

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Civic engagement (participation in public decision-making) gives people a way of contributing to their communities, which is an important aspect of wellbeing. Civic engagement can also reflect a sense of being valued by community leaders and others in the community [1]. Electoral participation is the most well-established measure of civic engagement and the feeling that one has a moral obligation to vote (civic duty) has been shown to be the most powerful driver of engagement [2]. Civic duty is associated with citizens' confidence in their ability to influence local and national decision making, including their trust in the political process [3]. If people believe strongly in their ability to be heard and to make a difference, they are more likely to enrol and vote in elections [4]. Participation in public decision-making offers people a way to engage with, and contribute to, their communities [3,5,6].

Key trends within civic engagement

Local trends in civic engagement should be considered within the context of the general decline in voter engagement across western democracies [6]. In the last 30 years, voter turnout in New Zealand has fallen from a high of 89 percent in the 1984 general election to a low of 70 percent in 2011 [7]. Greater Christchurch citizens' (New Zealand citizens or permanent residents) engagement with central government elections has generally followed this national pattern. Similar to general elections, there has also been a gradual decline in voter turnout for local government elections (now typically ≈40%) [7]. Along with declining turnout over the last three or more decades, this period has also shown declining levels of trust in political institutions, and in the political system; an important driver of 'civic duty' [7,8].

However, there is some variation in turnout in greater Christchurch, such as improved turnout in the 2010 local government elections. This increase in local voting in greater Christchurch has been partly attributed to the 2010 Canterbury earthquakes. Increased engagement by greater Christchurch residents was also apparent in the 2017 General Election: 82% of enrolled electors in greater Christchurch voted in 2017 compared with 79.8% across New Zealand as a whole (compared with the ≈72% OECD average in this period).

While greater Christchurch residents appear relatively well engaged with the democratic processes of central and local government, the majority of residents appear to be less than satisfied with their level of influence on government agencies' actions.

Key equity issues within civic engagement

Although turnout for Māori electors increased for all age groups between the 2014 and 2017 general elections, turnout rates for Māori are still lower than for non-Māori electors. In terms of citizens' sense of being able to influence the actions of central and local government agencies, there is no difference between Māori and European respondents to the Canterbury Wellbeing Survey in 2019. The proportion of Asian/Pacific/Indian respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are able to have enough say in central and local government actions is statistically significantly higher than the proportion of European respondents in 2019.

What this means for wellbeing

There has been a noticeable increase in civic engagement in greater Christchurch (above New Zealand levels) post-earthquakes. This suggests changes in attitudes, knowledge, awareness, political emotion and involvement in the post-earthquake context. The drivers of these changes are difficult to determine, but may include engagement opportunities such as

the 'Share an idea' and 'Residential Red Zone Draft Regeneration Plan' consultation processes. This broadening of traditional engagement platforms may have boosted participation in public decision-making generally. Such participation is recognised as an important aspect of people's wellbeing [3,5,6].

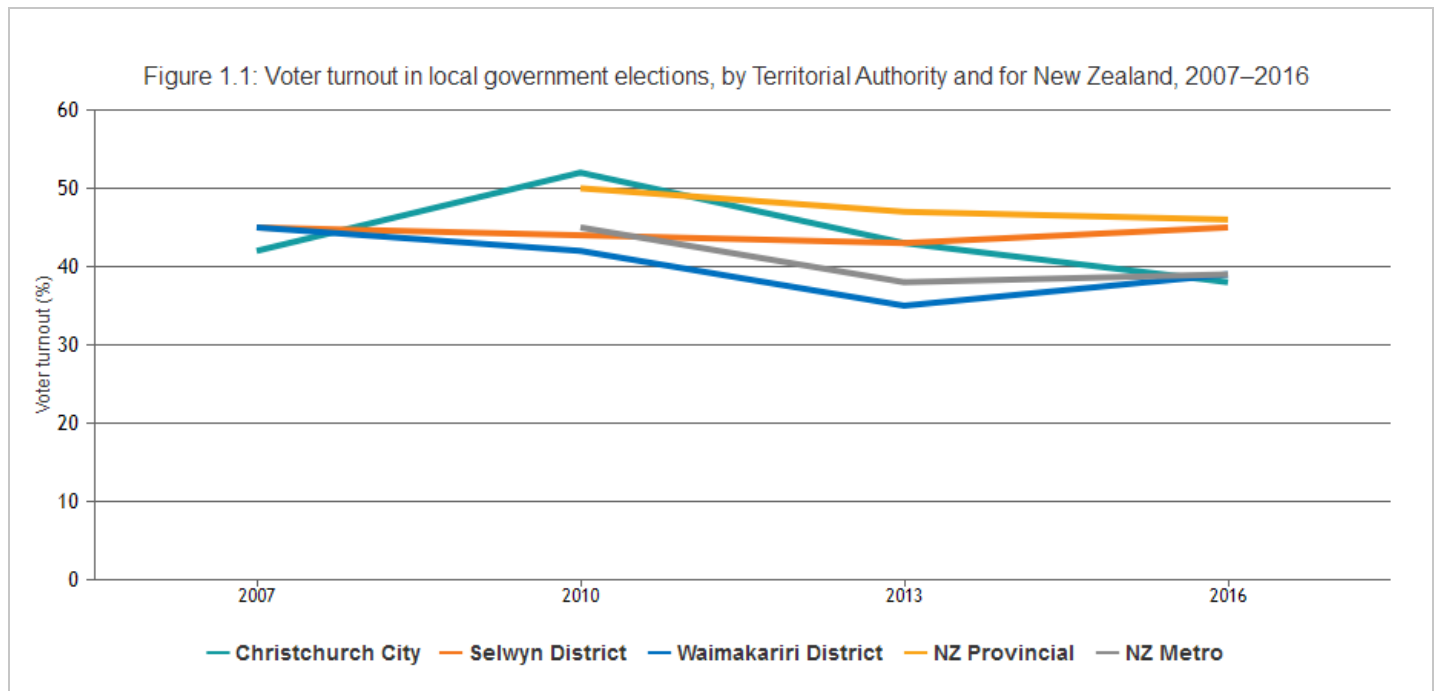
Indicators in this domain

- **Voter turnout — local government elections**
- **Voter turnout — general elections**
- **Influencing central and local government**

VOTER TURNOUT — LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Voter turnout rates help to show how people feel about local government. This includes the confidence people have in their local authorities, the importance they attach to them, and whether they feel their participation in the voting process can make a difference.

