

# RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Impacts and  
needs of  
Aucklanders  
following the  
2023 severe  
weather events.



September 2024, Version 1.0

## Purpose

This paper pulls together three pieces of research looking at the impacts, needs and wellbeing of individuals impacted by the 2023 extreme weather events. This includes findings from:

1. The Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office (TMRO) *Community and Social Recovery Needs Assessments* which were undertaken in three geographic areas - [West Auckland](#), [Mt Roskill/Wesley](#), and [Māngere/Favona](#) - over October and November 2023, and in May 2024.
2. The Mental Health Foundation's [2023-24 Community Wellbeing survey](#), which conducted surveys with 644 people in Auckland over December 2023 to February 2024.
3. The University of Auckland's [Growing Up in New Zealand \(GUiNZ\) Extreme Weather Survey](#), which surveyed 817 mothers/caregivers and 680 young people (667 family units) in August 2023.

## Impacts

The 2023 extreme weather events had a strong, diverse and widespread impacts on local communities across Tāmaki Makaurau. Half of Auckland respondents (51%) reported experiencing a direct negative impact on themselves or their families. Most substantial was the physical damage to, or loss of, property and homes as a direct result of flooding (41%); this reported damage was higher compared to other areas in New Zealand (MHF Research).

A large proportion of respondents experienced effects to themselves personally, particularly stress, mental health and emotional responses (30%); with some continuing to feel anxiety about subsequent weather and rain long after the extreme events (20%) (MHF Research).

Those engaged in the TMRO Community Needs Assessment reinforced the trauma of the event itself, including grief and loss, and the way in which this has impacted on whānau and communities. Importantly, they also articulated secondary impacts relating to recovery related issues such as the categorisation process, settling insurance claims, arranging for repairs to properties, as well as ongoing financial and psychosocial effects from the weather events.

## Health and Wellbeing

All three research pieces identified significant impacts of the weather events on individuals and whānau physically, spiritually and emotionally. Identified needs were linked to a range of issues including ongoing trauma from the events, anxiety about future adverse weather events, stress in addressing the impacts of the events, isolation and loneliness, grief, unsuitable accommodation options and family and relationship stressors. Some key findings include:

- Those impacted by the storms were more likely to **feel less safe** (43% vs. 6% of those with no impact), **feel their life got worse** (43% vs. 4%), and experienced a **decline in mental health** and overall wellbeing (MHF Research).
- Almost half (46%) of those impacted in Tāmaki Makaurau were found to be struggling with their psychological wellbeing, with the strongest predictors of poor wellbeing being personal health, mental distress, a sense of loneliness, income adequacy, and social connections (MHF Research).
- This was reinforced by the TMRO needs assessments, which found:
  - Some individuals and families, particularly those who have had to relocate to areas away from their usual supports are experiencing **isolation and loneliness**.
  - **Stress and fatigue** resulting from addressing the impacts of the events, including settling insurance claims, arranging repairs to properties, and meeting additional financial commitments.

- The weather events have **exacerbated pre-existing challenges** and stress; compounding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ‘cost of living’ crisis.
- Twenty percent (20%) of those surveyed were continuing to **feel anxiety about subsequent weather and rain long after the extreme events** (MFH Research). This also came up strongly in the TMRO needs assessment, with reports of anxiety relating to the potential for future weather events evident in both adults and children (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- Higher levels of anxiety among those impacted by the storms was also found in the GUiNZ research, with mothers/primary caregivers who were affected by the extreme weather events reporting greater anxiety symptoms compared to mothers/primary caregivers who were not affected (GUiNZ).
- There has been a negative impact of the weather events on family relationships including stressed and overworked parents struggling to make ends meet, and capacity to meet their children’s needs (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- **Physical health needs** were also identified, with reports that the weather events had exacerbated underlying health issues that families were still contending with (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- Those living in rural locations (27%), Māori (26%), and beneficiaries (60%) were more likely to be experiencing poor health (MHF Research).

