

Medium to long-term court system trends by jurisdiction

Ministry of Justice

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Introduction

This is a companion document to the Ministry of Justice's Long-term Insights Briefing on the *Future operation of the courts and justice services*. It covers trends in court business over the last 10-20 years (or as many trends as we have data to support). We have not covered all jurisdictions and courts in detail, but have selected those we consider provide the best illustrative examples of system trends that could be supported by consistent data.

In this document, data referring to active cases or applications is measured at month-end. Numbers for new cases, applications, or disposals¹ are rolling totals drawn from the previous 12-month period. For aged cases or aged applications, the figure used is a rolling total of the age of cases or applications counted at that time, expressed as an average.²

There has been a gradual increase over time in the amount of business the court system must handle. We believe the innovations and interventions of the last five years are beginning to pay dividends. We have mostly cleared the COVID-19-era backlogs and think we will be better equipped in future to handle these higher inflows. The picture is complex, however, so we may have more information on this in our final Long-term Insights Briefing.

If you have any queries about the information or statistics produced, or would like to use any of the following charts for publication, please contact us at: OIA@justice.govt.nz.

¹ "Disposals" refers to cases or applications that are removed from the Court system.

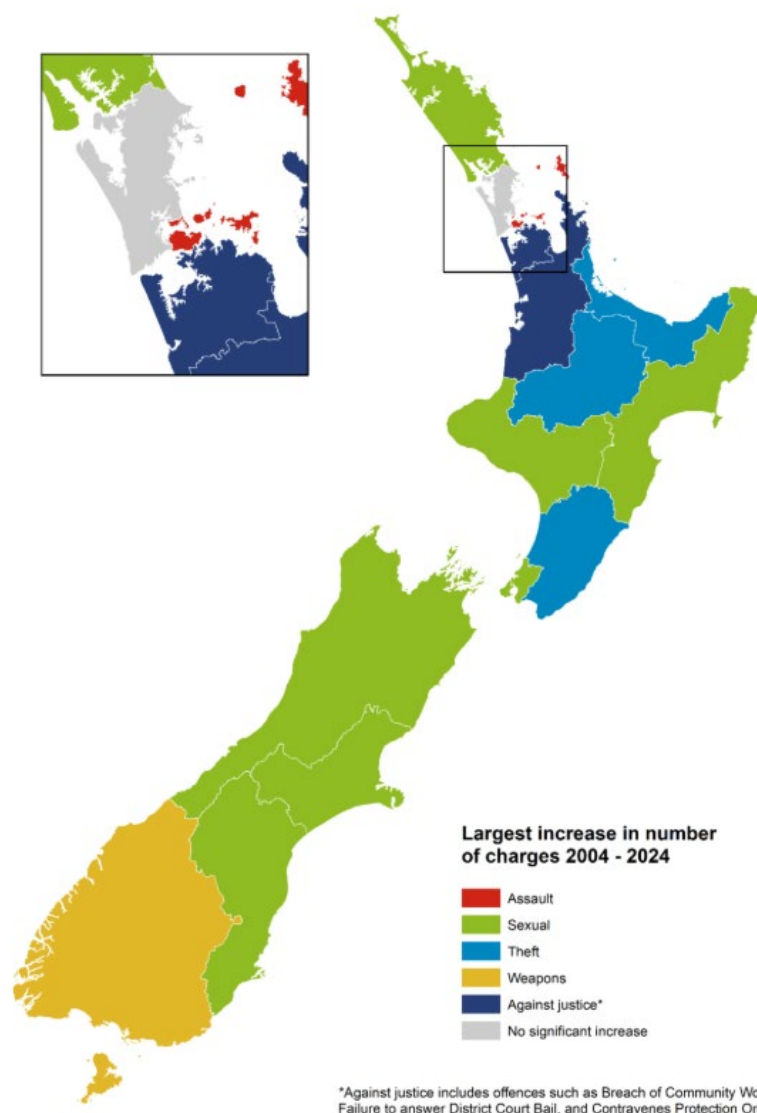
² Unless otherwise specified, trend information by jurisdiction is drawn from: Ministry of Justice. *Court timeliness 2015-2025*. Unpublished document.

The criminal jurisdiction

In the criminal jurisdiction, the 20-year data regarding apprehensions, charges, and convictions shows that the overall number of charges and convictions has been decreasing over the past 20 years. The total number of people convicted in 2024 was only two-thirds the total of 20 years ago. Almost all categories of criminal offence have reduced, except for a small increase in sexual assaults and related offences, and weapons offences.³

At a regional level, different parts of the country have experienced different dynamics. Map 1 below shows a picture of the types of crimes that have increased most in different parts of the country over the last 20 years.

Map 1: Largest increase in criminal charges per region, by type, 2004–2024

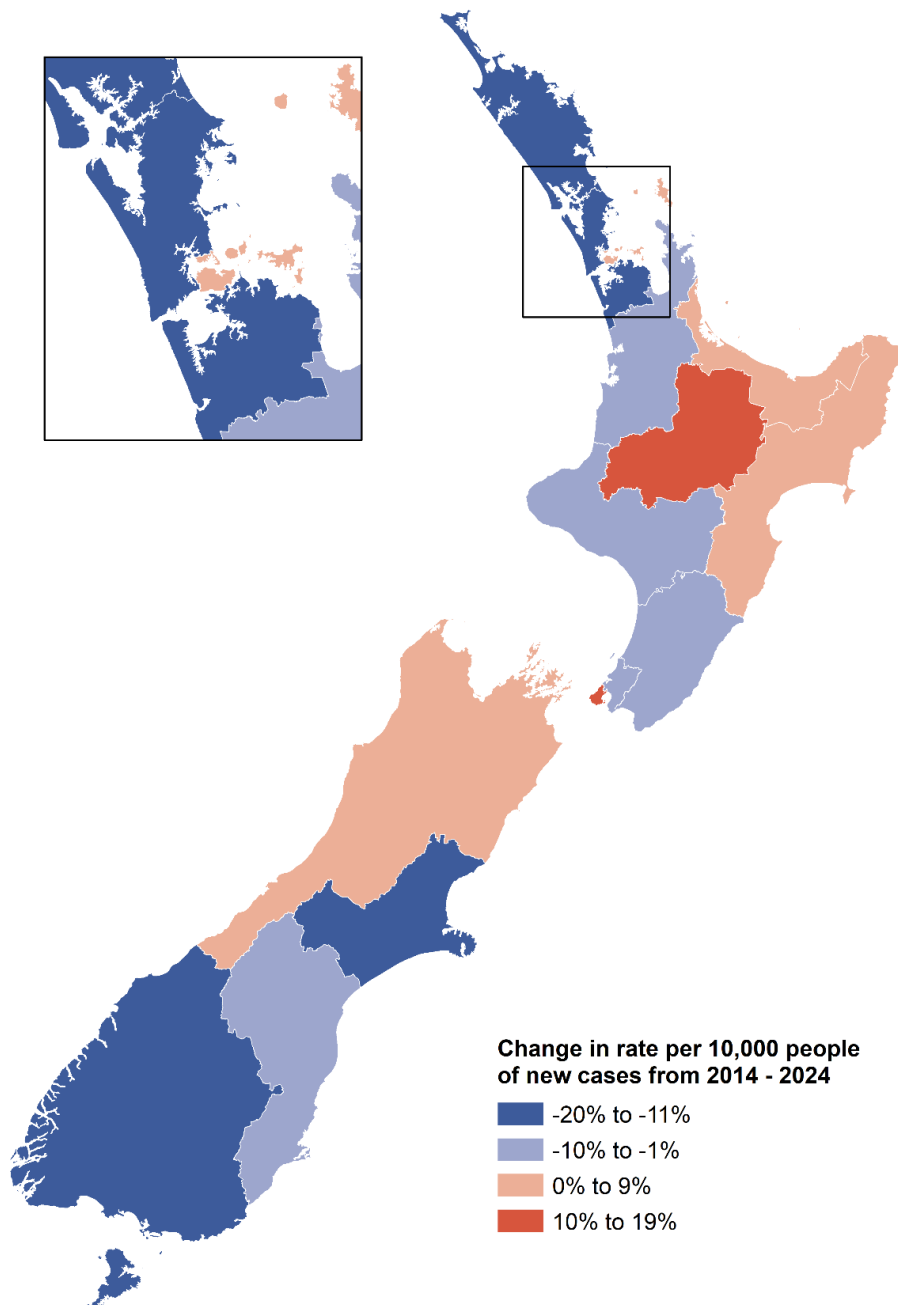


Source: Ministry of Justice

³ Ministry of Justice. *Charges by ANSOC 1992/95 – 2020/23*. Unpublished document.

Map 2 is based on data for the last 10 years. It shows where and how much criminal cases have been declining or increasing around the country.

Map 2: Change in population rate of new criminal cases, 2014–2024⁴



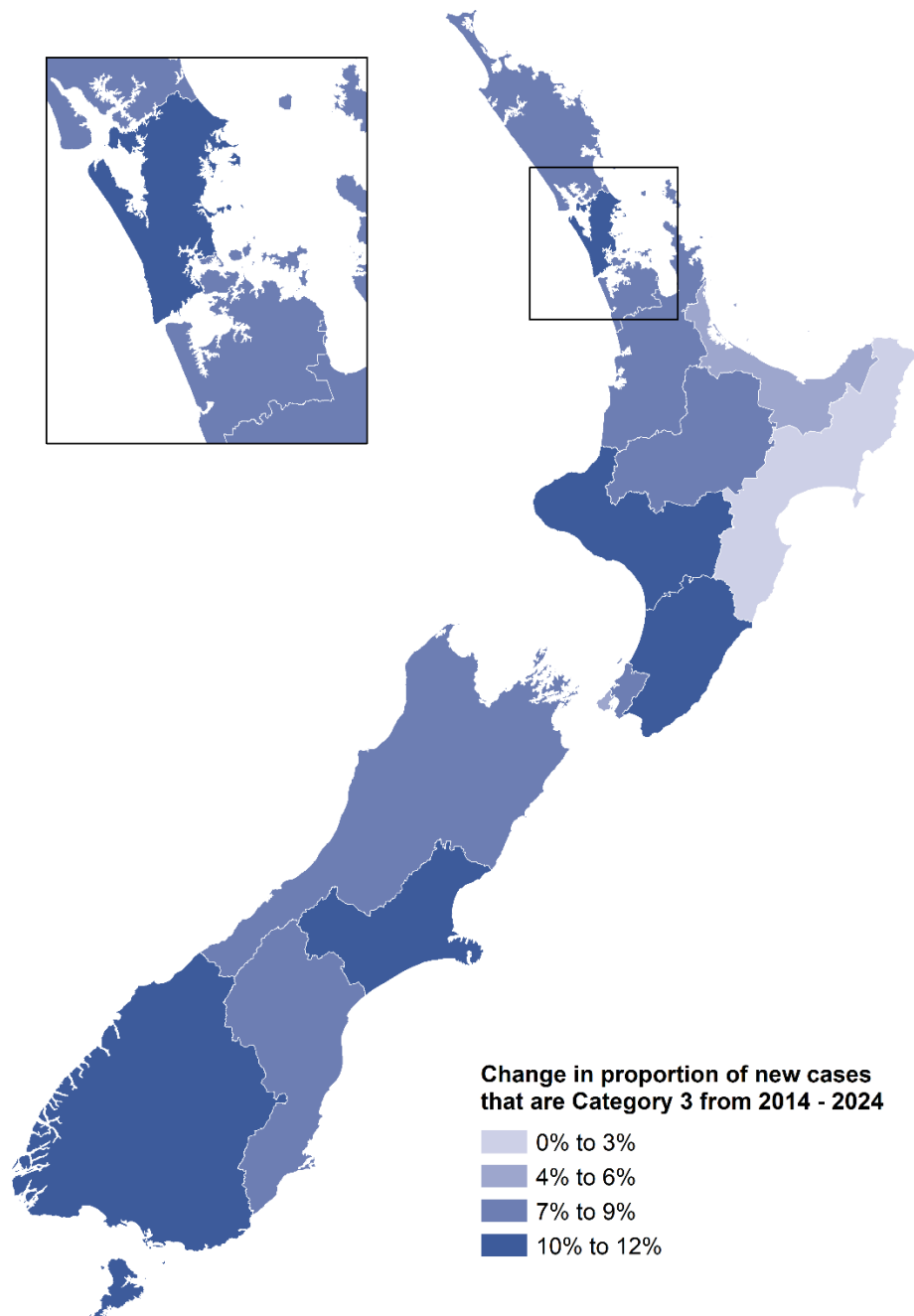
Source: Ministry of Justice

⁴ Population counts for Justice Service Areas were created using the Integrated Data Infrastructure managed by Stats NZ. These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>.

