Dampness and mould in New Zealand households: a tenure-based analysis

This report presents statistics on tenure of household and exposure to both dampness and mould in Aotearoa New Zealand, from the 2023 Census. It serves as a supplement to the *Living in mouldy dwellings* and *Living in damp dwellings* surveillance reports, and provides additional detail on how tenure type (renting versus owning) is related to the prevalence of mould and dampness in New Zealand households.

Key facts

- In 2023, rental households were more than twice as likely as owner-occupied households to report dampness (29.2% vs 13.1%) and mould (22.9% vs 10.4%) in their homes.
- About 40.2% of Pacific peoples households and 38.9% of Māori households living in rental housing reported that their homes were always or sometimes damp. Māori and Pacific households in rental housing also reported higher rates of mould exposure (30.8% for Māori households and 35.4% for Pacific peoples households in rental housing).
- In 2023, Tairāwhiti health district had the highest rate of damp housing, with 42.2% of rental households and 24.2% of owner-occupied households reporting dampness. Additionally, one in three households living in rental dwellings in Tairāwhiti (33.1%) reported mould larger than A4 sheet as being always or sometimes present.
- Kāinga Ora (formerly Housing New Zealand) and government housing rentals had the highest rate of damp and mould in 2023.

Rental households suffer the most from damp and mould exposure

Dampness and mould in housing can have negative impacts on occupants' health (Cox-Ganser 2015). Numerous studies have linked damp and mould exposure to adverse health effects, particularly respiratory illnesses such as asthma and lower respiratory tract infections. Infants, children, and older people are more susceptible to these health impacts (Coulburn et al 2022, Serjeant et al 2022). Dampness and mould can be reduced through adequate heating, insulation, ventilation and other measures. However, upgrading insulation and heating can be relatively expensive, although some households may be eligible for subsidies (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority).

In New Zealand, rental properties have generally been in poorer condition than owner-occupied homes in terms of dampness and mould (White et al 2017). Tenants typically have limited ability or legal rights to improve the housing quality (such as installing heat pumps, adding insulation, or improving ventilation). Introduced in 2019, the Healthy Homes Standards in New Zealand set minimum requirements for heating, insulation, ventilation, moisture ingress and drainage, and draught stopping in rental properties, to ensure safer and healthier living conditions for tenants. The final date for compliance with these standards was 1 July 2024 for Kāinga Ora and Community Housing Provider rentals, and 1 July 2025 for private rentals. This surveillance report presents findings from the 2023 Census, prior to these compliance dates.

One in three households did not own the dwelling they lived in

In 2023, about 34.0% of households in New Zealand (604,884 households) were living in non-owner-occupied dwellings (that is, occupied private dwellings that were not owned or held in a family trust). Most of these households (31.8% of all households) rented their home (that is, were paying rent). An additional 2.1% of all households were those occupying the dwelling rent-free (for example, staying with family and friends), and 0.1% were households that did not own the dwelling and rental arrangements were not defined. The percentage of households in non-owner-occupied dwellings was notably higher among Pacific peoples households (about 62%) and Māori households (about 49%).

