their views on income support. Findings from this engagement will be available in early 2022.

**At the end of 2022 we will be gathering results from these and other studies together in a second synthesis of client experience research covering the period since the Families Package.**

# Coming up in our work programme



**Over the coming year,** studies now underway will tell us about:

- how the adequacy of income support has changed for ‘model’ families, updating research undertaken for the Welfare Expert Advisory Group that looked at the gap between the level of income available from the income support system and what families need for core needs, and to participate in their communities
- how health and other outcomes are tracking for families and for people needing support from the benefit system
- the difference the Winter Energy Payment made to spending on heating and health
- the effects of changes in financial incentives that occurred with the Families Package
- the effects of the early-years changes over a longer follow-up.

## Looking further ahead

We will be exploring the use of the Stats NZ Te Kupenga survey to understand the relationship between income and wellbeing for Māori, and for Pacific people who also identify as Māori. Te Kupenga is an important survey resource that can help us to look at measures relevant to whānau wellbeing. It can help us establish a baseline for assessing changes in wellbeing when a repeat Te Kupenga survey is available after the 2028 Census. And it can help us learn more about wellbeing in whānau/aiga with multiple ethnic affiliations.

We will also be:

- estimating take-up rates for different income support payments and how these are changing over time
- doing more work to hear how people are experiencing the income support system
- monitoring how incomes and incentives are changing for people receiving benefits.

In 2024, we will look at how the Aotearoa NZ income support system compares internationally. This timing will allow the OECD database used for comparisons to be updated for the 2022 benefit increases in this country, and for policies as at 2022 to be captured for other countries.

# For more detail

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MSD Strategy and Insights



insights ▶ decisions ▶ lives

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<https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>.