Map 3 shows the parts of the country where the proportion of cases for Category 3 offences has risen the most in the last 10 years. Category 3 offences are offences that are imprisonable for two or more years and for which defendants can elect a jury trial in the District Court.

Note that the *number* of Category 3 offences may not have increased in that period: it may be that Category 3 offences now make up a greater proportion of cases, due to larger declines in Category 1 and 2 offences over the same period.

Map 3: Change in proportion of new cases that are Category 3, 2014–2024



Source: Ministry of Justice

Criminal: the High Court

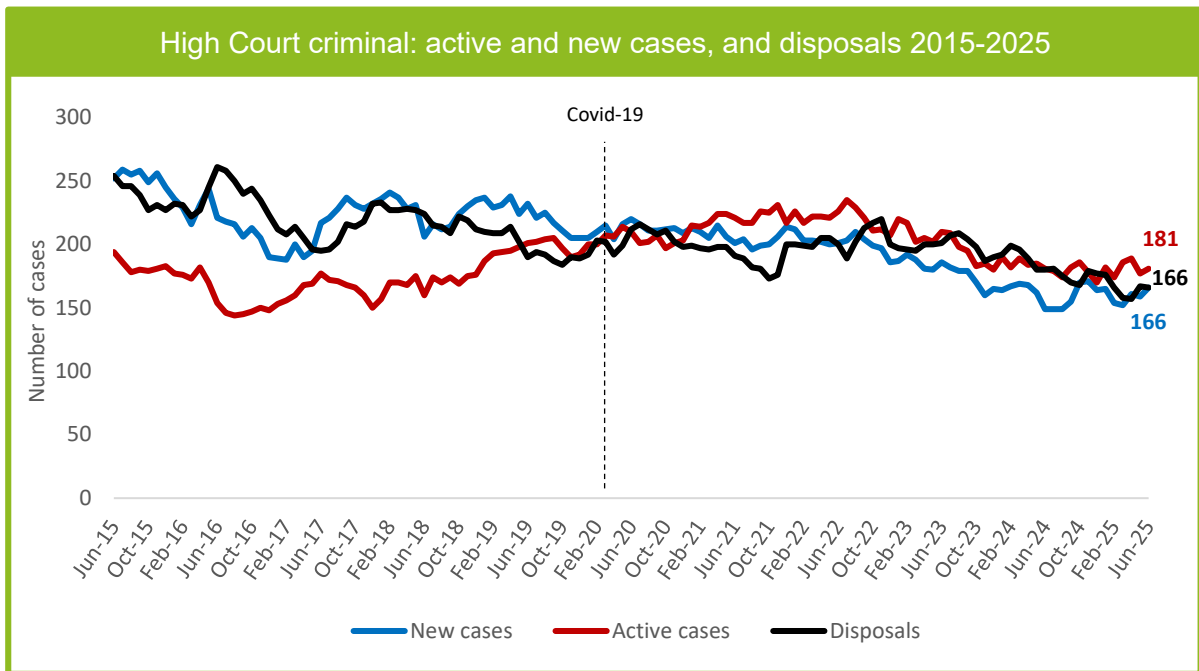
Key Points

- There are slightly fewer active criminal cases in the High Court compared to 10 years ago, but the estimated time needed to complete a case has increased.
- The average number of hearing days required for a jury trial in the High Court has increased significantly in recent years.
- A greater proportion of active cases are now Category 4 (the most serious, such as homicides).
- Despite significant efforts, COVID-19 caused delays to scheduling jury trial hearings, contributing to increases in the average age of active cases.

Over the past 10 years, the rolling average of active criminal cases in the High Court has reduced by 7% - from 194 to 181 cases as of June 2025. Over the same period both the number of new cases coming into the system and the number of disposals (cases leaving the system) also decreased, to sit at 166 cases each, as shown in the graph below.

The number of active cases increased from mid-2020 through to a peak of 235 cases in July 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions, but then decreased as restrictions eased. During this period, disruption and delays to court processes caused an increase in the age of both active cases and disposals. These disruptions occurred despite efforts to ensure jury trials could continue, including rapid antigen tests being administered onsite, and the reconfiguration of floorplans to increase spacing.

Despite the decrease in active cases in recent years, a greater proportion of those cases are now Category 4, and the average time needed to hear High Court cases has increased from 14 to almost 18 days. The number of High Court criminal cases needing 15 or more estimated hearing days creates scheduling challenges.



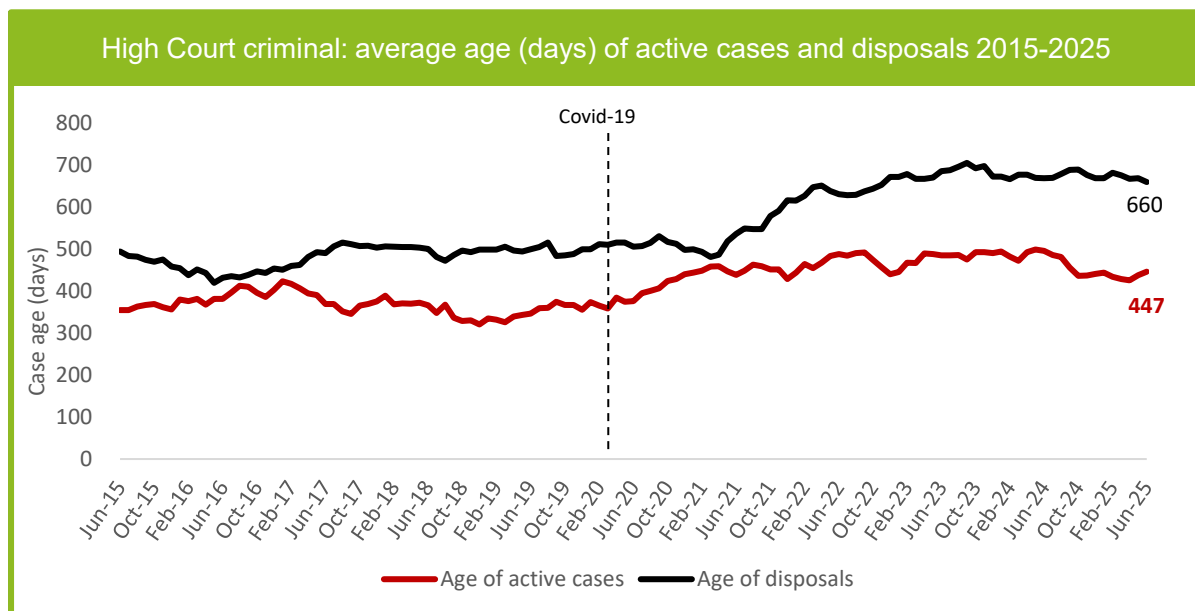
Source: Ministry of Justice

Timely access to justice

Over the past 10 years the average age of an active case has increased by 26% to 447 days (although more recently in the two years from June 2023 to June 2025, the average age of active cases has decreased by 8%).

A key factor contributing to longer timeframes to progress criminal cases to trial in the High Court is the greater hearing time required per case, which impacts on scheduling. This in turn reflects the increasing complexity of criminal jury trials. Some of the reasons for this include:

- more advanced technology (CCTV, phone data, social media data, vehicle data), forensics and expert reports - increasing the amount of evidence presented at trial
- a greater awareness of some defendants having complex needs, which need to be accommodated during a trial (for example, the provision of communication assistance or interpreters)
- more multi-defendant trials (which take longer than single defendant trials), and which often have associated security concerns.



Source: Ministry of Justice

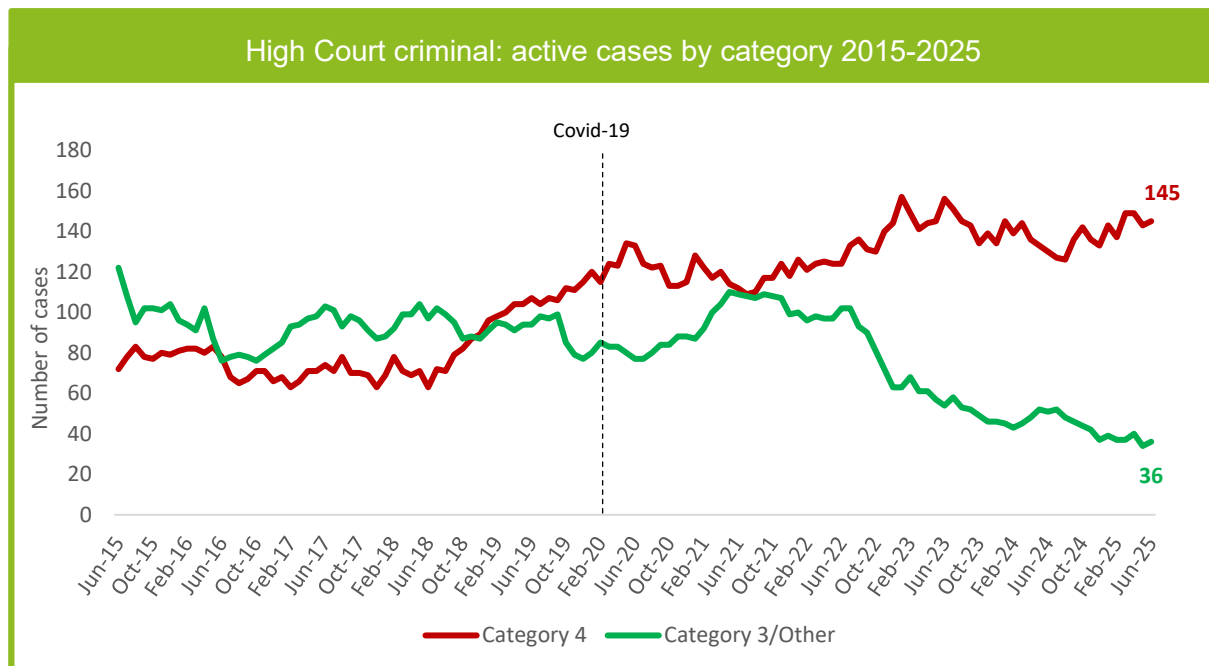
An added complication in some centres is the limited number of suitable courtrooms for holding jury trials. For example in Whangārei there is one courtroom available for both High Court and District Court trial cases (including both civil and criminal work in Northland). Similarly in Rotorua, there is only one courtroom available to the High Court for all work in that centre, and there is no jury-enabled courtroom available to the High Court in Tauranga.