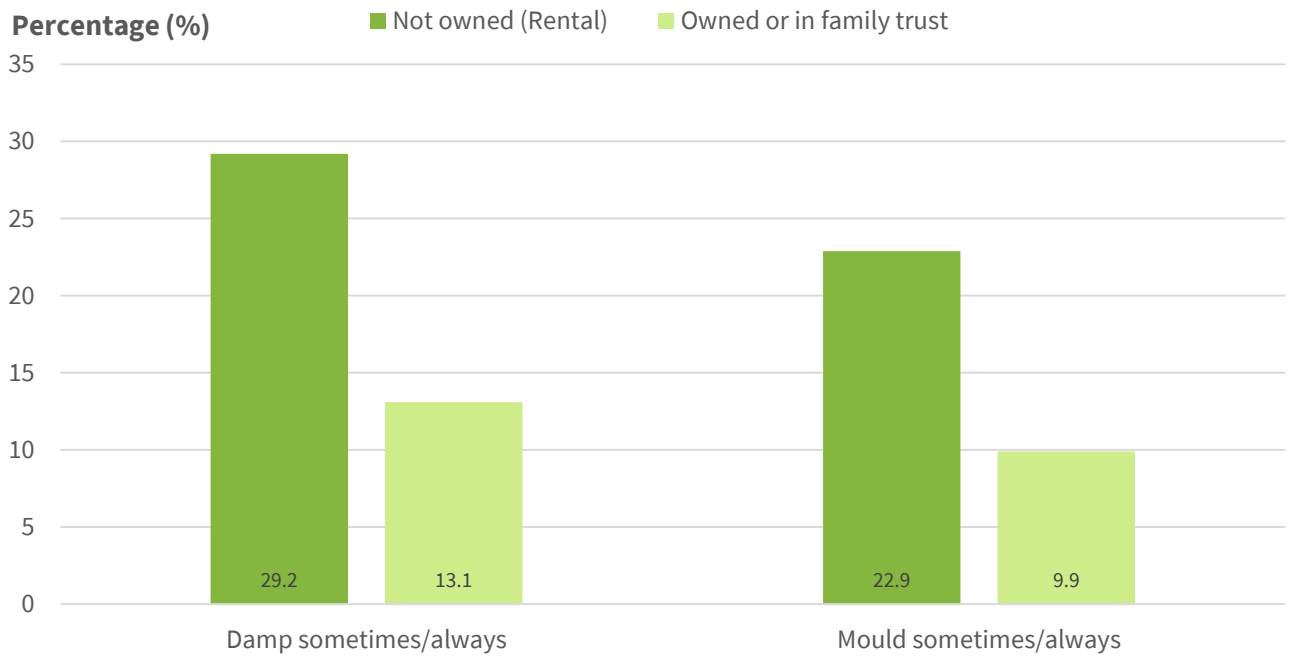
In 2023, two in three New Zealand households (66.0%) were owner-occupied (i.e., lived in dwellings that were owned or partly owned, or held in a family trust).

For the purposes of this report, the term 'rental housing' refers to dwellings not owned by the household and not held in family trust (including households that pay rent, and the small number of households that do not own the dwelling and do not pay rent).

Dampness and mould more common in rental dwellings than in owner-occupied dwellings

In 2023, 29.2% of households in rental housing reported dampness (always or sometimes), and 22.9% reported the presence of mould larger than A4 sheet of paper (always or sometimes). In comparison, among owner-occupied households, 13.1% reported dampness and 9.9% reported mould in their dwellings (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of households in damp or mouldy dwellings, by tenure of households, 2023