This indicator presents the voter turnout (proportion of all eligible electors who cast a vote) by election year, by Territorial Authority, and for New Zealand Provincial and Metropolitan, for the local government elections from 2007 to 2016.



The figure shows a general downward trend in greater Christchurch in voter turnout for local government elections. The 2010 peak in voter turnout for Christchurch City (52%) now appears to have dissipated and turnout at that election is likely to have been influenced by the September 2010 earthquake, which preceded the delivery of voting papers by two weeks. In 2016, voter turnout in Christchurch City had fallen to below pre-earthquake levels, at 38 percent. Voter turnout in the Selwyn District remains steady at pre-earthquake levels (approximately 45 percent). Voter turnout in the Waimakariri District was similar to Selwyn District in 2010 at 42 percent, dropping to 35 percent in 2013, followed by an increase to 39 percent in 2016.

Data Sources

Source: Local Government New Zealand.

Survey/data set: Administrative data. Access publicly available data from the Local Government New Zealand website www.lgnz.co.nz/nzs-local-government/vote2016/final-voter-turnout-2016/

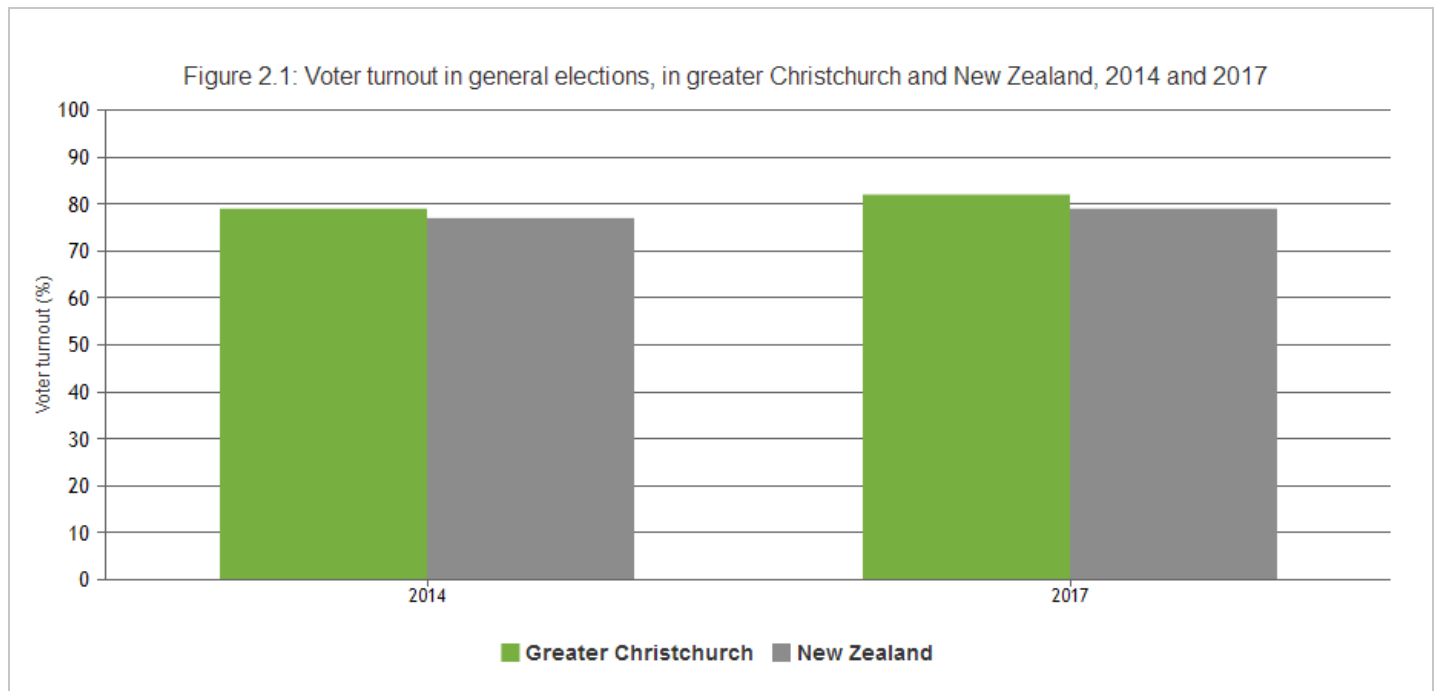
Source data frequency: Three yearly.

Metadata for this indicator is available at <https://www.canterburywellbeing.org.nz/index-data>

