LifeCare

Primary Industries Workforce Intelligence Report 2026

Five years of workforce health insights from New Zealand's forestry, agriculture, horticulture and fishery sectors.

Period 2021 - 2025

lifecare.co.nz

Executive Summary

New Zealand's primary industries depend on a workforce capable of performing physically demanding, safety-critical work in challenging environments. Whether operating heavy machinery, working in remote locations, handling livestock, harvesting crops or processing food, workforce capability is fundamental to operational performance.

LifeCare analysed anonymised workplace health assessment data collected **between 2021 and 2025** across New Zealand's **forestry, agriculture, horticulture** and **fishery sectors**.

~15,000
Workplace health assessments

202
Primary Industries Worksites

2,425
Employees assessed in 2021

2,927
Employees assessed in 2025

Primary Industries Workforce Snapshot

Overall workforce wellness has declined despite increasing participation in health assessments. More importantly, several independent health indicators are deteriorating simultaneously, suggesting a broader shift in workforce capability rather than isolated health issues.

The strongest emerging risks include:

- Declining overall workforce wellness
- Persistent workers outside the normal range for BMI and cholesterol
- Rapid deterioration in near vision screening outcomes
- Declining blood pressure within normal range

Individually, these findings are important. Together they indicate a workforce that may be becoming progressively less resilient to the physical demands of the job.

For organisations operating in safety-critical environments, these are not simply health statistics; they are leading indicators of operational risk, absenteeism, ACC exposure, productivity loss and workforce sustainability.

	Trend
Overall Workforce Wellness	⌄⌄ 81.7% → 75.9%
Overall Health Screening Participation	⌃⌃ +19% since 2021
Possible Noise-Induced Hearing Loss	~18-22% (persistent across five years)
Employees Outside Health BMI Range	~80% persistent
Workers Outside Normal Cholesterol Range	32-41% persistent
Near Vision Referrals	⌃⌃ 8.8% → 25.7%
Blood Pressure Within Normal Range	⌄⌄ 93.2% → 83.8%

The strongest message from the data is not that every health measure is worsening. It is that several long-standing risks, including hearing, metabolic health and cholesterol, remain consistently high, while new concerns such as declining vision and blood pressure are emerging. This suggests organisations should move beyond compliance monitoring and use workforce health information to prioritise preventative action.

Insight One

The Silent Cost of Hearing Loss

The finding

#1

Possible noise-induced hearing loss has remained consistently high at approximately **one in five workers** over five years. In 2025, a new category of "Other Hearing Loss" emerged, affecting more than 5% of workers assessed.

Why This Matters

Persistent hearing loss indicates that existing controls may not be delivering the expected long-term outcomes.
For organisations operating machinery, chainsaws, harvesters, tractors, forklifts or processing equipment, hearing loss affects more than communication. It influences:

- Hazard awareness
- Emergency response
- Team communication
- Situational awareness
- Overall workplace safety

Questions Leaders Should Consider



- Are hearing outcomes **improving year on year**?
- Which **roles** have the **highest exposure**?
- Are current **hearing conservation** programmes **effective**?
- Are **engineering controls reducing exposure** or simply managing compliance?

How LifeCare Helps

- Audiometry and Occupational Health Monitoring
- Hearing Conservation Programme Reviews
- Noise Exposure Trend Analysis
- Site-by-site reporting
- Mobile Health Clinics for remote locations
- Health data benchmarking against industry trends

Insight Two

Vision: An Emerging Safety Risk

The Finding

#2

Near vision referrals have almost tripled in two years, making it one of the **fastest-changing indicators** in the dataset.

Business Implications

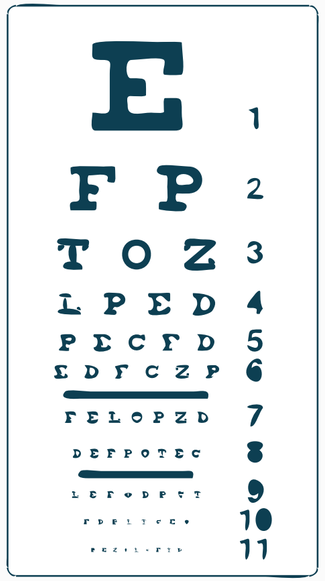
Good vision is essential for:

- Machinery operation
- Reading instrumentation
- Chemical handling
- Equipment maintenance
- Quality control
- Vehicle operation

Declining vision increases operational risk long before employees recognise the issue themselves.

Questions Leaders Should Ask

- Are **equipment operators** receiving r**egular vision screening**?
- Is our **workforce ageing**?
- Are current **screening intervals** appropriate?
- Could **vision** be contributing to **near misses**?



How LifeCare Helps

- Workplace Health Checks
- Vision Screening
- Fitness for Work Assessments
- Pre-employment Medicals
- Periodic health reviews

Insight Three

The Metabolic Health Challenge

The finding

#3

Approximately **80% of workers** remain **outside the healthy BMI range.** Between **32% and 41%** sit **outside the normal cholesterol range.** These trends have remained remarkably consistent.

Metabolic health influences:

- Injury recovery
- Physical endurance
- Cardiovascular health
- Fatigue
- Long-term absenteeism

These findings represent an opportunity for **preventative health initiatives** rather than reactive interventions.

How LifeCare Helps

- Corporate Health Checks
- Cardiovascular screening
- Lifestyle education
- Wellbeing initiatives
- Flu Vaccination Programmes

The Missing Metric

Mental Health and Rural Isolation

The dataset highlights another important consideration.
Psychological wellbeing remains under-measured despite known sector challenges, including:

#1

- Remote work
- Isolation
- Seasonal pressure
- Long working hours
- Labour shortages
- Financial uncertainty

Without proactive measurement and education, organisations may only become aware of issues once they affect performance or retention.