## Housing and accommodation

The TMRO needs assessment found that many whānau are not having their basic housing needs met. Many families and whānau are still displaced from their homes. This includes homeowners and renters. Needs stem from families being forced to leave their properties which has resulted in some living in accommodation which is not fit for purpose, a loss of familial ties, cultural connections and other support networks, overcrowding, and psychological impacts as a result of housing instability. Some families are still living in damaged and unhealthy properties that they cannot afford to repair.

Key housing needs include:

- **Suitability of temporary accommodation:** including not meeting the requirements of those with a disability, being too small for the number of family members, and unsafe environments. It was also reported that some families are not allowed to cook in motel units, restricting what they are able to eat and introducing additional costs related to the purchase of takeaway meals.
- **Dislocation from community:** Some whānau remain living in different communities, either temporarily or permanently. This has resulted in **dislocation from their familial ties, cultural connections and usual support networks**.
- **Inappropriate or substandard accommodation:**
  - There were frequent reports of overcrowding due to families being forced to move into smaller properties. Significant concern was raised about the **psychological impacts of overcrowding, inappropriate emergency or temporary accommodation, and families living in areas outside of their usual sources of support, comfort and community**. This was also linked to people sleeping in living rooms or garages, and uncertainty regarding the likelihood of properties flooding in the future.
  - There were also reports of **people living in sub-standard, flood damaged** homes that have been poorly repaired, and anti-social behaviour linked to empty properties.
  - Some people remain in homes that have been deemed unsuitable for living through the placard or categorisation process and/or are awaiting categorisation.
- **Inability to commute to school and/or work due to living further away:** for some families, this has resulted in having to give up work, or children not going to school because it is too difficult or the family do not have the means to get there.

## Financial Impacts

For some whānau, the financial toll of the weather events will be significant, ongoing and difficult to recover from. Financial impacts stem from loss of income, loss of vehicles and home contents, costly repairs, accommodation and travel costs related to temporary accommodation, additional insurance costs in the future and reductions in values of homes. For those who were already struggling the financial impacts will be worse (TMRO Needs Assessment).

- Residents are struggling to meet the costs of basic household needs, including housing, food, and petrol. While the impacts of inflation and overall increase in the cost of living in Aotearoa was acknowledged by stakeholders, they reported that some families were facing increased financial commitments due to the weather events (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- In the GUiNZ study, almost a quarter of parents (23%) noted that their housing costs had increased as a result of the weather events.
- These included costs related to private rentals they have been forced to move into, fuel associated with transporting children to school from a different area, the purchase of uniforms for children attending new schools, and replacing items damaged in the floods (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- Those impacted noted the increased financial costs linked to having to travel back to their 'home' community to meet family commitments. This included attending health appointments and transporting children to their usual school to maintain a sense of normalcy and minimise disruption to their education (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- Other housing related issues include ongoing insurance claims, and families not being able to move back to their 'home' community due to a lack of affordable and/or appropriately sized housing in the area.
- There are reports of increased debt – including with Work and Income New Zealand or loan companies – amongst families struggling to meet household costs.
- Insurance is not always covering all repairs needed, leaving people to self-fund which has added to the financial strain, or not conduct repairs, resulting in them living in sub-standard or unsafe accommodation (TMRO Needs Assessment).
- There is an emerging need for financial advice once buy-outs go through. Navigators frequently encounter residents unsure of how to manage large amounts of money. For many, the buy-out rate may not be sufficient to buy a new home or even pay off existing mortgages (TMRO Needs Assessment).

## Preparedness and Basic Needs

Several needs were identified by impacted individuals and whānau regarding preparing for, and directly responding to, the aftermath of the storms.

### Communication

Communication issues were a significant and ongoing barrier for many residents, with power outages and loss of cellular and internet coverage contributing to the widespread sense of isolation. Respondents pointed to a lack of preparation for weather/flooding events hindering their own or the community response, in

particular the perceived slow response or coordination from Council, civil defence or other support agencies (MHF Research).

This was reinforced by the GUiNZ study, where over half of those surveyed (56%) reporting that they **did not see any information or advice about how to prepare for the floods** and/or cyclone before the events (GUiNZ).