VOTER TURNOUT — GENERAL ELECTIONS

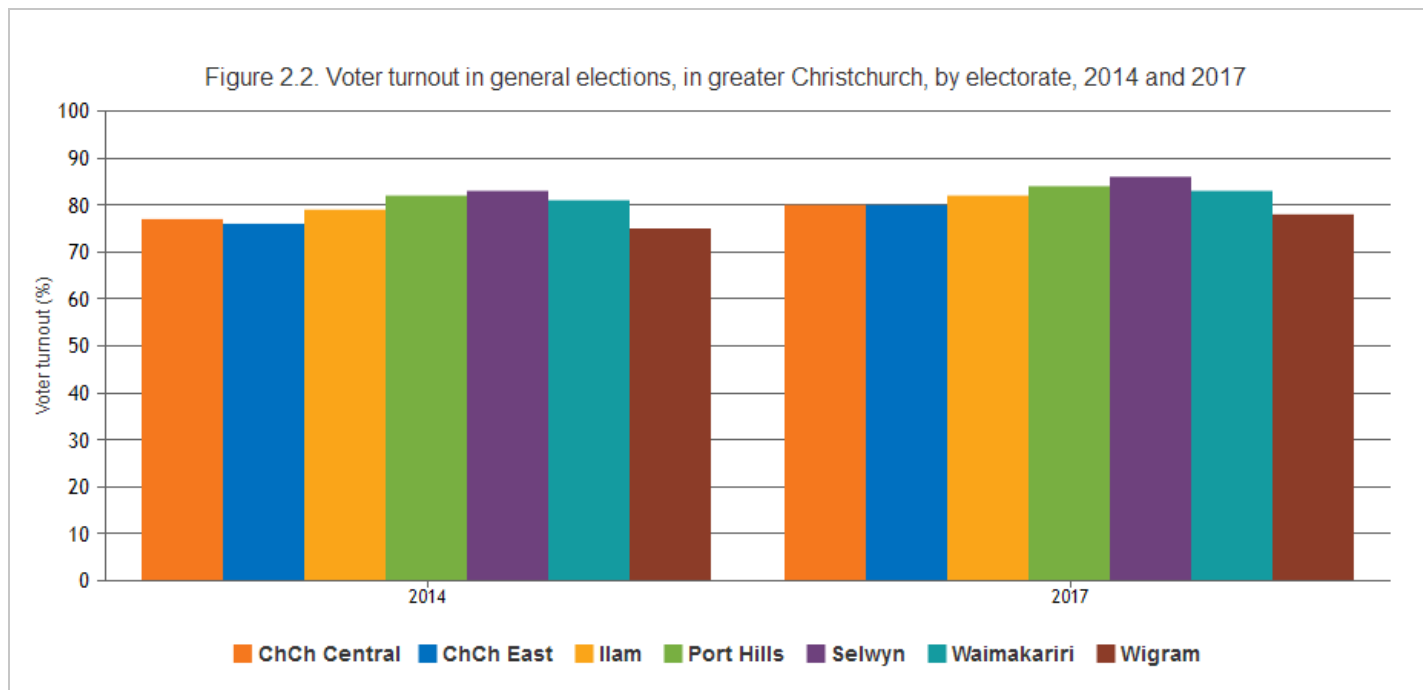
Voter turnout rates help to show how people feel about central government. This includes the confidence they have in political institutions, the importance they attach to them, and whether they feel their participation in general elections can make a difference. In New Zealand, the enrolment of eligible electors is compulsory, but voting is not.

This indicator presents the voter turnout (proportion of eligible electors who cast a vote) in general elections, for greater Christchurch and New Zealand, for 2014 and 2017.



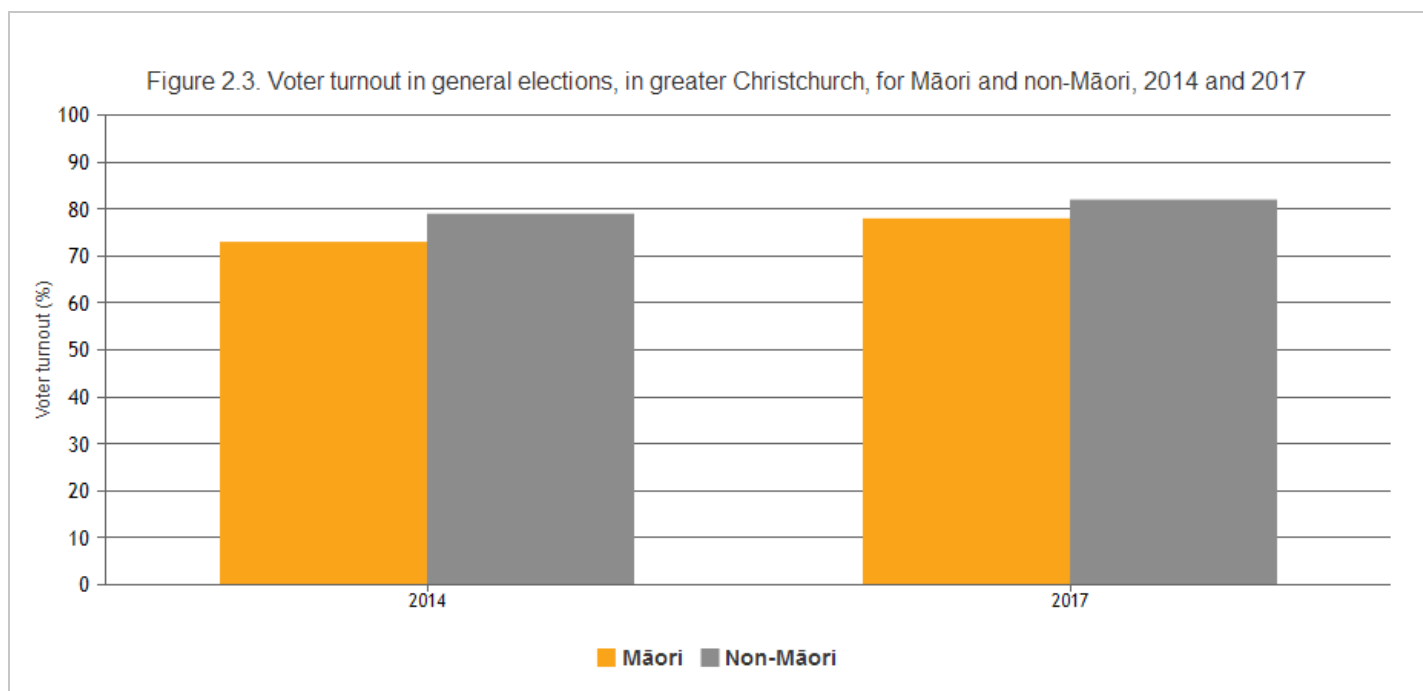
In 2017, 82 percent of enrolled electors in greater Christchurch voted in the general election (up from 79% in 2014), the highest turnout since 2005 (80.9%) [10]. Turnout increased in both general and Māori electorates [10]. Nationally, the voter turnout was slightly lower at both elections, at 77 percent of enrolled electors in 2014 and 79 percent in 2017.

