

One in two New Zealanders are affected by the cost of living crisis

The topic

On 20 February 2025, Stats NZ outlined the latest child poverty statistics, which revealed that child poverty remains steady at around 11.7% to 13.7%.

The media subsequently reported that the Government had missed its child poverty targets, which led child poverty campaigners and the Chief Children's Commissioner to raise the alarm about efforts to reduce poverty.

As the targets are influenced by what households can and cannot afford to buy for their children, we decided to repeat our 'cost-of-living poll'.

The survey

A nationally-representative sample of n=1,004 New Zealanders, 18 years of age and over were interviewed online between 20-24 February 2025. We asked the question:

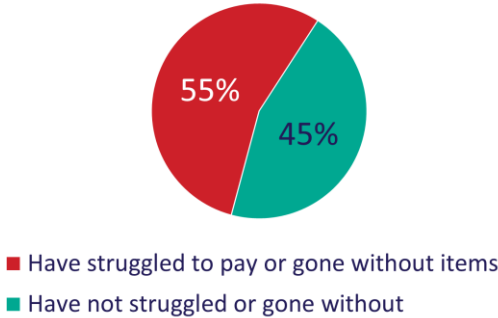
Q. "Given the current cost of living crisis, which of the following (if any) have applied to you in the last three months?"

- Struggled to pay for the **cost of transport** (for example bus or train tickets, or fuel for a car etc.).
- Been unable to buy **things that were needed** (such as clothing or school supplies).
- Gone without **medical or a doctor's care when feeling unwell** due to cost concerns (including prescriptions, visits, telehealth etc.).
- Struggled to pay for **essential bills such as power/water/internet**.
- Struggled to pay **rent or mortgage payments**.
- Gone without **basics such as food and groceries**.

High-level findings – over half struggled to pay for essentials...

1. Overall, this poll revealed that just over half the respondents (55%) reported they had **struggled** to pay or went without everyday items because of the cost-of-living crisis. (Refer to Figure 1.)

Figure 1: The proportion who indicated they had struggled or gone without in at least one of the areas measured in the last three months.



2. Those most likely to have struggled and gone without essential items and services are **young adults** (71% of those aged 18 to 34 years), living in **households with children** (62%), and **female** respondents (60%).
3. Overall the poll shows there has been **no significant improvement** in these levels of hardship compared to two years ago (March 2023).
 - In fact it showed a significant increase in the number who reported they struggled to pay for **essential bills** such as power – up to one-third (33%), from 28% nine months ago in May 2024.
 - **Medical care** continued to be an area **most impacted**, also with one third of respondents (33%) who stated they had gone without medical care when unwell in the last 3 months.

Comment

“These results confirm that we are in the depths of a cost-of-living crisis and that little is changing on the upside yet. It also shows that some groups of the population are suffering more than others, including those in households with children. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that some of these households are existing below what we might expect in a modern democratic society like Aotearoa New Zealand.”

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Key findings – impact of the cost of living crisis

Respondents were asked to say whether they had gone without or struggled to pay for everyday cost-of-living items.

Table 1 overleaf provides the results for the current poll in comparison to the previous polls conducted in March 2023, July 2023, and May 2024.

The key findings are as follows:

- One-third (33%) stated they had gone without **medical care** when feeling unwell due to cost concerns. Going without medical care has been the top rating item for the last two years ago and the level of ‘going without’ has remained fairly stable during this period of time (32% in March 2023, 33% in July 2023 and 34% in May 2024).
- One-third (33%) also reported they had struggled to pay for essential bills such as **power, water or internet**. This was a significant increase from 28% reported in May 2025, and similar to the 32% reported in July 2023.
- Just under one-third (31%) reported being unable to buy necessary things such as **clothing or school supplies**. This proportion has also not changed significantly over the past two years.
- Compared to two years ago (March 2023) there has also been **no** significant improvement in the following:
 - Three out of ten struggled to pay transport costs (29%).
 - One-quarter struggled to pay rent or mortgage payments (26%).
 - One-quarter went without basics such as food and groceries (24%).

Table 1: Time series - Given the current cost of living crisis, which of the following (if any) have applied to you in the last three months? Have you ...?

	TOTAL FEBRUARY 2025 1004 %	TOTAL MAY 2024 1016 %	TOTAL JULY 2023 1000 %	TOTAL MARCH 2023 1000 %
Unweighted base =				
Gone without medical or a doctor's care when feeling unwell due to cost concerns (including prescriptions, visits, telehealth etc.).	33	34	33	32
Struggled to pay for essential bills such as power/water/internet.	33	28	32	27
Been unable to buy things that were needed (such as clothing or school supplies).	31	30	33	30
Struggled to pay for the cost of transport (for example bus or train tickets, or fuel for a car, etc.).	29	28	32	29
Struggled to pay rent or mortgage payments .	26	23	29	24
Gone without basics such as food and groceries .	24	24	26	23

The groups **most affected** by the current cost of living crisis in the last three months were:

- **Young adults** aged 18 to 34 years (refer to Table 2 overleaf):
 - Overall, 71% reported they had struggled to pay or gone without at least one of the items we asked about.
 - Young adults were significantly more likely than older respondents to have struggled to pay essential bills (46%), rent or mortgage payments (41%), transport costs (40%) and basics like food (31%).
- Respondents in **households with children**:
 - Overall, 62% stated they had struggled to pay or gone without at least one of the items we measured.
 - Those in households with children were significantly more likely to have struggled to pay essential bills (40%) and rent or mortgage payments (32%), compared to other households (29% and 23% respectively).
- **Female** respondents:
 - Overall, 60% of female respondents indicated they had struggled to pay or gone without at least one of the essential items or services we asked about.
 - Female respondents were significantly more likely than males to have gone without medical care when unwell (38% compared to 27% for males), struggled to pay transport costs (34% compared to 23%), and been unable to buy things that were needed such as clothing or school supplies (35% compared to 26%).

Table 2: February 2025 - Given the current cost of living crisis, which of the following (if any) have applied to you in the last three months? Have you ...? By age.

	TOTAL FEB 2025	18-34	35-54	55+
Unweighted base =	1004	295	369	340
	%	%	%	%
Total – struggled or went without at least one item mentioned below	55	71	56	41
Gone without medical or a doctor's care when feeling unwell due to cost concerns (including prescriptions, visits, telehealth etc.).	33	42	36	22
Struggled to pay for essential bills such as power/water/internet.	33	46	31	24
Gone without medical or a doctor's care when feeling unwell due to cost concerns (including prescriptions, visits, telehealth etc.).	33	42	36	22
Been unable to buy things that were needed (such as clothing or school supplies).	31	39	34	21
Struggled to pay for the cost of transport (for example bus or train tickets, or fuel for a car, etc.).	29	40	25	22
Gone without basics such as food and groceries .	24	31	24	20
Struggled to pay rent or mortgage payments .	26	41	26	15

Method

This survey of 1,004 respondents aged 18 years and over was conducted online, between 20-24 February 2025. The maximum margin of error is +/- 3.1 percent (at the 95 percent confidence level).

The sample has been weighted by gender and age to ensure the results are representative of the population 18 years-plus, based on these demographic criteria.

The survey was not undertaken on behalf of any organisation, but as part of Rangahau Aotearoa Research New Zealand's social poll of New Zealanders' opinions about topical issues.

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