Several ongoing barriers to accessing information and support were identified in the TMRO Needs Assessment. These included:

- A lack of awareness of support options.
- Confusing or complex pathways to help.
- Language and technical barriers complicate access to information and support, particularly for those for whom English is a second language, and the elderly who lack internet access or digital literacy.
- A reluctance to ask for help, or a belief that they do not require help.
- A lack of documentation required to access support or process applications, due to this being lost during the weather events.
- Needing to chase for information and updates, receiving generic emails, and being passed between different representatives.

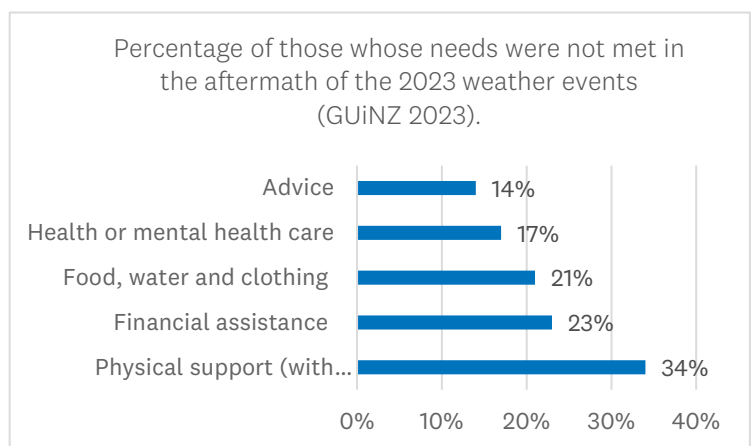
Mana whenua noted that Māori will not always ask for help. This might be out of embarrassment, or thinking there will be someone else who is worse off who should receive the help instead.

People are feeling overwhelmed with flood recovery language, and processes and find the information challenging to understand and access. People struggle with conflicting information, different systems, and the mental load of working to access and decipher information. The interface between Insurance and the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office is unclear and confusing. We heard people don't know what questions to ask or how to progress their fix/claim and that this process is having an impact on mental health (TMRO Needs Assessment).

### Basic Needs

In the GUiNZ study, between 17-34% of parents indicated that their immediate needs had not been met in the aftermath of the weather events. Overall:

- 14% did not get their advice need met.
- 17% did not get their mental or physical health needs met.
- 21% did not get their food, water or clothing needs met.
- 23% did not get their financial assistance needs met.
- 34% did not get their physical needs met (for support with property, transport or belongings).



In the longer term, the TMRO Needs Assessment identified that many whānau have still not had their basic needs met.

## Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Communities relied on multiple sources of strength and assistance to help them cope with the weather events. Of most notable significance were the networks and ties within the community itself. In the MHF research, community support and people coming together was most frequently cited as a coping tool. Similarly, knowing one's neighbours and/or having family or friends on hand to help each other was of great importance; together with volunteers who performed essential tasks and assistance, and local community groups, marae, churches and businesses who provided support and resources in so many ways (MHF Research).

Social connections remained high among respondents regardless of the impacts and provided valuable and effective support networks aiding communities in the aftermath of weather events. Psychosocial support networks were a crucial source of strength, practical assistance and coping.

60% of people interviewed in the MHF research identified multiple things they now do differently as a result of the 2023 weather events; and particularly felt better prepared generally for future emergencies and weather events. Many had ensured their property is emergency-ready for future events (particularly for heavy rains). Behavioural changes were higher among those reporting primary negative impacts (71%); however, half (46%) of unaffected respondents, or those mentioning secondary impacts (50%), also reported some changes in preparedness (MHF Research).

Māori were most likely of ethnic groups to report making any behavioural changes in response to weather events (76%); however, they were more likely to mention being better prepared generally (MHF Research).

### *Community*

The TMRO Needs Assessment found widespread evidence of collaborative working across stakeholders. A competitive environment had negatively impacted previous levels of collaboration; however, the weather events have led to organisations reconnecting and exploring ways that they could work together.

Community groups and organisations would like to see a community-led approach that empowers those who are well versed in local needs, know how to engage with the community and have established trusted relationships with residents.

The scale of the impacts across Tāmaki Makaurau provide an opportunity for a coordinated community-driven recovery approach that empowers local stakeholders to bridge existing gaps and deliver tailored responses to address diverse and persistent recovery needs.