Breakdown by electorate



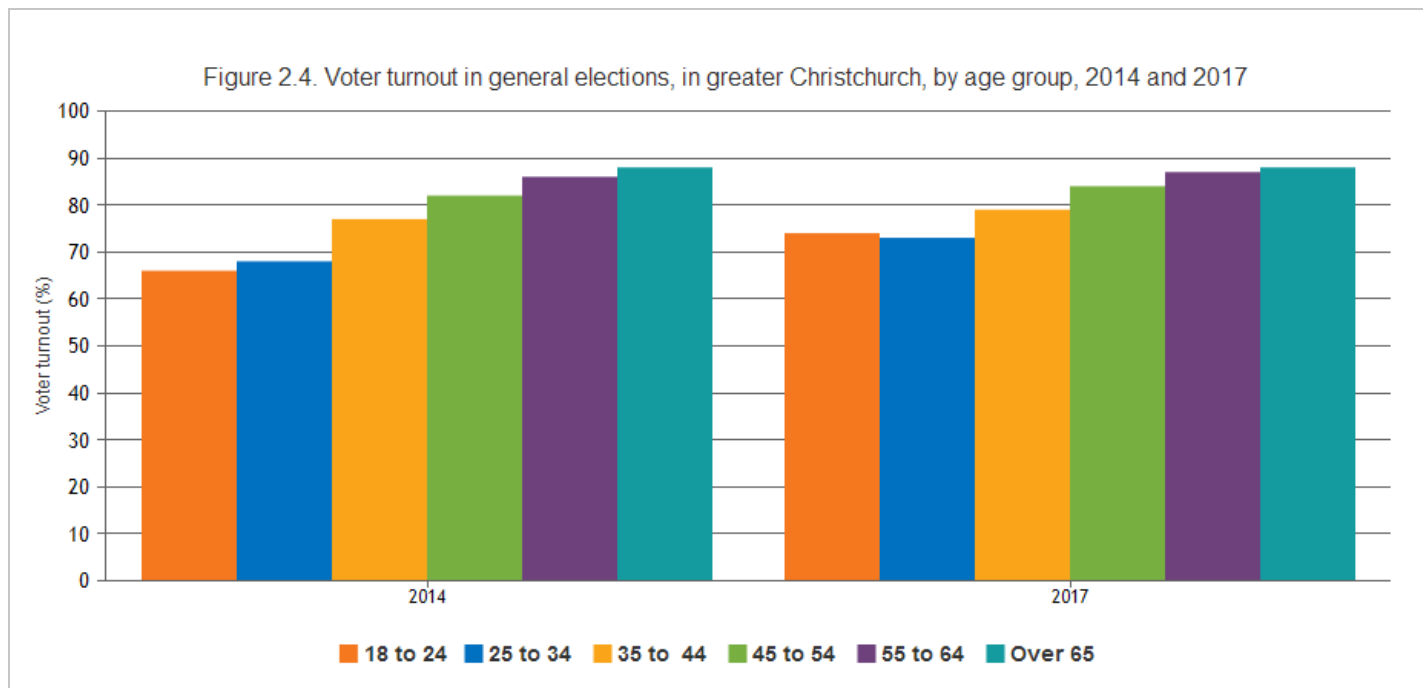
The figure shows increased voter turnout in the general elections for all seven electorates in greater Christchurch, from 2014 to 2017, continuing to build on the 2011 result (data not shown) [11].

Breakdown by ethnicity



The figure shows that in 2017, 78 percent of enrolled Māori electors voted in the general election compared to 82 percent of non-Māori. The voter turnout for Māori in greater Christchurch in 2017 is the highest since 2005 (80.9%) [10].

Breakdown by age



The figure shows an increase in voter turnout for younger people in greater Christchurch between 2014 and 2017, with the largest increase being in the 18 to 24 year-old age group. Younger voters in greater Christchurch (74% turnout; 18 to 24 year-old age group) were relatively more engaged than their peers nationally (69.3% turnout) - New Zealand data not shown [10]. Voter turnout in greater Christchurch mirrors the national picture of increasing voter engagement with increasing age, at both time points.

Data Sources

Source: Electoral Commission.

Survey/data set: Administrative data. Access publicly available data from the Electoral Commission website www.elections.org.nz/events/2017-general-election/2017-general-election-results/voter-turnout-statistics