A key factor in the increasing time between verdicts at trial and sentencing, is delay in the Court receiving all necessary reports for sentencing, particularly health assessor reports (for example, reports from psychiatrists and or psychologists).

Changes to composition

While the number of active cases in the High Court has reduced over the last 10 years, the composition of cases has changed. Category 4 cases grew by 101% over the last 10 years through to June 2025, and now make up 80% of the active caseload, compared to 37% just 10 years ago. In contrast, Category 3 cases (serious offences punishable by imprisonment of two or more years) declined by 70% over the same 10 years.

The drop in Category 3 cases during this period can be traced in part to the repeal of the Three Strikes legislation in 2022, as previously some Category 3 cases were required under this legislation to be heard in the High Court. The increase in Category 4 cases also means the High Court is unable to transfer up as many Category 3 cases from the District Court as previously.⁵



Source: Ministry of Justice

As of June 2025 there were 145 active Category 4 trial cases. The average time to dispose of a Category 4 case reduced from mid-2020 through to mid-2021 (in correlation with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions) but has steadily increased since then, due to an increased focus on the disposal of older cases.⁶

⁵ With the Three Strikes regime being reinstated in June 2025, we expect Category 3 cases to increase again in the High Court.

⁶ A contributing factor to the increase in age was work done to dispose of a number of very old cases, which had the effect of increasing the overall age of disposals at the time of counting. Given the limited number of cases in the High Court's criminal jurisdiction, this also shows how minor variations with a small number of cases can affect the overall result.

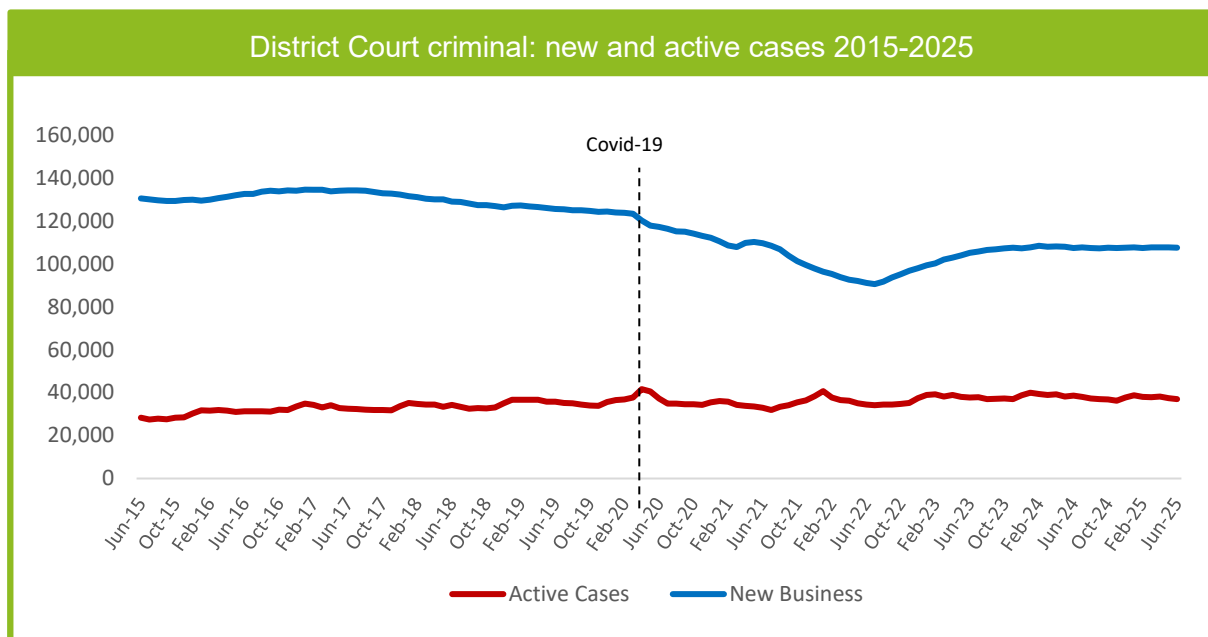
Criminal: the District Court

Key Points

- Overall, the number of new cases entering the system has declined in the past 10 years.
- There are, however, more active criminal cases in the District Court now compared to 10 years ago, and the number of events (steps within the process) required to dispose of a case has increased, creating delays and backlogs.
- The drivers of the additional events included more people electing jury trials, later guilty pleas, and an increase in adjournments.
- The Timely Justice Action Plan, overseen by the Judiciary and led by the Court's Central Registry, is showing promise at improving timely access to justice and addressing backlogs.

Between 2015 and 2025, active criminal cases increased by 31% (from 28,312 in June 2015 to 36,998 in June 2025). New criminal cases coming into the District Court from 2015 to 2025 decreased by 18% over the same period (from 130,639 cases in June 2015 to 107,569 in June 2025).

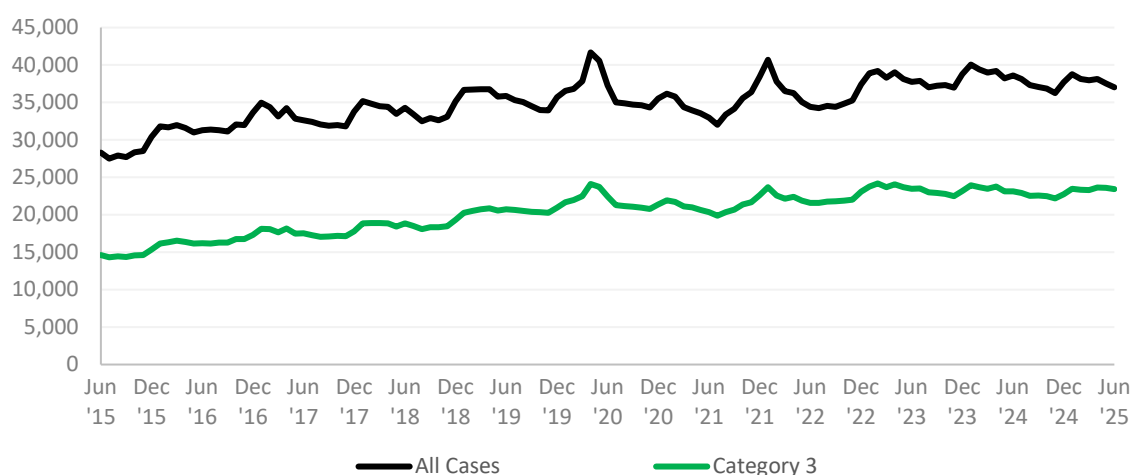
The graph below shows these trends but does not show what disposals were doing over this period. This is because District Court criminal cases can be split into multiple cases or combined into single cases after entering the court. This means new business and disposals are not comparable in the way they are in other jurisdictions and so graphing the trend line can be misleading. The Ministry is moving away from reporting District Court data in this way.



Source: Ministry of Justice

The increase in active cases overall is due both to an increase in the number of Category 3 cases (as shown below), and to an increase in the number of events needed to take Category 3 cases through to disposal. Category 3 cases make up 38% of new cases and 63% of active criminal cases in the District Court.

District Court criminal: Category 3 cases as a proportion of total active cases 2015-2025



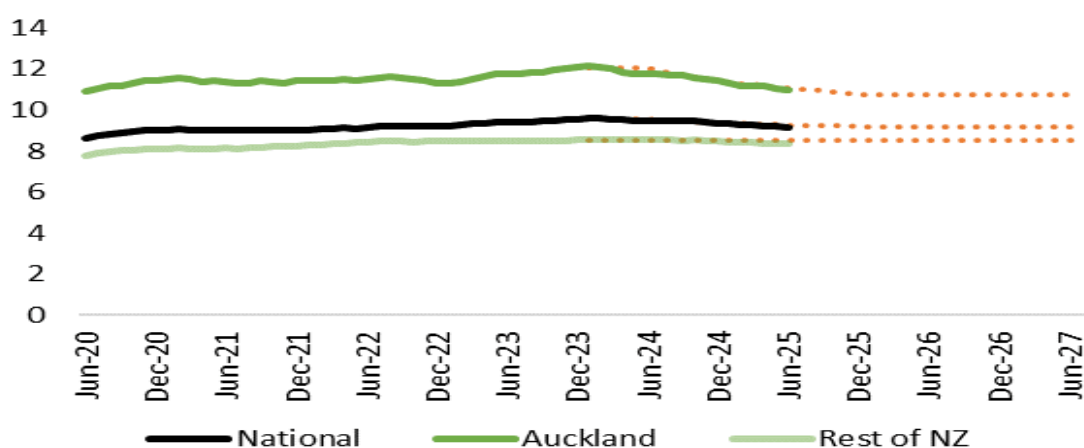
Source: Ministry of Justice

Events

For each category of case coming into a Court there is typically an expected number of events (steps within a process) required to dispose of a case. Between 2015 and 2025 the average number of events for Category 3 cases increased from 6.3 to 9.2 events (a rise of 44%). The increase in events has the effect of lengthening District Court cases, which means active cases stay in the system longer, and together with a greater number of Category 3 cases leads to an increase in active cases overall.

The graph below shows a fairly steady increase in average events per Category 3 case from June 2020 up to the end of 2023. This is followed by a steady decline through to June 2025, with the trend more prominent within the Auckland metro area where the bulk of District Court criminal cases are heard.

District Court criminal: average events per Category 3 case 2020-2025

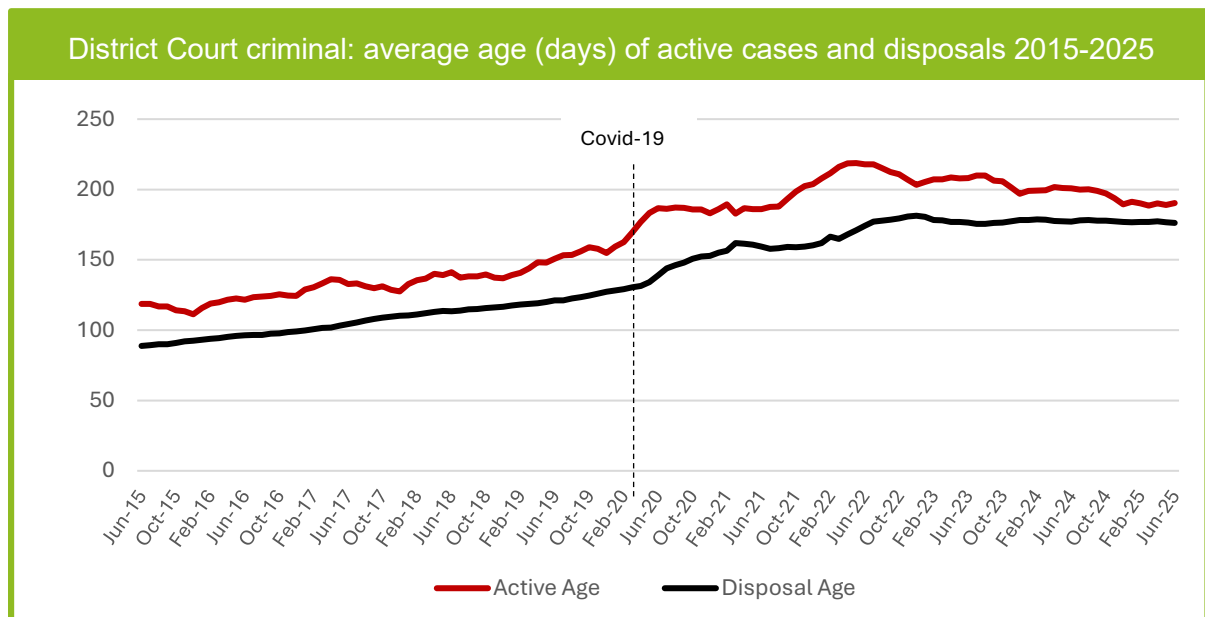


Source: Ministry of Justice

In the 18 months from January 2024 to June 2025 category 3 case events reduced by 4%, while jury and judge-alone trial events reduced by 5% and 4% respectively. These improvements have been higher in Auckland metropolitan courts due to the implementation of the Timely Justice Action Plan (a programme aimed at reducing delays in the court system).

