

General Practitioners

What this is about...

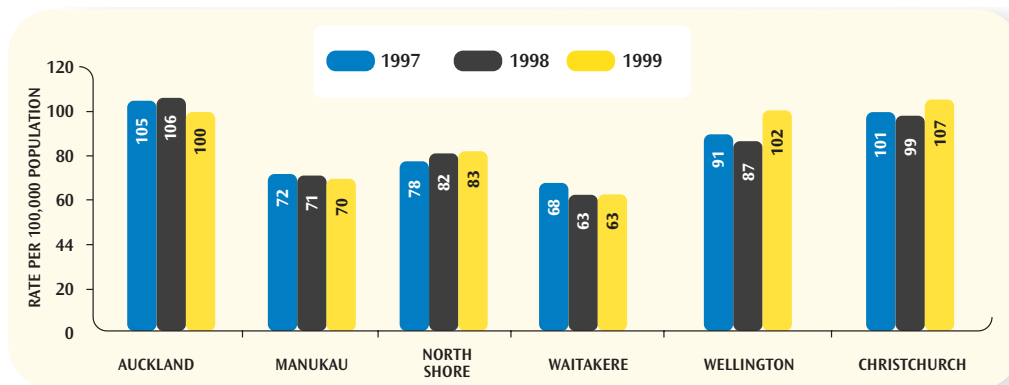
The number of General Practitioners (GPs) per city reflects accessibility to health services. A lower rate of GPs per population may indicate difficulty with accessing primary health care and may be associated with higher rates of hospitalisation.

This indicator uses the rate of full time equivalent GPs per 100,000 population within the six largest cities.

What did we find ?

- Waitakere and Manukau Cities have the lowest rate of GPs per population, with an average rate of 65 and 71 per 100,000 population respectively. In comparison, Auckland and Christchurch Cities have the highest rate of GPs, with averages of 104 and 102 per 100,000 population respectively. This is a significant difference, and suggests that areas of greatest need may not be adequately provided for in terms of primary health care.

RATE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS PER 100,000 POPULATION (1997 TO 1999)



Data Source: New Zealand Medical Council's Annual Workforce Survey

It is not clear how GPs are spread throughout the community - that is, whether practices are located close together or spread evenly throughout the city, or the number of GPs working in 'super clinics'.

Poor access to health care, especially preventative health and early intervention services such as those offered by GPs, partly explains the link between socio-economic status and health. Social, cultural and economic factors influence the use of preventive and treatment services and the more affluent generally have better access to high quality health services. New Zealand studies demonstrate that individuals in lower socio-economic groups use general practitioner services less than would be expected given their health status, and that financial constraints act as a deterrent to consultation for those with lower family incomes and from more deprived areas.⁷⁵ In particular, a considerable number of Pacific Islands people are admitted to hospital with conditions that would be largely preventable through access to primary care.⁷⁶ Therefore, improving the affordability of general practice services, and addressing issues of availability and appropriateness of services for different ethnic groups would assist with reducing socio-economic differences in health status.

There has been a restriction on the issuing of Section 51 notices by the Health Funding Authority (Section 51 of the Health and Disability Services Act (1993) enables GPs to claim payments from the government for consultations). This has limited the number of new GPs able to open up practices, especially in the Auckland area. These limitations have been strongly challenged by many GPs and communities who say that GPs need to be located where there are fast growing populations.

75 National Health Committee. 1998. The Social, Cultural and Economic Determinants of Health in New Zealand: Action to improve health.

76 Health Funding Authority. 2000. Improving our Health in Wellington – a discussion document for community involvement.