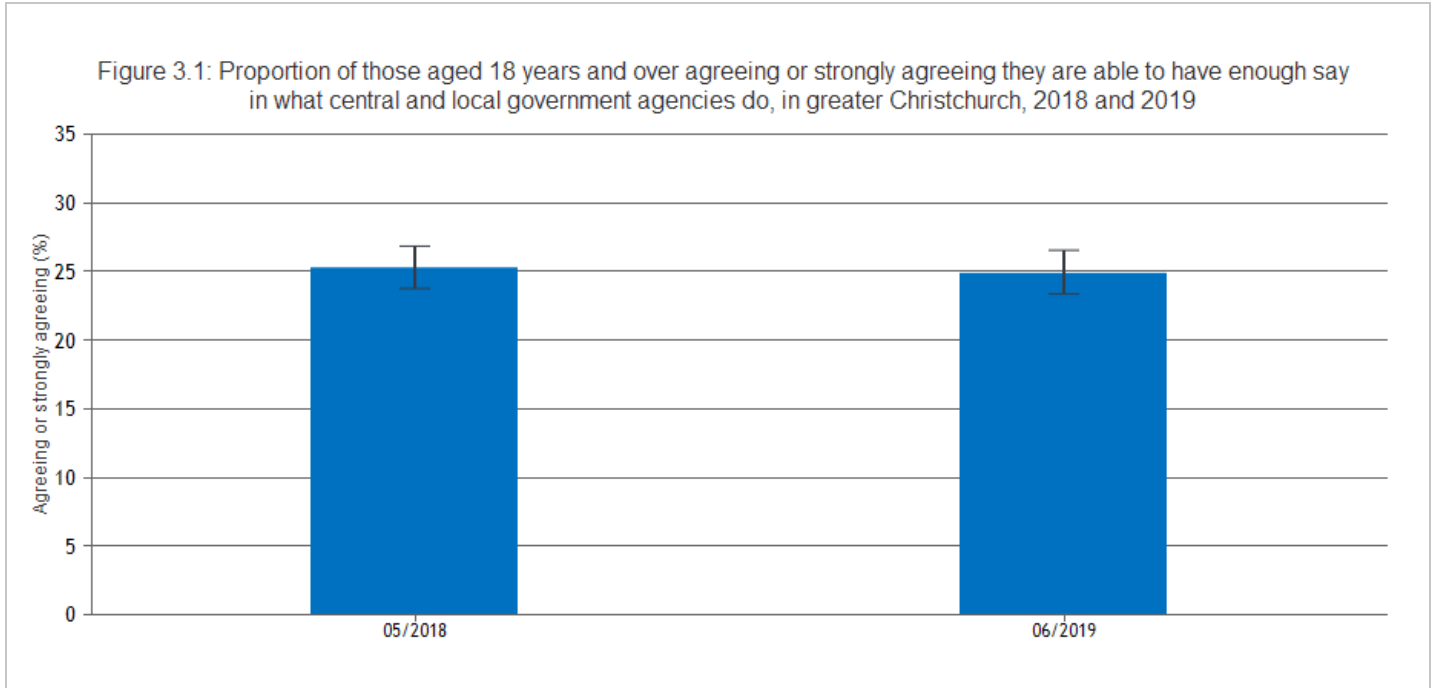
Source data frequency: Three yearly.

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INFLUENCING CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

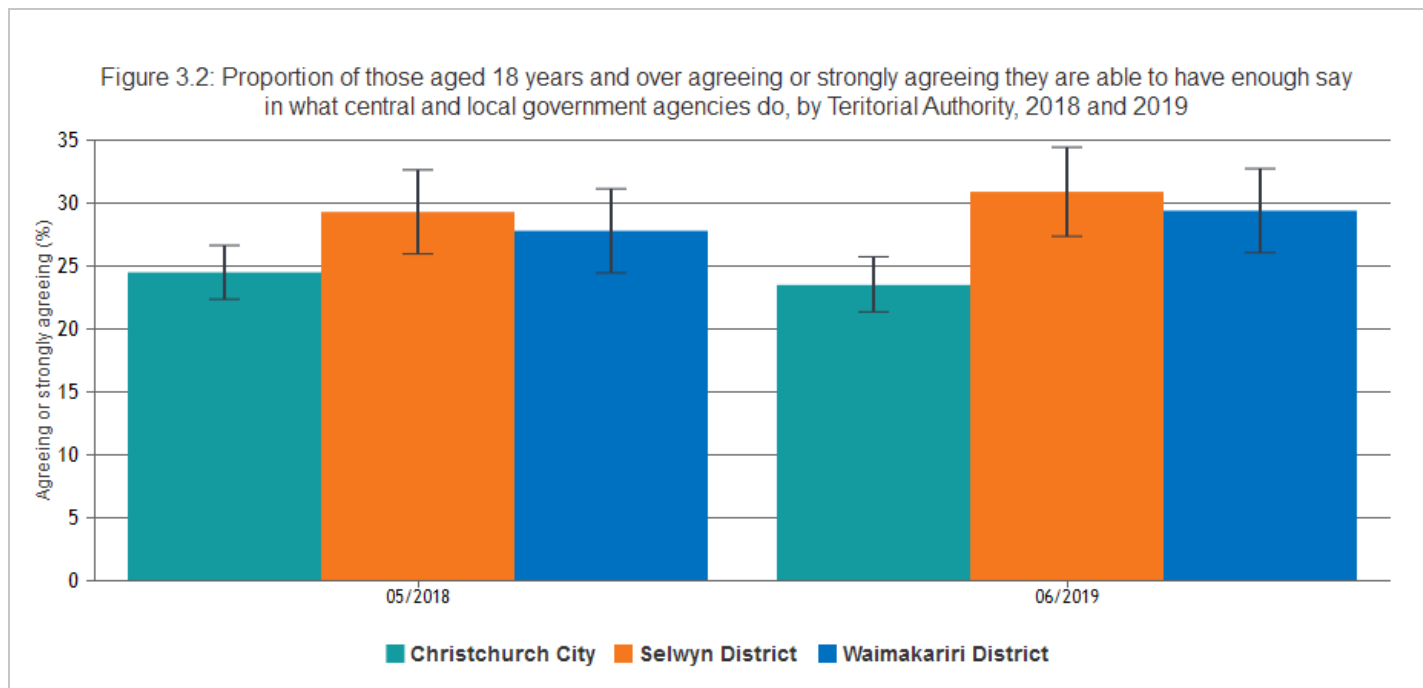
Central and local government agencies have a major role in enhancing the social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of wellbeing within communities. Civic engagement is associated with citizens' confidence in their ability to influence local and national decision making, including their trust in the political process [3].

This indicator presents the proportion of those 18 years and over agreeing or strongly agreeing they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do, as reported in the 2018 and 2019 Canterbury Wellbeing Surveys.