How LifeCare Helps

- Mental Health Awareness Training
- Manager workshops
- Mental wellbeing seminars
- K10 wellbeing screening

Connecting the Dots

None of these findings should be viewed independently. Hearing, vision and metabolic health often interact. A worker experiencing several moderate health risks simultaneously may be significantly more vulnerable to:

- Workplace incidents
- Reduced productivity
- Slower recovery
- Increased absenteeism
- Higher ACC exposure

This is why workforce health should be viewed as a strategic business asset rather than a compliance activity.

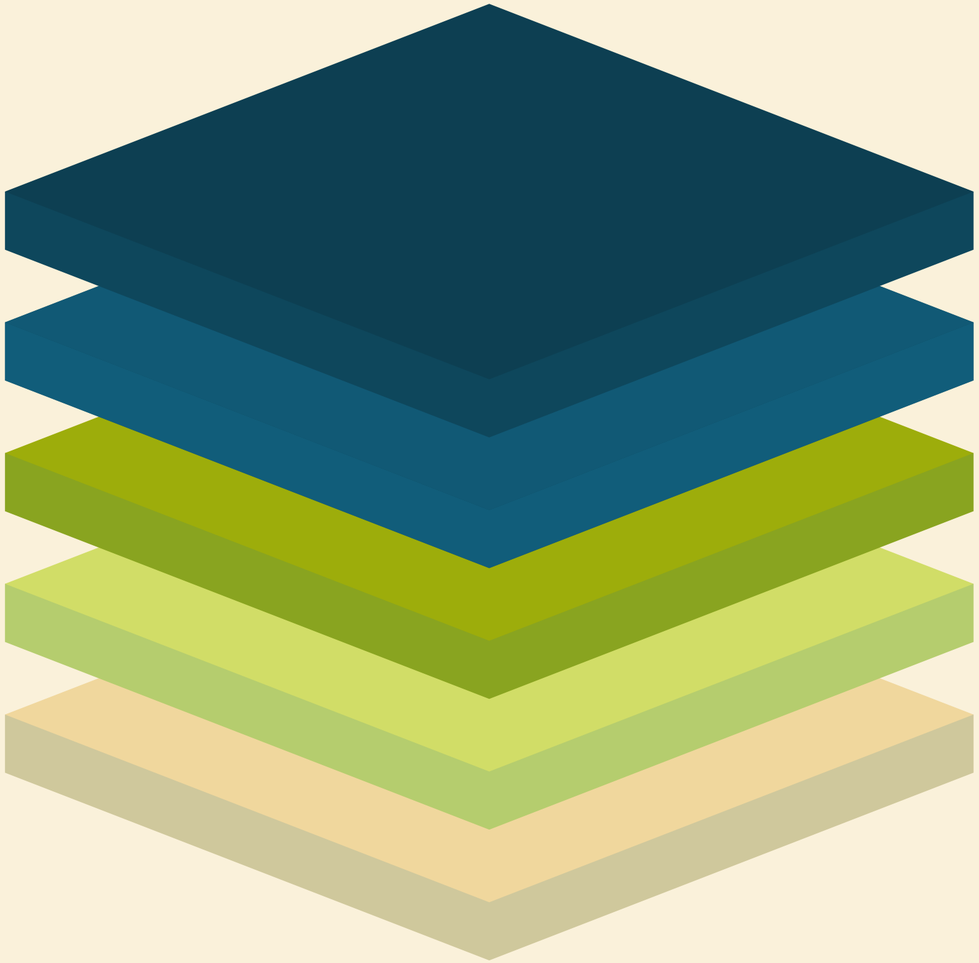
From Health Data to Business Intelligence

Leading organisations increasingly use workforce health information to:

- Identify emerging risks before incidents occur
- Benchmark health trends across sites and business units
- Support an ageing workforce
- Improve workforce planning
- Prioritise health investment
- Strengthen operational resilience
- Measure the effectiveness of wellbeing programmes over time



Questions Every Leader Should Be Asking



01 Is our workforce becoming more resilient or less resilient?

02 Which risks are increasing fastest? Which locations or teams require targeted intervention?

03 Are seasonal peaks influencing health outcomes? Are older workers concentrated in higher-risk roles?

04 Are our current health programmes reducing risk or simply measuring it?

05 Do our pre-employment and periodic medical standards reflect the physical demands of today's roles?

Why LifeCare?

LifeCare supports organisations across NZ with **integrated occupational health solutions** that combine **clinical expertise** with **actionable workforce intelligence.** Rather than delivering isolated health assessments, we help organisations **understand the trends behind the data** and prioritise interventions that improve both employee wellbeing and business performance.

Our services include:

- Workplace Health Monitoring
- Pre-employment Medicals
- Functional Capacity Assessments
- Random Drug & Alcohol Testing
- DL9 Driver's Medicals
- Respirator Fit Testing
- Mental Health Training
- Fatigue Assessments
- Flu Vaccinations
- Nationwide Mobile Clinics

Benchmark Your Workforce

Every organisation is different. The most valuable question is not whether these trends exist across NZ. It is whether they exist within your workforce.

LifeCare can help benchmark your workforce against industry trends, identify emerging risks and provide practical recommendations tailored to your operations. **Understanding your workforce today is one of the most effective ways to reduce tomorrow's health, safety and productivity risks.**

We are where you are!

The LifeCare team is based all over the country. We bring our staff as required to service our clients in any location.



LifeCare

Thank you!

info@lifecare.co.nz
0800 493 559

lifecare.co.nz