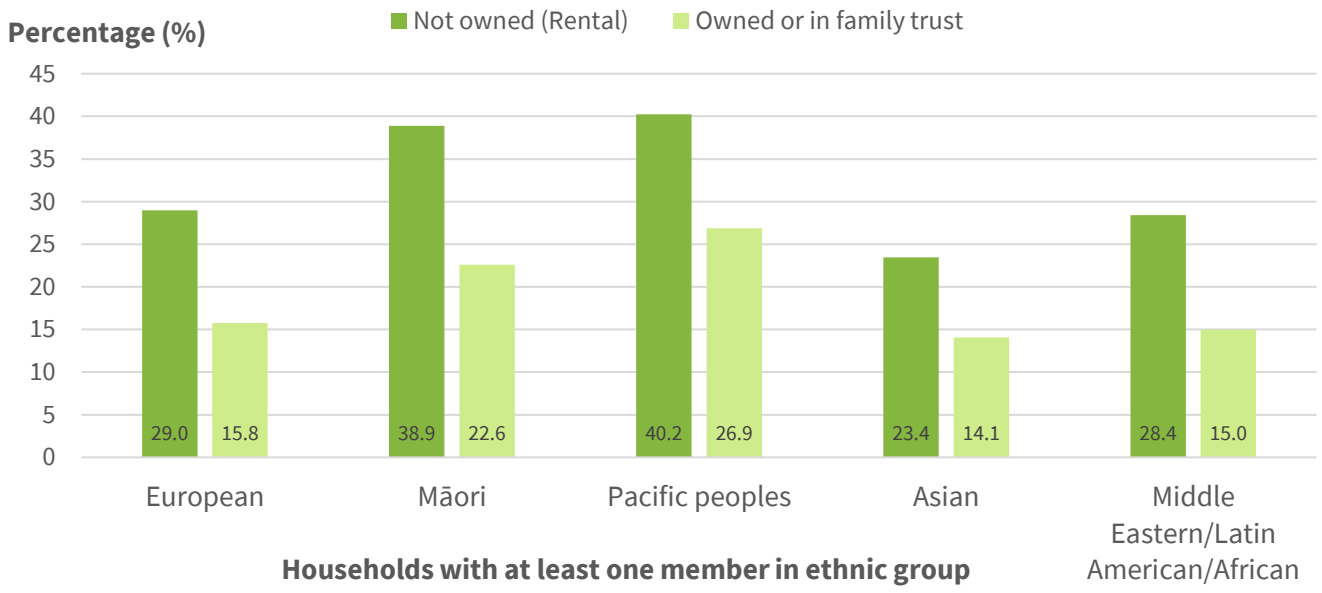


Note: Mould refers to mould at least the size of an A4 piece of paper.
Source: Stats NZ, 2023

Higher dampness and mould rates in rental housing, especially for Māori and Pacific peoples

Households living in rented dwellings had higher rates of dampness than owner-occupied dwellings, across all ethnic groups, and particularly for households with at least one member who was Māori or Pacific peoples. In 2023, 40.2% of Pacific peoples households in rental housing, and 38.9% of Māori households in rental housing reported that dampness was always or sometimes present (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of households in damp dwellings (always or sometimes), by ethnic group (total response) and tenure of households, 2023



Notes: Ethnic group refers to the total response ethnic group of at least one member of the household.
Source: Stats NZ, 2023

Mould exposure was also high among Pacific peoples households and Māori households. Among households that did not own their home, 35.4% of Pacific peoples households and 30.8% of Māori households reported that mould larger than a sheet of A4-paper was always or sometimes present (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of households in mouldy dwellings, by ethnicity and tenure of households, 2023

Notes: Ethnic group refers to the total response ethnic group of at least one member of the household.
Source: Stats NZ, 2023

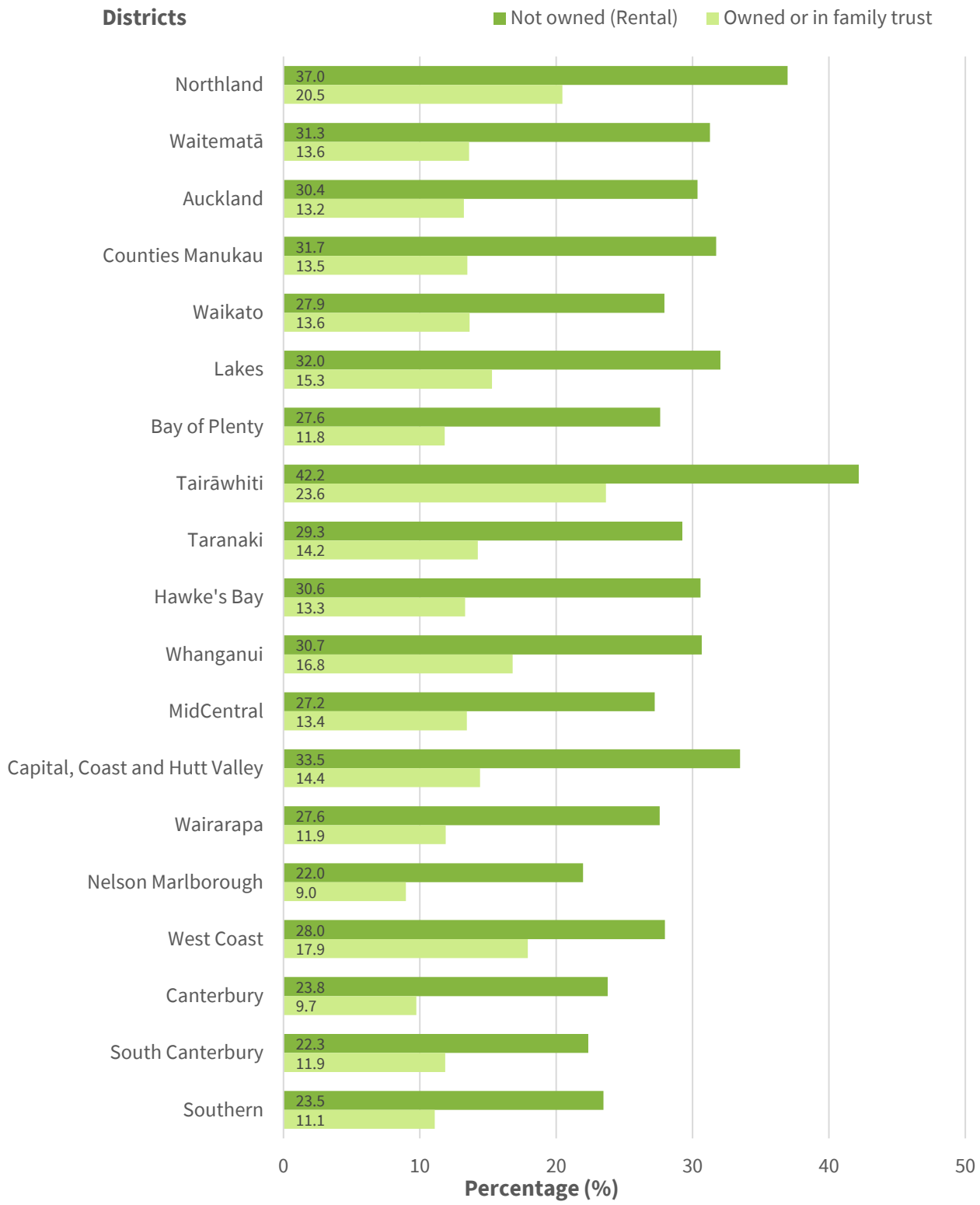
Renters more likely to report dampness in all health districts