Age and Complexity

The average age of criminal cases currently active in the District Court increased by 60% over the last 10 years (going from 119 days in 2015 to 190 days in 30 June 2025). The average age of disposals almost doubled over the same period (from 89 days to 176 days).



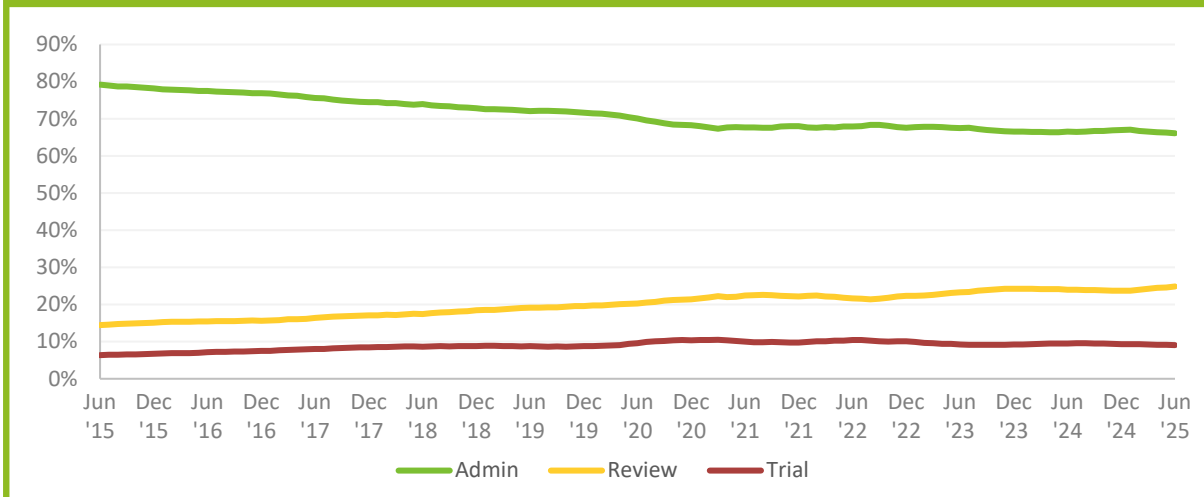
Source: Ministry of Justice

As with the High Court, the increase in the age of active cases over the 3-year period from January 2020 to December 2022 reflects in part the lingering impact of COVID-19 restrictions. The increase also reflects in part the trend for longer District Court criminal cases due to more events. A range of factors are contributing to this:

- **More people electing jury trials**, requiring more time and resources compared to judge-alone trials. Jury trial election rates increased from 25% in June 2015 to a peak of 35% in January 2022, to sit at 34% by 30 June 2025.
- **More court events adjourned** due to parties not being ready to proceed. Case review hearing adjournment rates have increased from 18% in June 2015 to 20% in June 2025, while judge-alone trial hearing adjournment rates have remained reasonably steady at 31% across the same period.
- **Additional days between events** due to insufficient resources to administer the workload requirements.
- **People pleading guilty later in the court process**, resulting in more events and more resources being required. When pleas are entered earlier (at the admin stage) this requires fewer case events and less administration, and cases are dealt with more quickly.

The proportion of pleas entered at the admin stage decreased from 79% in June 2015 to 66% in June 2025, while the proportion of pleas entered in the review stage increased from 14% to 25%, and from 6% to 9% in the trial stage over the same period. This presents challenges to timely access to justice and has flow-on implications for other parts of the system, such as remand rates.

District Court criminal: stage of guilty pleas 2015-2025



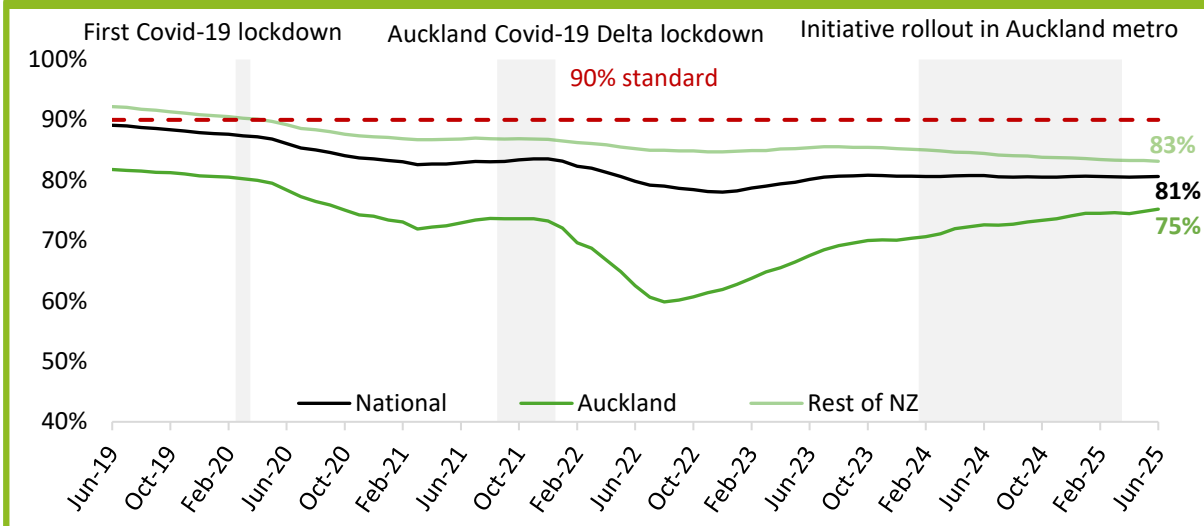
Source: Ministry of Justice

Recent progress

We are starting to see improvements in delays and backlogs through the Timely Justice Action Plan. As illustrated in the graph below, there has been a significant improvement in the proportion of cases being closed in Auckland since mid-2022 (following the impacts of both the national and Auckland specific COVID-19 lockdowns).⁷

The backlog has reduced and is probably closer now to a sustainable level.⁸ Nationally, active cases have decreased in the District Court by 9% since the Timely Justice Standard was implemented in February 2024, while active backlog cases decreased by 16%.

District Court criminal: Timely Justice Standard progress 2019-2025

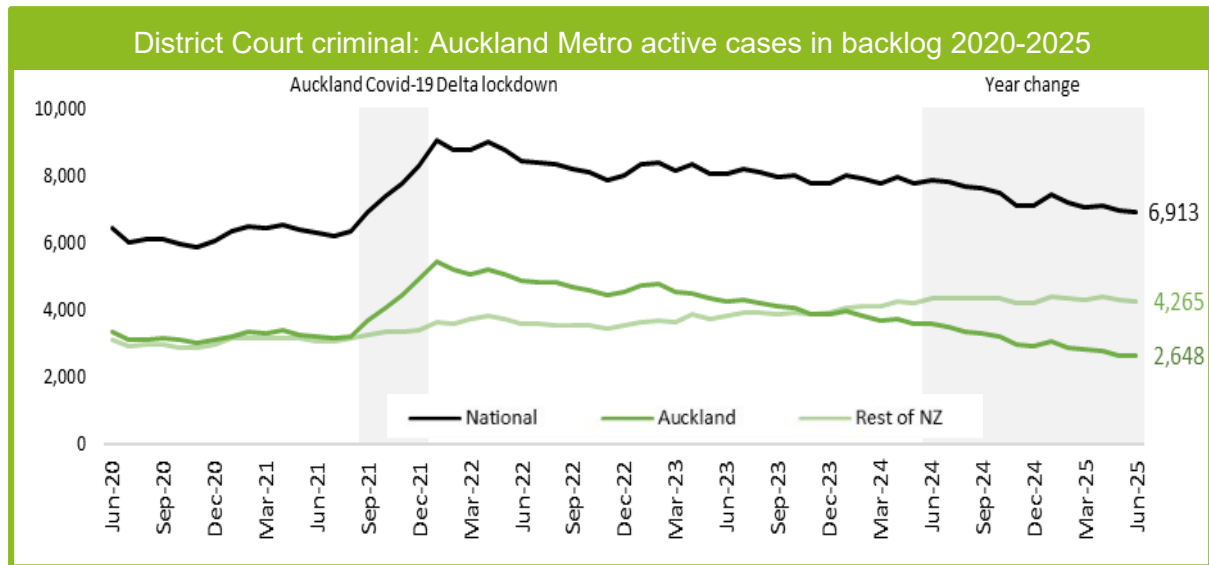


Source: Ministry of Justice

⁷ The work underway is aimed at meeting the requirements of the Timely Access to Justice protocol established in 2024, which sets a standard for 90% disposal of criminal cases within category-based thresholds.

⁸ Backlog refers to cases that have not met the 90% standard in the Timely Access to Justice protocol

Backlog cases now make up 18% of active cases, an improvement that has mostly been driven by courts in the Auckland metropolitan area. In total since February 2024, active cases have decreased by 17%, while backlog cases have decreased by 35%. These gains are freeing up resources and as a result, timely access to justice is expected to improve.

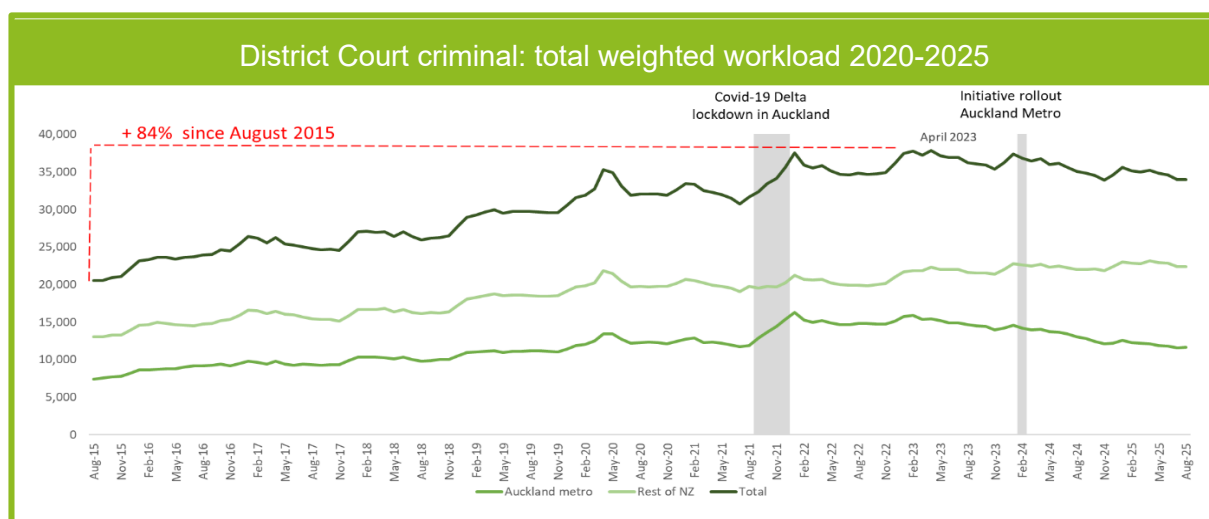


Source: Ministry of Justice

Total workload

The impact of improved results and targeted work in Auckland is further emphasized when looking at the total weighted workload. This is a new measure that looks at the total effort that would be needed to dispose of active cases. In effect, this is a proxy for court effort required, expressed as the number of days judges would need to work to dispose of all active cases. The graph below shows the total number of judge days required as of August 2025 for all active cases (which currently sits at 34,583 days).