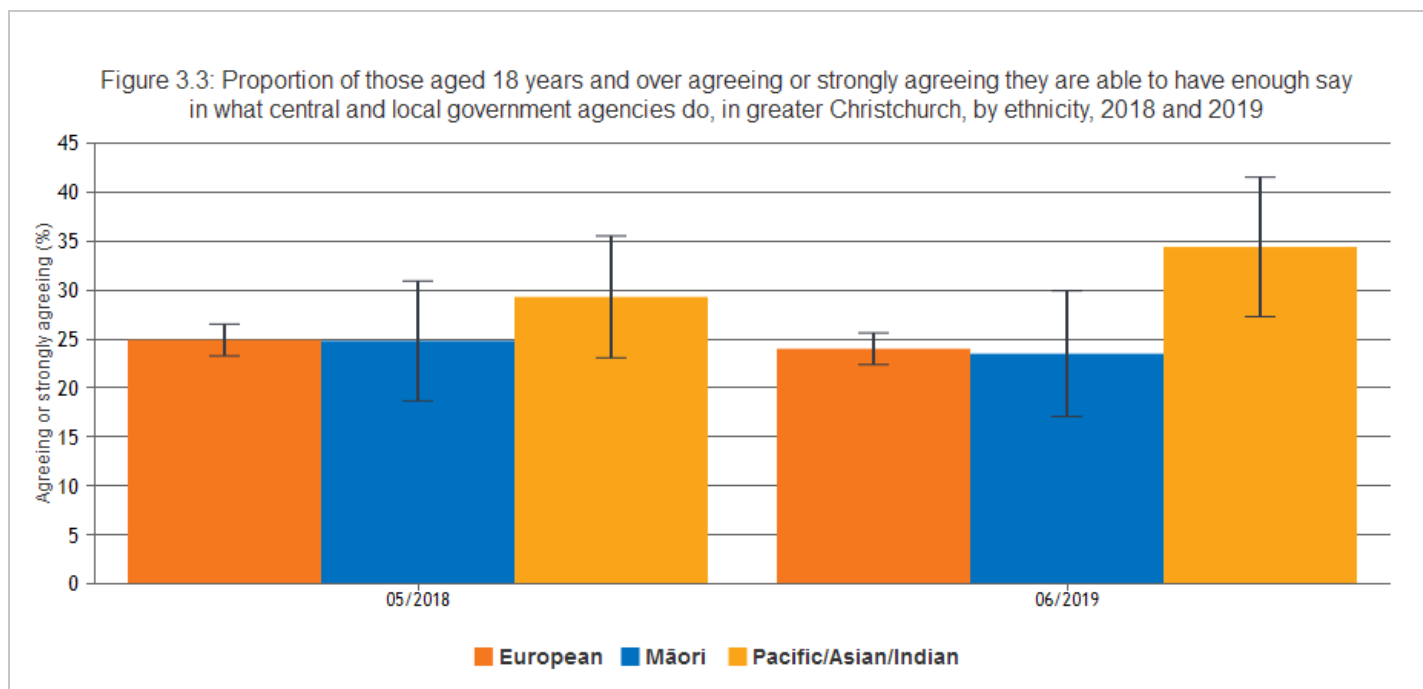
The figure shows that about one quarter of greater Christchurch respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies. This proportion has been stable over the two time-points.

Breakdown by Territorial Authority



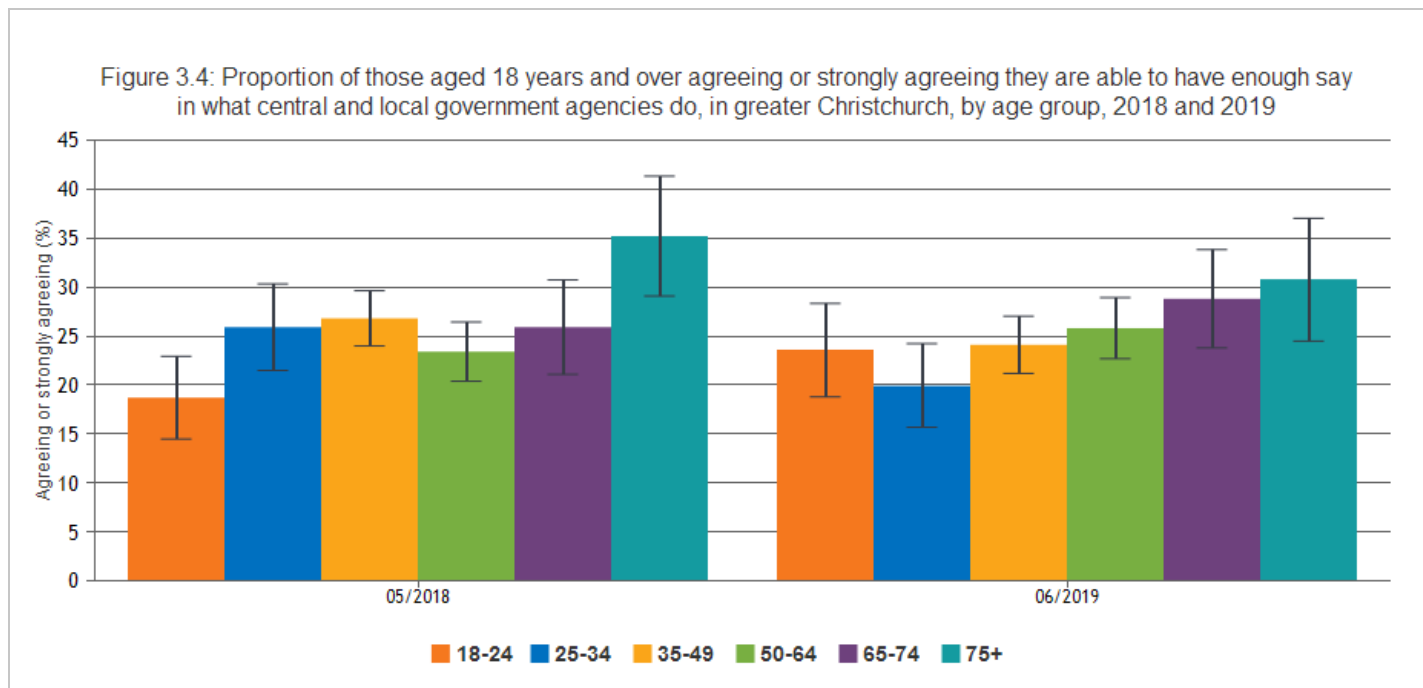
The figure shows that less than one quarter of Christchurch City respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies. For the Selwyn and Waimakariri districts, around 30 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough say in central and local government agencies' actions in 2019 (30.9 percent in Selwyn District; 29.4 percent in Waimakariri District). The difference between Christchurch City and Selwyn and Waimakariri districts is statistically significant in 2019.