In 2023, people in rental properties had higher rates of reporting dampness in their home (always or sometimes), compared with owner-occupied dwellings, across all districts (formerly district health board).

Tairāwhiti had the highest percentage of households reporting dampness in both tenure types, with 42.2% of rented dwellings and 24.2% of owner-occupied dwellings affected. Northland and Lakes health districts also had high rates, with 37.0% of rented dwellings and 21.2% of owner-occupied dwellings in Northland and 32.0% of rented dwellings and 16.3% of owner-occupied dwellings in Lakes experiencing damp conditions.

Even in districts with lower overall rates of dampness, such as Canterbury (23.8% of rented dwellings, 10.4% of owner-occupied dwellings), and Nelson Marlborough (22.0% of rented dwellings, 9.6% of owner-occupied dwellings), rented dwellings experienced more than double the rate of dampness compared to owner-occupied dwellings (Figure 4).

Figure 4: **Percentage of households in damp dwellings (sometimes/always damp), by tenure of household and health district, 2023**

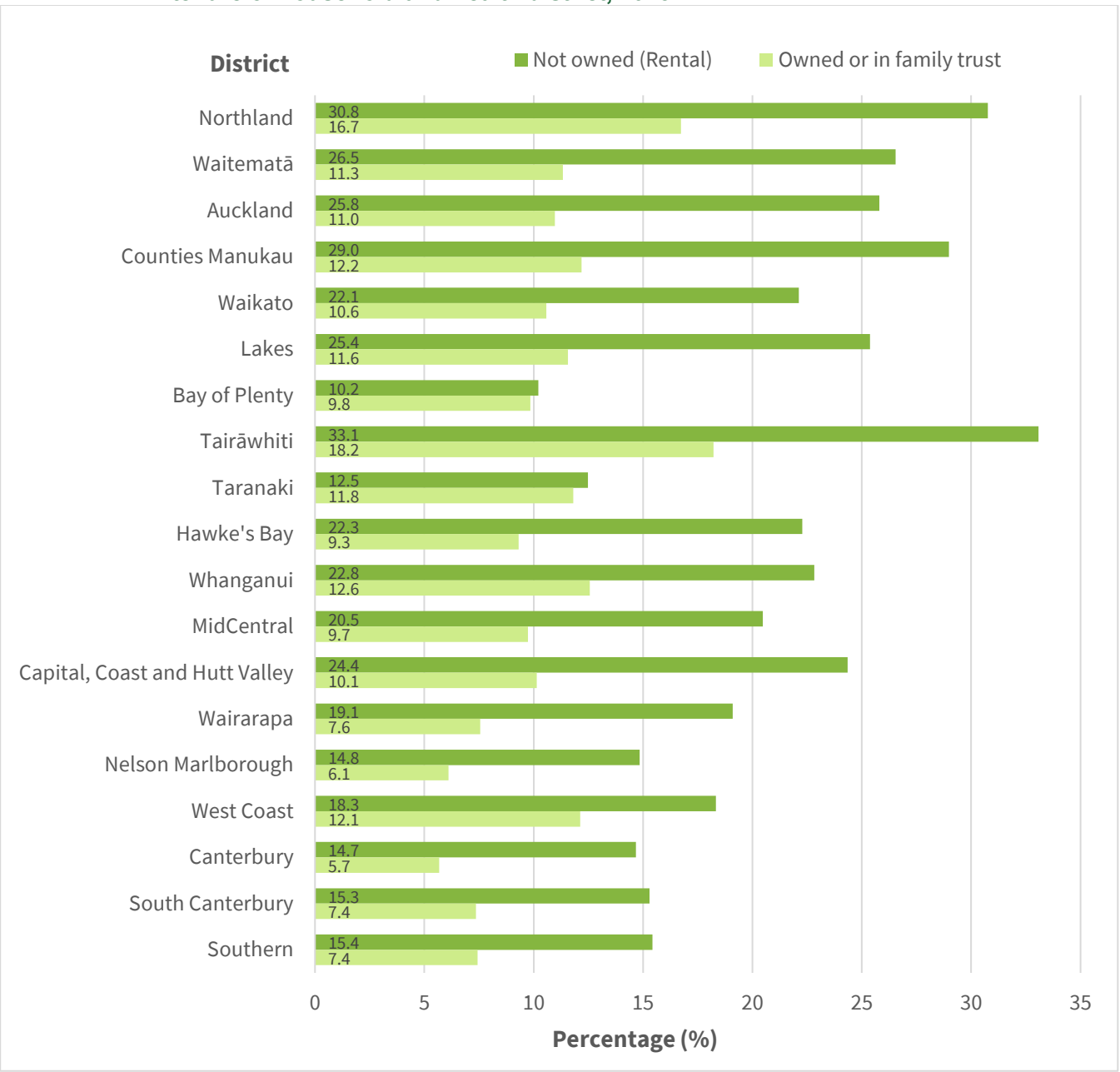


Source: Stats NZ, 2023

Household mould exposure varies across health districts, renters affected most

In 2023, across all health districts, the presence of mould larger than A4 sheet either always or sometimes was more commonly reported in rental dwellings (not owned or held in a family trust) than in owner-occupied dwellings. Tairāwhiti had the highest percentage of households reporting mould (always or sometimes) in both tenure types, with 33.1% of rental households and 18.5% of owner-occupied households affected. This was followed by Northland, where 30.8% of rental households and 17.3% of owner-occupied households reported mould (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of households in mouldy dwellings (sometimes/always mouldy), by tenure of household and health district, 2023



Source: Stats NZ, 2023

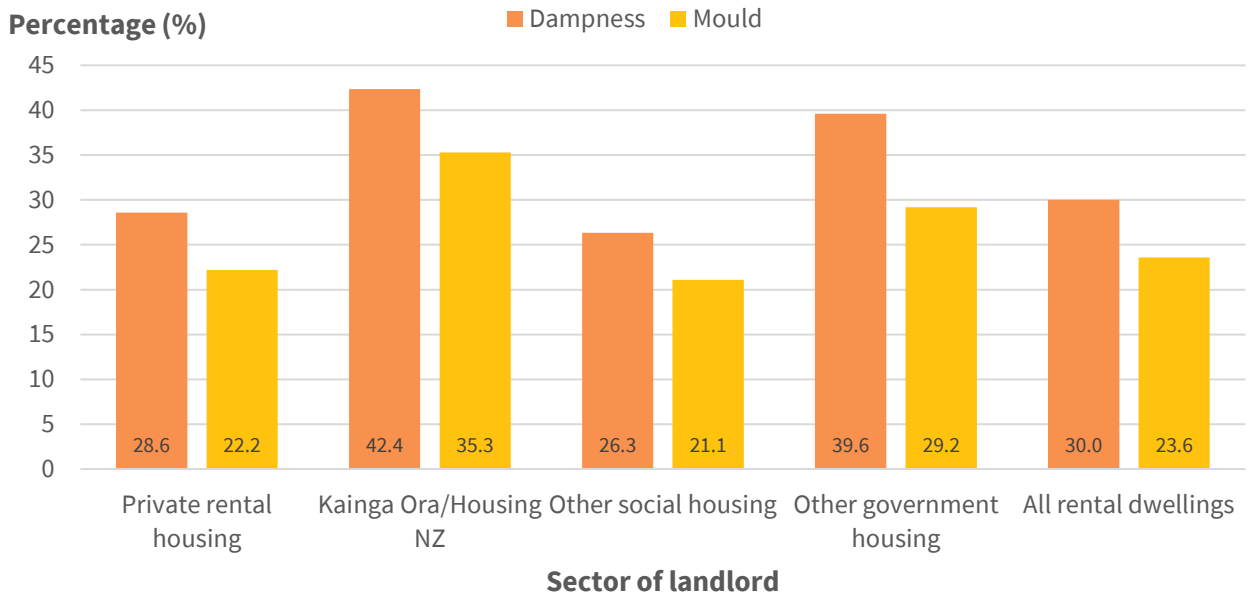
Dampness and mould most common in social housing