Between August 2015 and April 2023, the number of judge days required nationally increased by 84%. In the graph below, you can see the situation improving in Auckland since then compared to the rest of New Zealand.



Source: Ministry of Justice

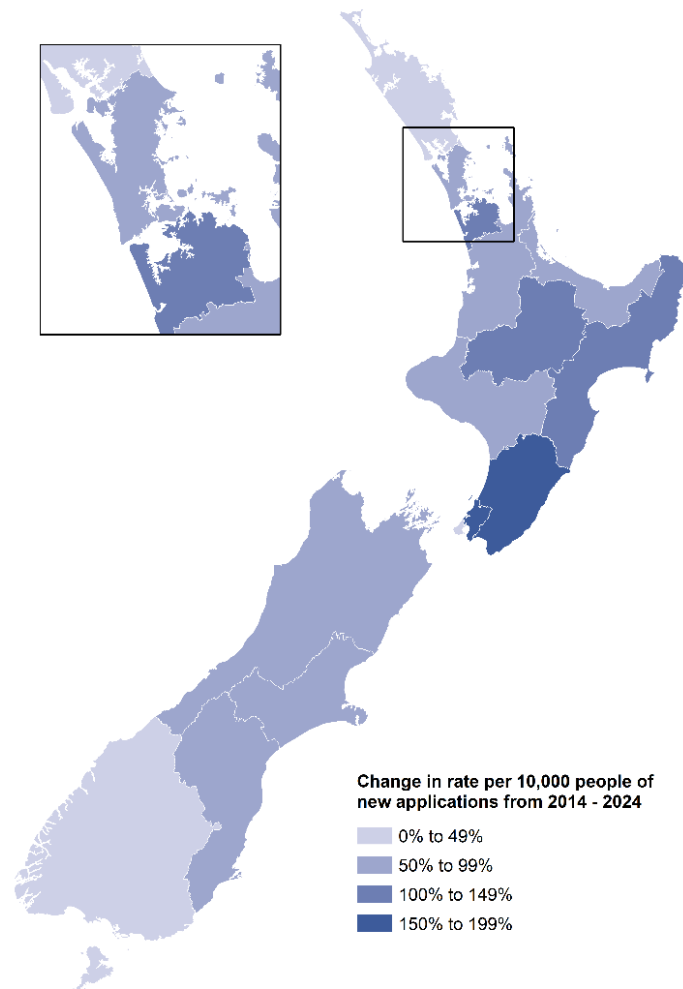
The civil jurisdiction

New civil cases in both the High Court and District Court are increasing over time.

Some of this appears to be a reflection of economic conditions, showing up as an increased number of insolvencies, and contract disputes.

This pattern varies around the country, as Map 4 shows, using data for District Court civil cases over the last 10 years:

Map 4: Change in population rate of new civil applications, 2014–2024⁹



Source: Ministry of Justice

A scan across some other civil jurisdictions (such as the Disputes Tribunal, Coroners Court) shows a similar picture, with an overall increase in active cases or applications, but also shows that the introduction of additional resources and new roles is starting to have an impact.

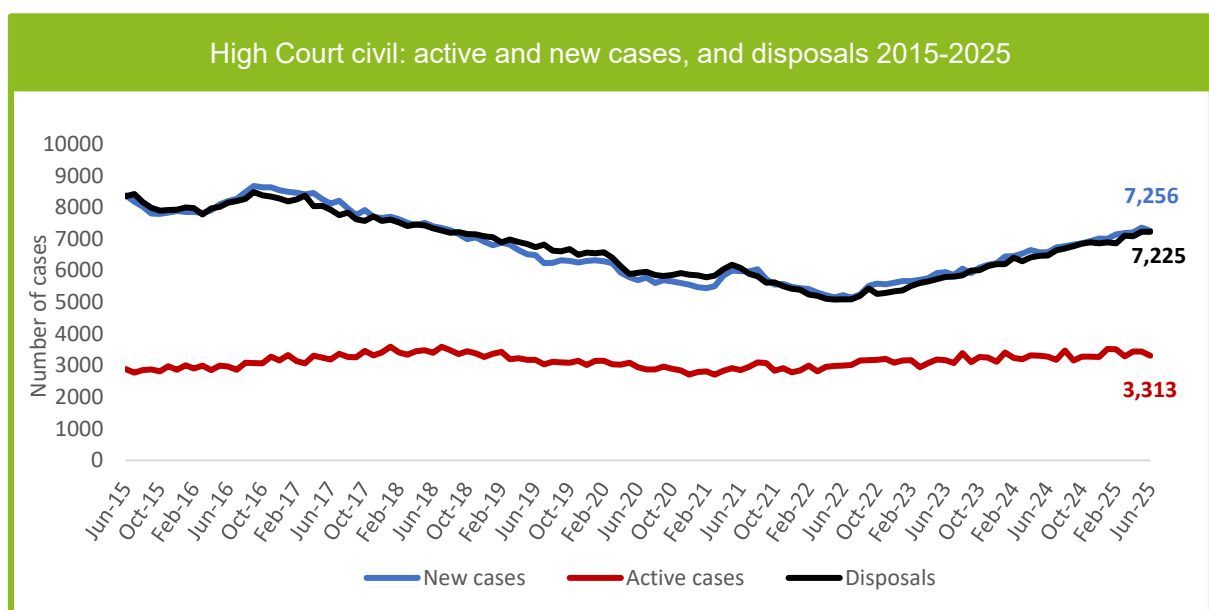
⁹ Population counts for Justice Service Area were created using the Integrated Data Infrastructure managed by Stats NZ. These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>.

Civil: the High Court

Key Points

- New civil cases in the High Court had been declining up to July 2022, but have increased steadily since then.
- Over the past 10 years disposals have largely kept pace with new cases.
- Overall, the number of active cases has remained reasonably static over the past 10 years.
- The increase in both new cases and disposals appears mostly driven by insolvency.

Active civil cases in the High Court have risen gradually over the past 10 years, and as of June 2024 sat at 3,313 cases (an increase of 15% over 10 years). Both new cases and disposals coming into the system were declining up until mid-2022, at which point both began to increase.



Source: Ministry of Justice

New cases and disposals have largely kept pace with one another. Although new cases coming into the system increased sharply from mid-2022 (which might be expected to lead to a corresponding increase in active cases), disposals increased at almost the same rate. This is due primarily to the high volume of cases that were disposed of without a defended hearing, such as insolvency and general proceedings cases, which we discuss in more detail below.

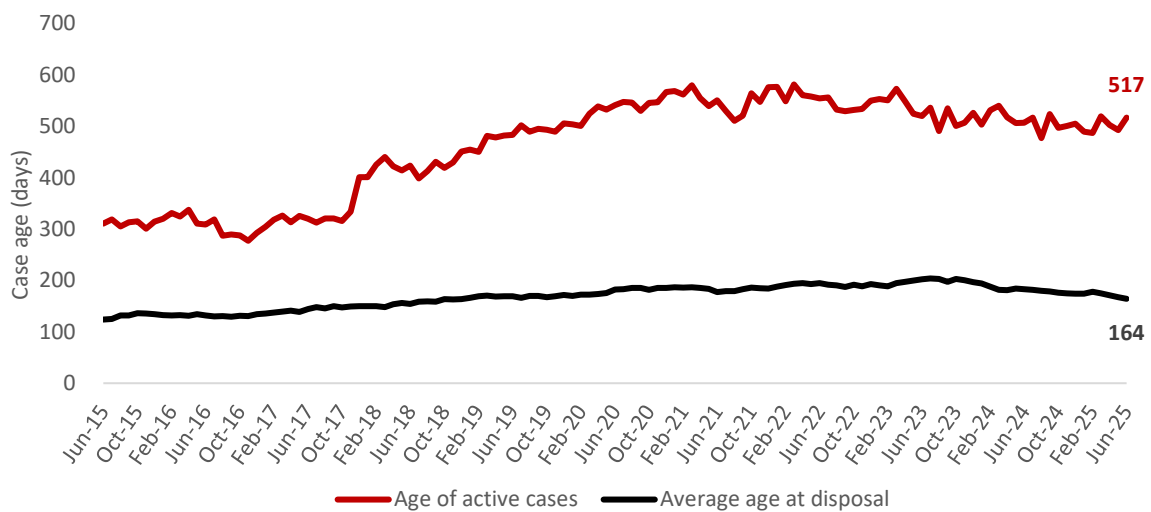
Timely access to justice

In terms of timely access to justice, the average age of an active case has increased by 66% over the past 10 years, to sit at 517 days as of June 2025.

It should be noted that the aged case data for the High Court civil jurisdiction is significantly influenced by a number of very complex and lengthy case types and proceedings.

Applications related to the Marine and Coastal Areas Act for example, can involve multiple parties, and proceedings may extend to very lengthy timeframes (possibly years). Similarly, cases involving the proceeds of crime can be quite complex, and may also require an extended length of time if linked to criminal proceedings. In these cases, civil action may be paused until criminal proceedings, including appeals, are concluded.

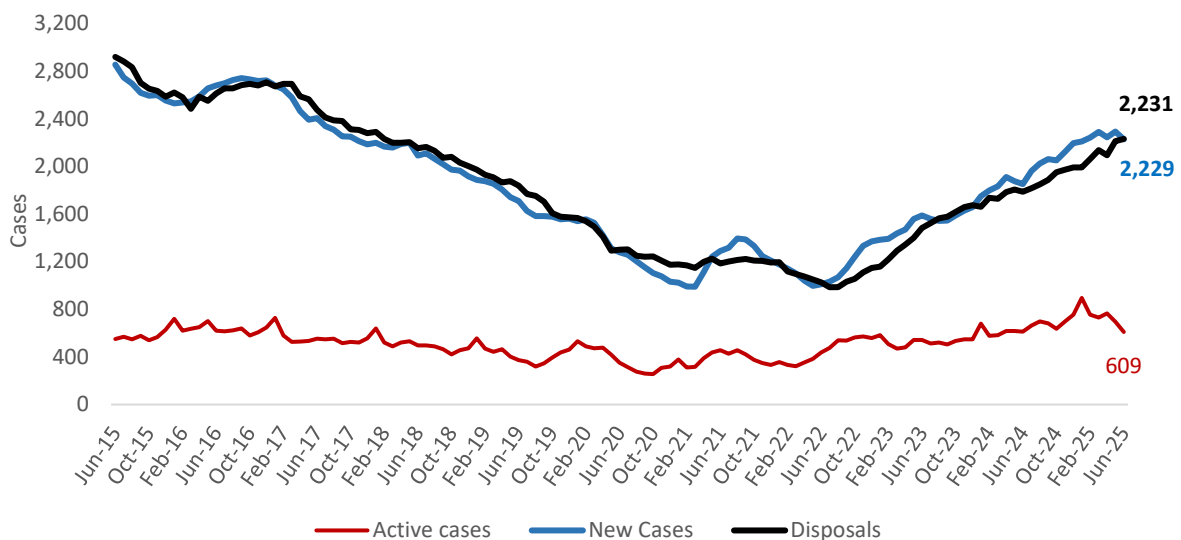
High Court civil: average age (days) for active cases and disposals 2015-2025



Source: Ministry of Justice

We do not yet understand all the factors that impact and influence the average age of active civil cases and disposals in the High Court. The lower average age for disposals (compared to active cases) is again probably the result of the high number of cases disposed of without a defended hearing, such as insolvency and general proceedings cases.

