

Impacts of the ongoing fuel crisis on children and communities

Social
Service
Providers

Te Pai
Ora o
Aotearoa



May 2026

Te Pai Ora SSPA has surveyed leaders from community-based social services on the impact of the global fuel crisis on the ability of providers to support tamariki and whānau around Aotearoa. We heard back from over 60 government-funded social services that undertake critical work in the community for tamariki and whānau such as child protection, youth justice, sexual violence and family violence services.

The results are sobering. The impacts are being felt by nearly all social services and the whānau they serve. Government assistance is urgently needed to ensure that the sector can continue to offer essential services to children and whānau.

Nearly all providers are impacted

This survey illustrates how much our sector has been absorbing the impacts and trying to calmly carry on. Community social services have told us how much whānau are hurting and how the impacts for their organisations are real, and significant.

- 97% report being impacted by the ongoing surges in fuel prices
- 44% state the impact on their organisation was significant
- 28% are cutting back on community outreach
- 33% have alternative work arrangements, e.g working from home, flexible hours and carpooling
- Financial impacts are significant and run into the tens of thousands of dollars annually for many respondents, with one provider's costs doubling and another seeing a likely increase of \$70,000
- Impacts are particularly acute for rural and isolated communities and social services
- 95% of respondents described their service as 'essential', but only 11% have contacted MBIE directly to request essential service status

We have learnt that social services are adapting extremely quickly and reallocating resources at pace, but this will not be sustainable over the medium term.

Children and whānau are struggling

Social services are deeply concerned about the impacts of escalating fuel impacts on tamariki and whānau. They told us that:

- whānau are no longer attending critical appointments
- households are making impossible choices between fuel and essentials
- rural communities are facing even greater challenges and isolation

"The impact goes beyond fuel cost increases alone. Our service delivery model is relationship-based and requires consistent face-to-face engagement with tamariki and whānau, often in crisis situations. Rising fuel costs are forcing difficult trade-offs between maintaining service quality and managing financial sustainability. While some administrative functions can shift to remote work, frontline delivery cannot be meaningfully replaced without compromising outcomes."

"There are no measures in place to support these groups and so we are left to try and find petrol vouchers or provide the transport ourselves. These are not families receiving the additional \$50 supplement but those working families already living at the limit of their means."

"We can minimise some of our services and only use vehicles for essential home visits but our issue becomes the community members no longer able to get their children to school or attend important hui or medical appointments."

Social services are trying to ease the burden on whānau

Rather than cutting back on services, social services are adapting to help whānau receive the help they need. Many talked about going out to see whānau, providing petrol vouchers and offering services online.

Unfortunately, in some circumstances, these measures are not enough and they are having to reduce services. In some cases, kaimahi hours have been reduced. Social services also reported that rising fuel costs mean that some volunteer kaimahi can no longer help out. This is particularly worrying in a sector that is so reliant on volunteer labour.

Relief is urgently needed

We believe the following areas warrant your urgent consideration:

- targeted financial support to social services to ease the burden of prolonged high fuel prices
- relief to whānau and tamariki aimed at enabling access to critical services
- government contracts being inflation-adjusted to ease rising costs across the sector and enable resilience to future shocks
- social services being collectively recognised as essential services under the response phases

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas, this survey and possible next steps.

“We need acknowledgement from the Government that rising fuel costs are having a direct impact on frontline service delivery. Increased reliance on home visits and school-based engagements means kaimahi are travelling more frequently and over greater distances, often using personal vehicles. These fuel costs are not currently matched in funding or contract settings, creating additional pressure on already constrained services.”

“Fuel price increases are significantly constraining our ability to deliver essential, community-based services. Unlike other sectors, our work cannot be fully digitised or centralised. Staff must travel to homes, schools, and community settings to provide effective support. The increase in costs is reducing our capacity to respond promptly and consistently to high-needs cases.”

“Another potential impact will be the ability for our volunteers to continue to operate our foodbank. We rely on volunteers to enable us to support our community with food security.”

“This crisis is disproportionately affecting families and vulnerable people in the isolated rural communities that we work with. There are no public transport options and existing hardship is intensified by rising fuel costs, making it difficult for families to get children to school or attend essential health appointments, forcing them to prioritise food over petrol, an impact that will be felt even more acutely as winter approaches.”

“We are already severely underfunded by government contracts, this just adds another layer of stress on already very frugal and fragile budgets..”