Among households living in rental dwellings, most rent from a private person, trust or business. From the 2023 Census, rental households had the following sectors of landlords:

- Private person trust or business (84.6% of rental households; 475,944 households)
- Kāinga Ora (formerly Housing NZ) (11.2% of rental households; 63,162 households)
- Other social housing:
    - local authorities and city councils (1.7% of rental households; 9,561 households)
    - iwi, hapū or Māori land trusts (0.3% of rental households; 1,488 households)
    - other community housing providers (1.5% of rental households; 8,196 households)
- Other government housing (including state-owned corporations and state-owned enterprises, and government departments and ministries, such as Corrections or Minitry of Education staff accommodation) (0.8%, 4,224 households).

Among households living in rental dwellings, the percentage reporting dampness was highest in Kāinga Ora (formerly Housing New Zealand) housing, at 42.4% (1,9821 households), followed by other government housing at 39.6% (2,040 households). Both figures are well above the overall dampness rate in rental dwellings, which was 30.0% (137,898 households).
Kāinga Ora housing also had the highest rate for mould, with 35.3% (16,608 households) reporting its presence, followed by other government housing at 29.2% (1,674 households). These rates are notably higher than the overall mould rate in rental dwellings, which stood at 23.6% (110,106 households) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of damp or mouldy dwellings, by sector of landlord, 2023



Notes: Private rental housing is owned by private person, trust, or business. 'Other social housing' includes local authorities and city councils; iwi, hapū or Māori land trusts; and other community housing providers. 'Other government housing' includes other state-owned corporation or state-owned enterprise, or government department or ministry, such as Corrections, or Ministry of Education staff accommodation. Mould refers to mould the size of an A4 size piece of paper.
Source: Stats NZ, 2023

Data for this indicator

This indicator provides data from the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings.This indicator presents an analysis of damp and mouldy households by tenure housing.

Tenure of household indicates whether a household in a private dwelling rents, owns, or holds that dwelling in a family trust, and whether payment is made by the household for the right to reside in that dwelling. Tenure of household does not refer to the tenure of the land on which the dwelling is situated. A dwelling held in a family trust is owned by the family trust, so the household does not directly own the dwelling.

For this report, 'owner-occupied' refers to households that own their home (owned or partly owned), or live in a home held in a family trust. 'Rental housing' refers to all other households, ie households that do not own the dwelling (outright or with a mortgage) and do not hold the house in family trust. This includes a small number of households that do not own the dwelling and do not pay rent (or rental arrangements were not defined).

Dwelling dampness indicates whether an occupied private dwelling is not damp (dry throughout) or the degree to which it is damp – sometimes damp or always damp. Dampness is defined as when a dwelling feels or smells damp or has damp patches on the wall, ceiling, floor, or window frames. Mould measures the total amount of visible mould inside occupied private dwellings. It indicates whether mould is present (always or sometimes) that has a total area larger than A4 sheet of paper.It excludes dwelling any mould that is not visible, for example mould inside walls.Results by ethnic group have used the ethnicity of at least one household member, and results are reported at the household level.

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