High Court civil: insolvencies - active and new cases, and disposals 2015-2025



Source: Ministry of Justice

In the three years from June 2022 to June 2025 new insolvency applications increased by 121% to 2,229, while the disposal of insolvency cases in the same period increased by 117% to 2,231.

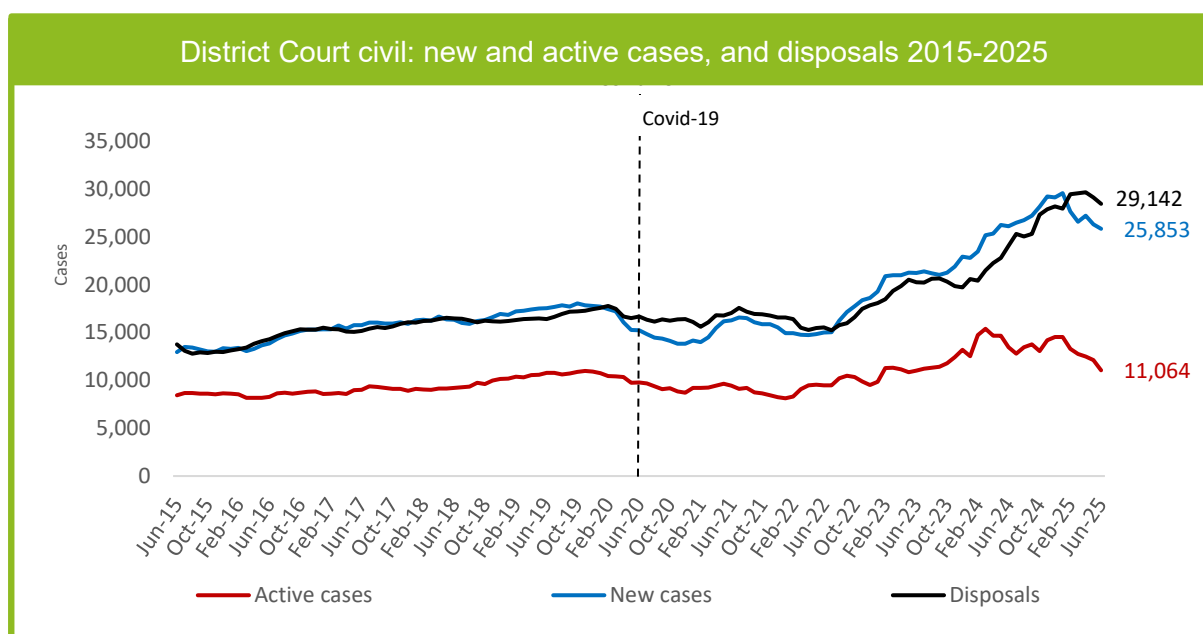
Civil: the District Court

Key Points

- Over the last 10 years to 2024, active civil cases in the District Court have increased.
- Most of that increase has been in the period 2022-2024.
- The significant reduction in average age in the past year is attributed to the work of the Judiciary and the Court's Central Registry, targeting and disposing of approximately 2,000 cases.

In the 10 year period from June 2015, active civil cases in the District Court increased by 30% with most of that growth occurring in the period 2022-2024. Since peaking in March 2024, active cases have decreased by 28% (going from 15,405 cases to the current June 2025 total of 11,064).

In the period June 2022 to June 2025, new cases grew by 72% (to sit at 25,835 cases by June 2025). In the same period the disposal of cases increased by 83%, to sit at 28,462 cases.



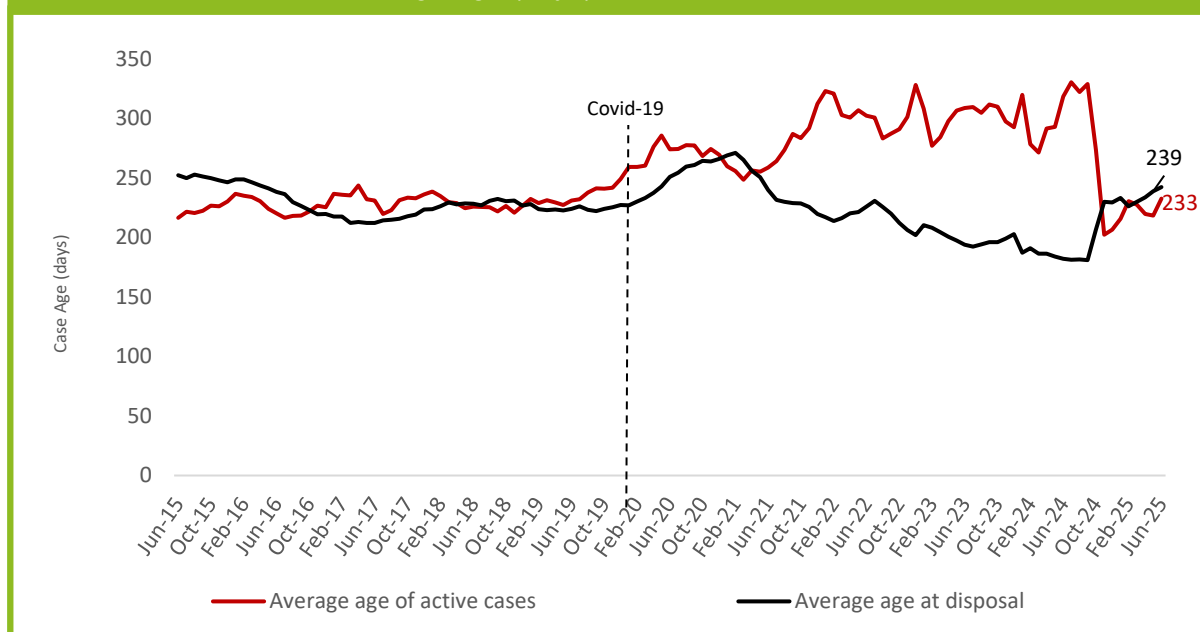
Source: Ministry of Justice

Timely access to justice

As of December 2024, the average age of an active case in the District Court's civil jurisdiction was 207 days, the lowest since November of 2018. Since then the age has increased slightly and as of June 2025 sat at 233 days.

Across the 10 year period from June 2015 to June 2025, the average age of an active District Court case increased only slightly (by 7%), from 217 days to 233 days. While the number of active cases increased markedly in the period 2022-2024, more recently the average age of active cases has been reducing sharply (by 26% since mid-2024).

District Court Civil: average age (days) of active cases and disposals 2015-2025



Source: Ministry of Justice

Developments in the District Court's civil jurisdiction

The recent significant reduction in aged cases is attributed to the Judiciary and the Court's Central Registry targeting and disposing of 2,000 cases. A case management approach was taken to address aged cases in the Auckland metropolitan area, which saw the average age of active cases reduce by 103 days. More recently towards the end of 2024 and into 2025, there has been a slight increase in the average age of both active cases and disposals. This is due to the closure of older cases which has the effect of raising the overall average age at the time the cases are counted.

Active cases managed by the Court's Central Registry account for 91% of the District Court's active caseload.

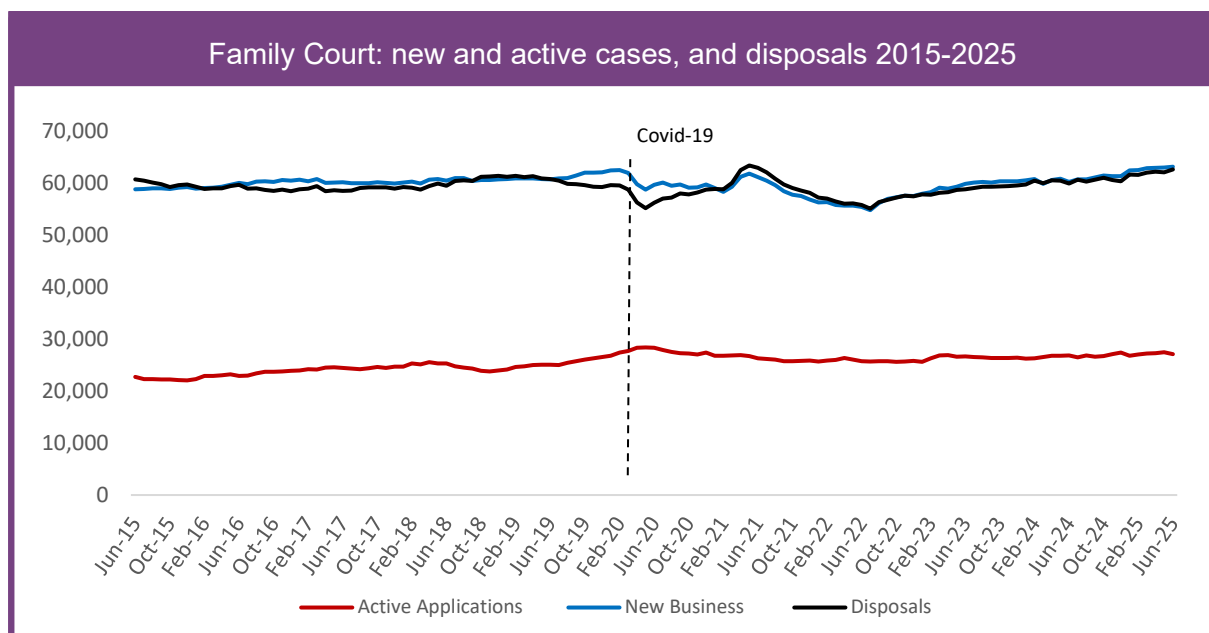
The Family Court

Key Points

- Family Court applications have increased modestly over the past 10 years.
- Family violence, mental health, property, and protection of personal and property rights applications¹⁰ have all increased in volume.
- Care of children applications, Oranga Tamariki applications and family proceedings have all declined.
- Care of children applications remain the largest proportion of applications, followed by mental health applications.
- Protection of personal and property rights has experienced the highest growth, having doubled in volume over the last 10 years.

New Family Court applications have crept up over the past 10 years, sitting at 63,146 in June 2025, up moderately from 58,829 in December 2015.

Active applications to the Court increased from 22,738 in 2015 to 27,088 in 2025 (an increase of 21%).



Source: Ministry of Justice

The composition of active cases and applications has shifted. Family violence, mental health, property, and the protection of personal and property rights applications have all increased in volume, while Care of Children, Oranga Tamariki applications, and family proceedings have all declined.