Breakdown by ethnicity



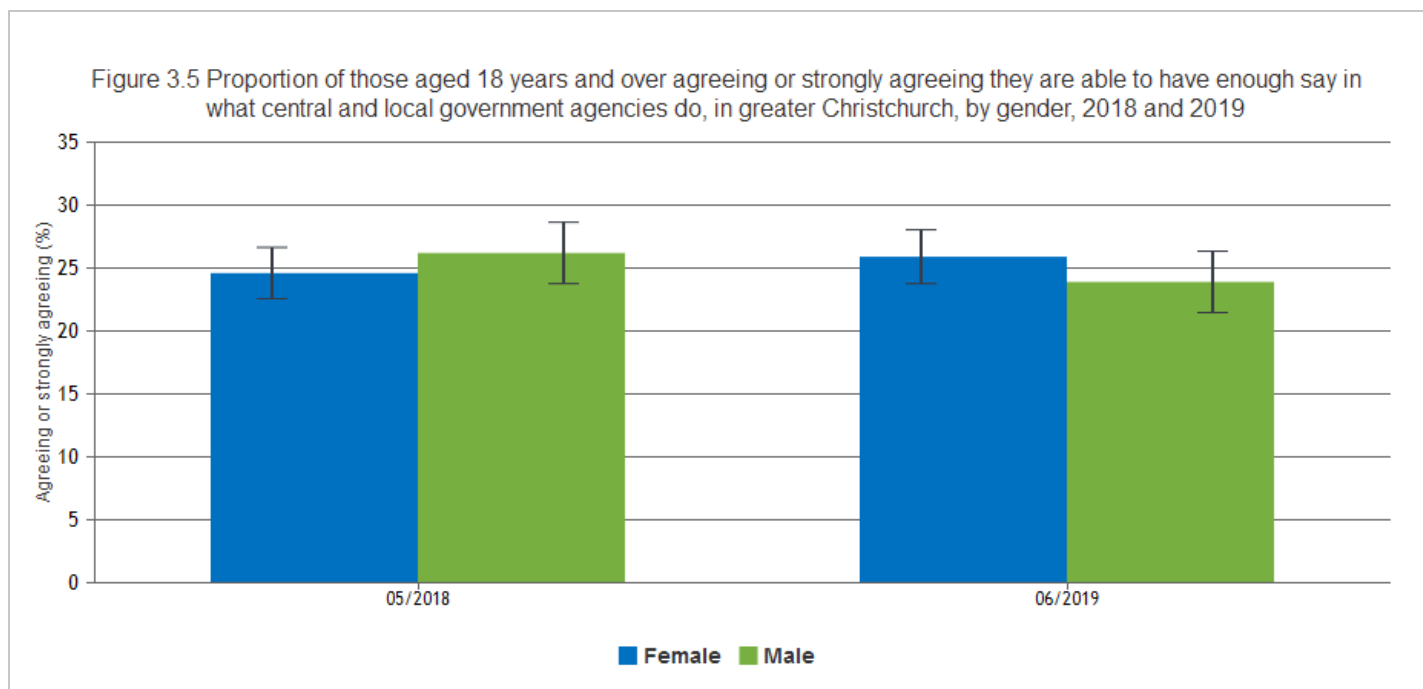
The figure shows that just under one quarter of European and Māori respondents to the 2019 Canterbury Wellbeing Survey agreed or strongly agreed that they are able to have enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies. In 2019, almost 35 percent of Pacific/Indian/Asian respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to have enough say. The proportion for European respondents is statistically significantly lower than that for Pacific/Asian/Indian respondents in 2019.

Breakdown by age



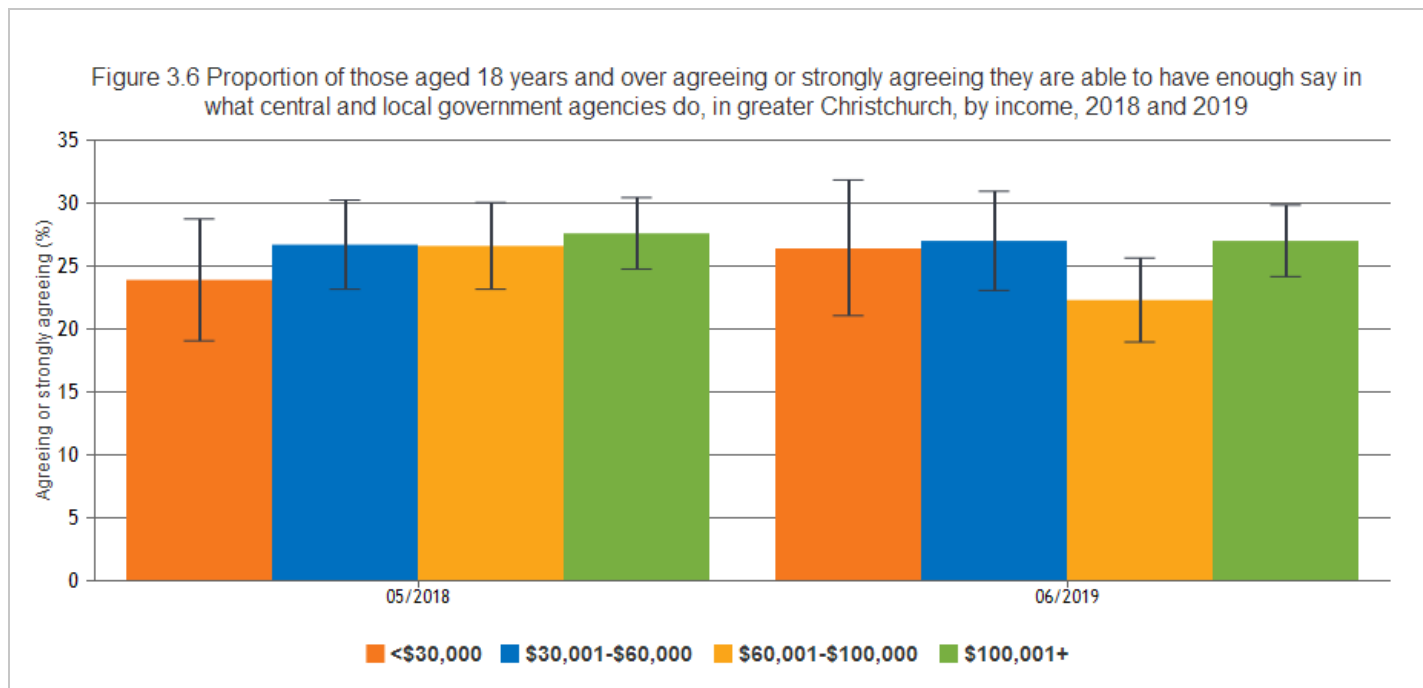
The figure shows an overall picture of increasing satisfaction with influence on central and local government agencies with increasing age. In 2019, the difference between the 25 to 34 years age group and the 75+ years age group (19.9 percent and 30.8 percent, respectively) was statistically significant. There are no statistically significant changes in the proportions for each group between 2018 and 2019.

