





females who experience greater early-life adversity (16). In particular, recent evidence has suggested that females born in neighbourhoods of concentrated ethnic and economic privilege are less likely to experience early puberty than females born in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage (17). Therefore, a young person's ethnicity may affect pubertal timing, justifying why it was important for *Growing Up in New Zealand* to investigate the topic in relation to ethnicity.

Puberty and poor access to period products are associated with lower school attendance, engagement, and participation in extracurricular activities (13). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education has introduced a new programme called *Ikura|Manaakitia te whare tangata*, providing free period products in schools<sup>1</sup> (13, 18). The programme currently serves 2130 schools and kura nationwide, representing approximately 96% of estimated menstruating students (13). Phase 1 of the programme was rolled out in June 2021, with Phase 2 beginning in early 2022. The *Growing Up in New Zealand* 12-year DCW coincided with the end of Phase 1 and the beginning of Phase 2, when access to and the availability of period products in schools may have been less extensive, limiting our results' applicability to the programme's current state.

Asking the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort about puberty allowed us to estimate puberty stages among 12-year-olds in Aotearoa, New Zealand and examine early and late development trends. We also captured young people's feelings about the processes their bodies are undergoing, providing insights that can inform a more inclusive Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum. Females were also asked about their access to free period products at school, giving insight into the success of *Ikura|Manaakitia te whare tangata*.

### 3. What can *Growing Up in New Zealand* add?

This report will examine young people's experiences of puberty using data from the 12-year DCW of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* longitudinal study. We investigated the cohort's pubertal development at age 12 to determine whether this differed by sex assigned at birth or self-reported ethnicity. We also explored how young people felt about the changes happening to their bodies, highlighting the diverse experiences of young people according to their sex and ethnicity. This report also describes the average age of first menstruation and use of free period products in schools among females who reported they had begun menstruating by aged 12.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ikura|Manaakitia te whare tangata* is currently offered to all levels of state and state-integrated schools and kura in New Zealand (13). Most young people in the *Growing Up in New Zealand* cohort were in Year 7 and 8 during the 12-year DCW.























