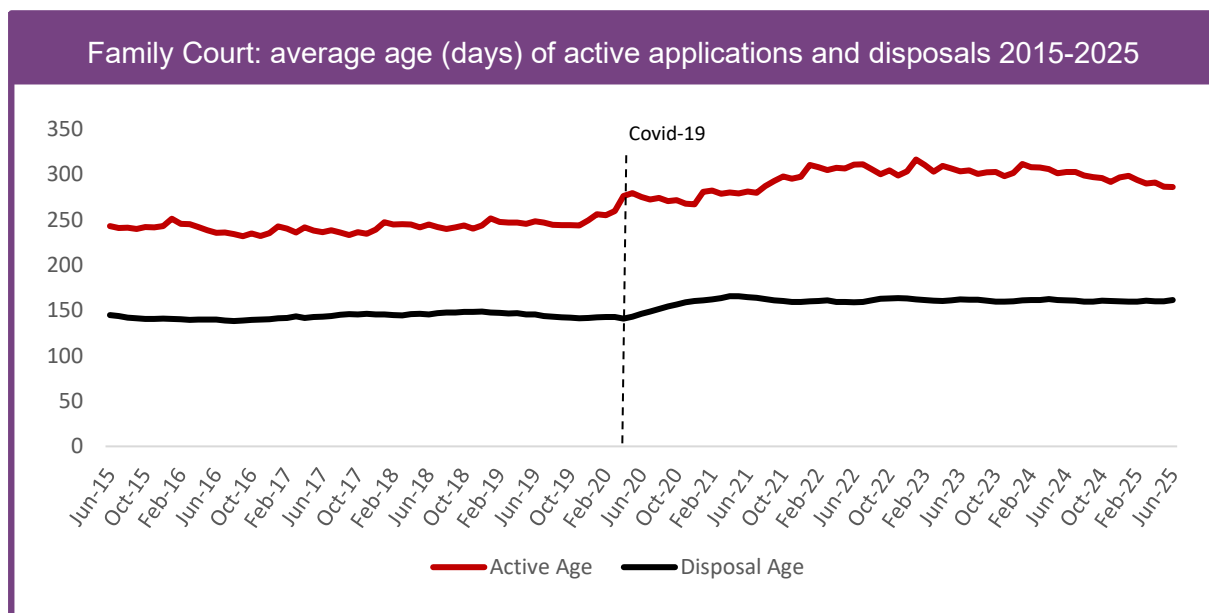
Protection of personal and property rights applications show the highest rate of growth, having doubled in the past 10 years from 6% of total in 2014/15 to 12% in 2023/24.

¹⁰ 'Property applications' refers to issues related to property in relationships, while 'the protection of property and personal rights' relates to the capacity of people to manager their own personal or property affairs.

Applications for Care of Children have consistently been the largest volume of applications (27% of the total in 2023/24), followed by mental health at 16%.

Timely access to justice

The average age of active Family Court applications has increased by 22% over the past 10 years, going from 243 days in 2015 to 286 days by June 2025. The pandemic played a part in this, as for other jurisdictions. COVID-19 reduced the capacity of the Court to progress cases, as well as increasing the number of active applications and the average age of those applications post-COVID-19.



Source: Ministry of Justice

Family Court applications by nature involve a high degree of complexity as well as vulnerable participants. There has been a general increase in the complexity of cases, including those involving family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol, or a combination of those factors.

This can have a significant effect on the overall management, timing, and scheduling of court processes. For example:

- The nature of the Court's work is such that some matters must be dealt with urgently, such as care and protection of children where there is immediate risk of harm. This can lead to delays for other matters.
- While the overall volume of Care of Children applications has declined over 10 years, the complexity of the work has increased.
- The proportion of applications under the Care of Children Act that are defended has increased from 57% to 70% over the past 10 years. This requires considerably more Court time (as of December 2024, disposing of a defended application took 413 days on average, compared to 193 days for an undefended application).

Developments in the Family Court

Efforts have been made to address challenges in the Family Court system, including improvements to the quality and accessibility of information about the Family Court for users, operational attempts to improve timely access to justice, and the introduction of Family Court Associates. The Victims of Family Violence (Strengthening Legal Protections) Act 2025 will

strengthen the courts' statutory powers to protect victims of litigation abuse, where a perpetrator of family violence uses the court system to harass, contact, and control their victim.

The first Family Court Associates began work in April 2024, with further appointments made in 2025. Data to the end of June 2025 provides some preliminary outcomes:

- Judges are on average spending 77% of their time on judge-only issues, compared with 71% before the introduction of Family Court Associates.
- Settlement conferences increased nationally by 43% compared to the same period last year, through to 2,186. Family Court Associates completed around half of these.
- Disposals in the courts where the first set of Family Court Associates have been working increased by 4%, or 977, in the year to June 2025, compared to May 2024 before the introduction of Family Court Associates.

More time is needed to discern the impact of the Associates overall but results to date indicate the new roles are having a positive effect.

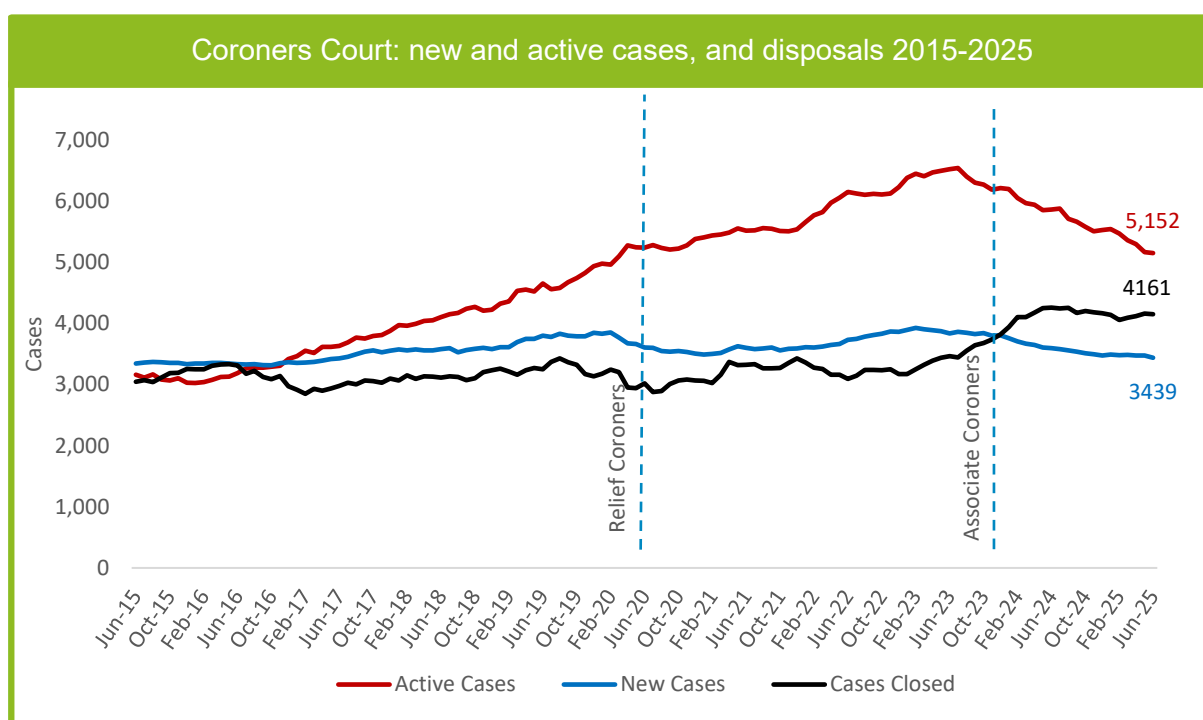
The Coroners Court

Key Points

- Active cases had been increasing steadily in the Coroners Court, peaking in July 2023.
- Since then, active cases have reduced significantly, driven by various measures, including increased judicial resources.
- The average age of findings has increased, due to a focus on resolving aged cases.

The number of active coronial cases had been increasing for a number of years, peaking in July 2023 at 6,544 cases. More recently in the 12 months to June 2025, the number of active cases decreased by 12% to 5,152 – back to levels last seen in late 2021. The number of cases closed between June 2023 and June 2025 increased by 20%, to sit at 4,161 in June 2025.

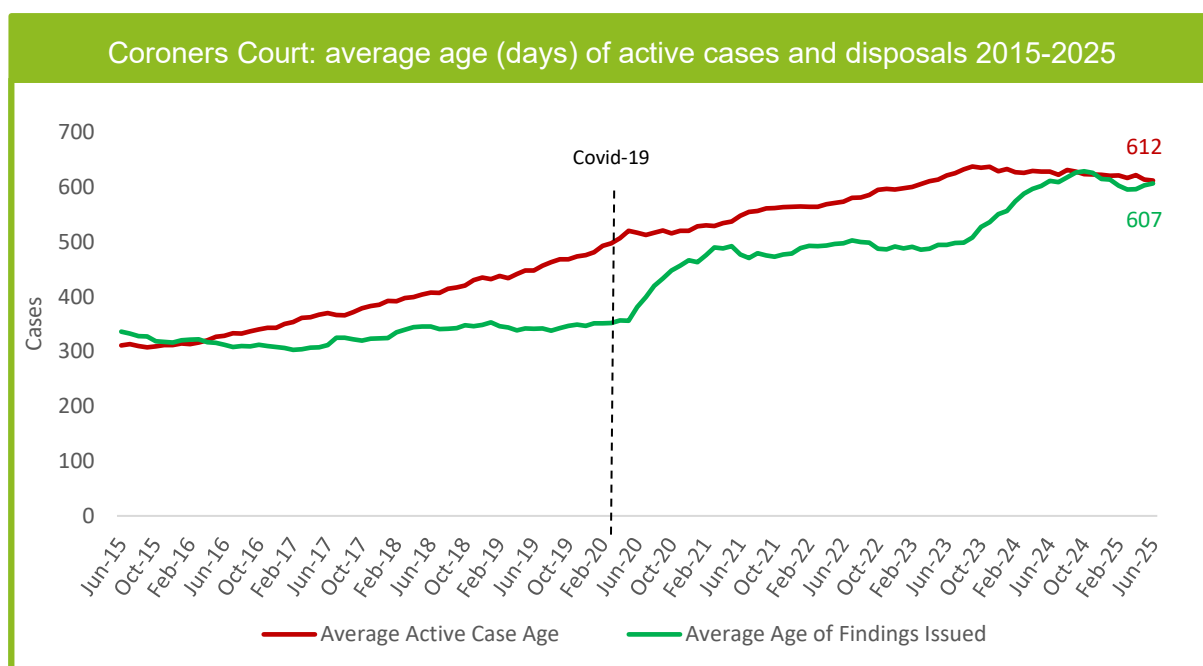
New cases coming into the system also decreased by 10% for the period June 2023 to June 2025, to sit at 3,439. The decrease in new cases did not match an equivalent decrease in the number of registered deaths in New Zealand over the past 2 years, as might be expected. This suggests the decrease in cases is unique to the Coroners Court, and is likely due to the work of Clinical Advisors who were introduced to help prevent natural cause deaths entering the Court unnecessarily, through the implementation of improved reporting guidance for health practitioners.



Source: Ministry of Justice

Timely access to justice

The average age of active cases had been increasing over a 10-year period, reaching a peak in November 2023 at 647 days. More recently, the average active age has started to decrease (although modestly, at 3% over the 12 months from June 2024 to June 2025).