Breakdown by gender



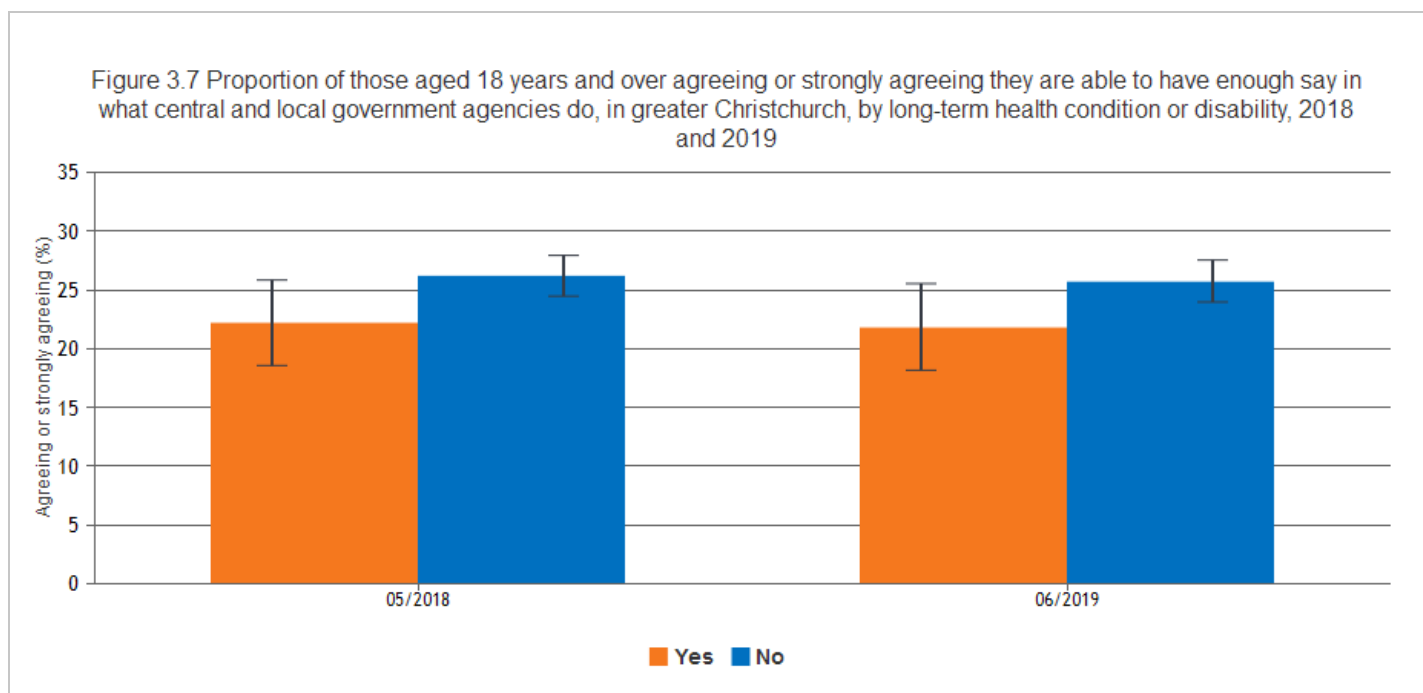
The figure shows that a similar proportion of female and male respondents agreed or strongly agreed they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do in 2018 and 2019 (in 2019, females 25.9 percent; males 23.9 percent).

Breakdown by income



The figure shows in 2019, all income groups with the exception of the \$60,001-\$100,000 group, had just over a quarter of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do. The \$60,001-\$100,000 income group showed a non-significant decrease of around 4 percentage points between 2018 and 2019, with 22.3 percent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing they are able to have enough say in what central and local government agencies do in 2019. The differences between income groups are not statistically significant at either timepoint.

Breakdown by disability



The figure shows that a lower proportion of respondents with a long-term health condition or disability agreed or strongly agreed they are able to have enough say in the actions of central and local government agencies in 2018 and 2019 (in 2019, 21.8 percent compared to 25.7 percent of those without a long-term health condition or disability). However, this difference is not statistically significant.

Data Sources

Source: Canterbury District Health Board.

Survey/data set: Canterbury Wellbeing Survey to 2019. Access publicly available data from the Community and Public Health (Canterbury DHB) website www.cph.co.nz/your-health/wellbeing-survey/

Source data frequency: Annually.

Metadata for this indicator is available at <https://www.canterburywellbeing.org.nz/index-data>

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