Source: Ministry of Justice

The average age of findings issued increased from 495 days in June 2023 to 607 days by June 2025, having remained relatively stable for the prior two years. This reflects the recent disposal of older cases. The focus on aged cases has shifted the composition of cases in the system towards more recent cases.

Developments in the Coroners Court

The increased closure of cases is the result of concerted efforts across the Coroners Court system. These efforts include better case management, the expansion of judicial resourcing (the addition of more permanent and relief Coroners and then new Associate Coroners enabled by a law change in 2023), a new team of Clinical Advisors, initiatives to reduce the number of natural cause deaths being reported to the Coroner and improve case progression, and an increased focus on reducing backlog in the second half of 2023.

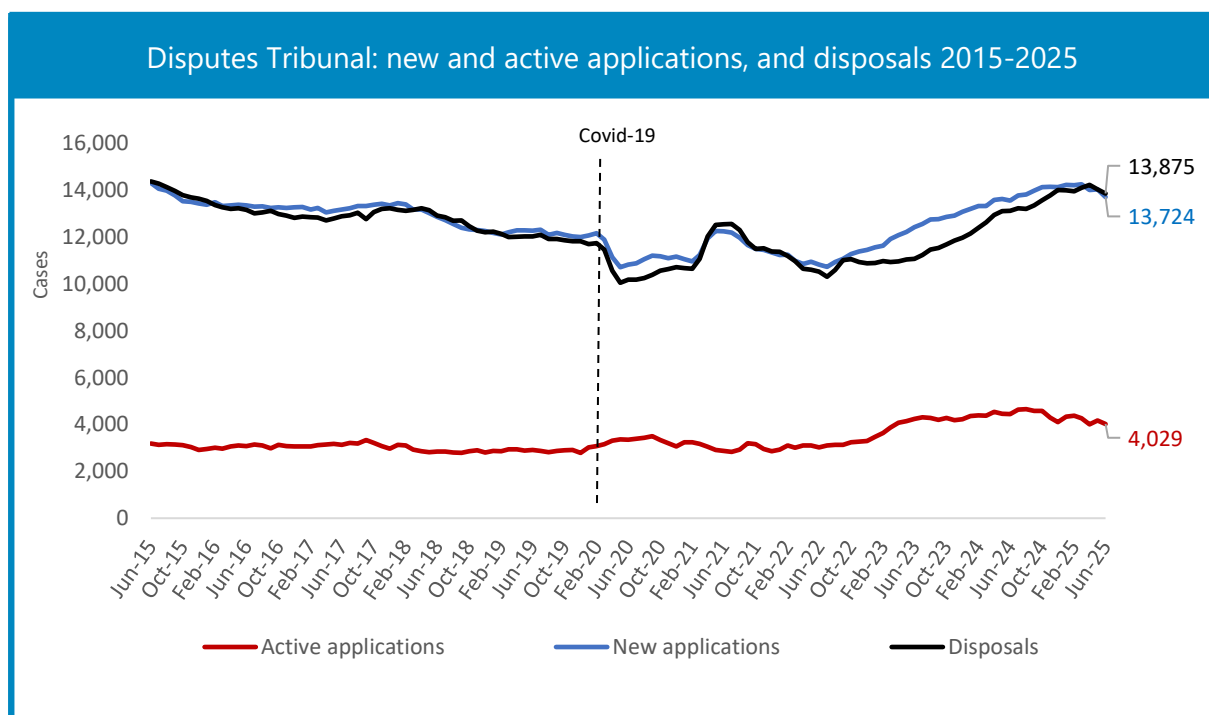
The Disputes Tribunal

Key Points

- Over the past 10 years the number of active applications has increased by a quarter.
- More recently, disposals have exceeded new applications coming in.
- A slight increase in the average age of disposals reflects a focus on resolving older applications in the system.
- New measures are being taken in 2025 to allow the Tribunal to manage an anticipated increase in applications, following the increase in its financial jurisdiction.

Over the 10-year period to June 2025, the Disputes Tribunal's caseload increased 26% to 4,029 active applications. Most of this increase occurred from mid-2022 to mid-2023. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tribunal use had been declining steadily (as shown in the graph below). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, applications have increased back to 2015 levels.

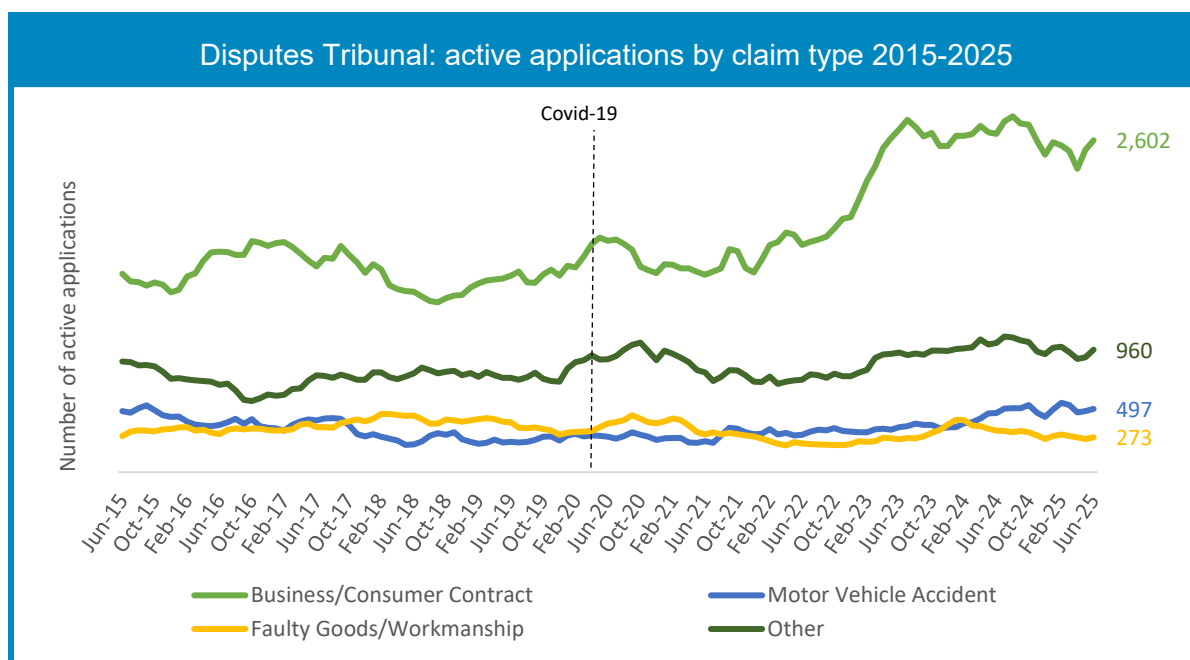
More recently disposals have exceeded new applications. Through to June 2025 the Tribunal received 13,724 new applications and disposed of 13,875 applications.



Source: Ministry of Justice

The increase in new claims over the past five years is due in part to increased awareness of the Tribunal's role and accessibility. This is attributed to: improved promotion of the Disputes Tribunal among community groups, increased media coverage of outcomes, the simplification of processes (such as forms), and the ability for parties to attend remotely via phone and audiovisual technology.

The Tribunal has recently seen a sizeable increase in applications that reflect the impact of economic hardship on consumers and small businesses. This can be seen in the graph below. For the 12 months through to December 2024, 61% of the Tribunal's caseload comprised issues relating to business or consumer contracts, with active applications increasing significantly over three years from September 2021 to September 2024.



Source: Ministry of Justice

It is difficult to predict how much the Disputes Tribunal's workload will increase when its financial jurisdiction is increased from \$30,000 to \$60,000. Modelling suggests that this change might result in around 2,000 additional claims over the next 3-5 years.

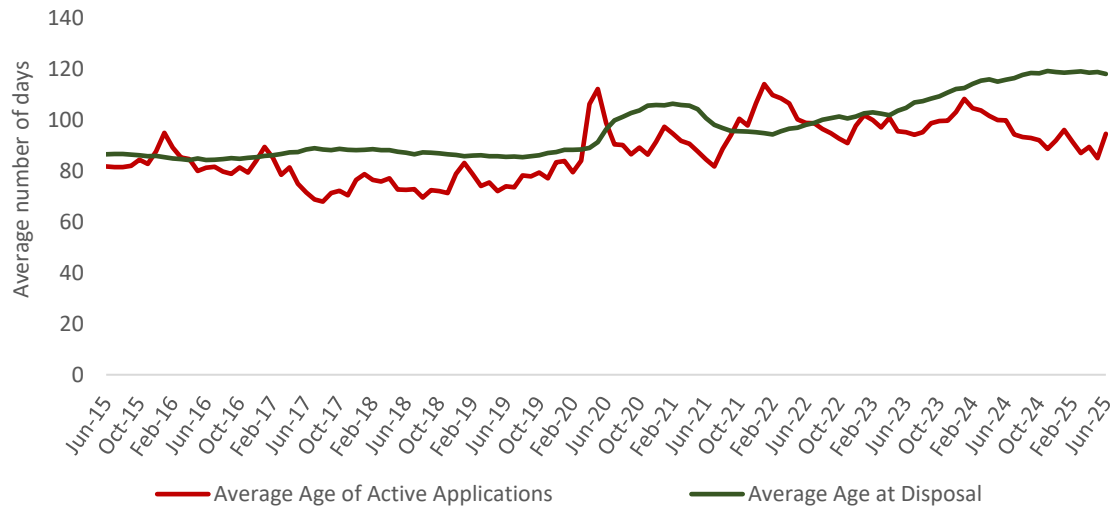
Timely access to justice

The average age of active Disputes Tribunal applications has increased by 16% over the past 10 years, and sat at 95 days as of June 2025.

As applications increased from 2022 to 2024, timely access to justice declined due to resourcing issues (primarily a 25% decrease in the number of Referees, who are responsible for hearing disputes). This caused an increase in the overall active application caseload. More recently in the 12 months from June 2024 to June 2025, however, the average age of active applications has decreased by 5%. As of August 2025, the average age was 83 days. This improvement reflects a return to a full complement of Referees at the start of 2025.

The average age of disposals has also increased over the last 10 years. Since 2023 however, there has been a greater focus on aged cases, which has the contrasting effect of increasing the average age of disposals at the time they are counted (when applications are disposed of, if there are a higher number of older applications at the time this will create an overall higher average age).

Disputes Tribunal: average age (days) of active applications & disposals 2015-2025



Source: Ministry of Justice

In recent months the average age of disposals has reduced significantly as the last few hundred aged claims from the 2023-2024 years are resolved and processed (the average age of disposal in June was 118 days compared to 101 days by August 2025).

Ongoing developments

The Disputes Tribunal exists to provide speedy, low cost and effective access to justice for lower value claims. Timely access to justice is therefore a critical part of its brief.

By the end of 2025, additional timely access to justice measures will be implemented to ensure all new business is dealt with efficiently, and to absorb the expected increase in claims as the level of financial jurisdiction lifts. These measures include scheduling changes, updated case management protocols and a move from paper files to electronic file sharing. These initiatives will enable applications and outcomes to be shifted around the country faster and for claims to be allocated and scheduled in a more efficient and flexible manner.

Ministry of Justice
Tāhū o te Ture

justice.govt.nz

info@justice.govt.nz

0800 COURTS
0800 268 787

National Office
Justice Centre | 19 Aitken St
DX SX10088 | Wellington | New Zealand

