Human Ethics Committee Processing Timeframes

Service level report for period ending 31 October 2026

Introduction

This report outlines the service commitments and actual ethics application processing timeframes for the Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee (AHREC) and University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC).

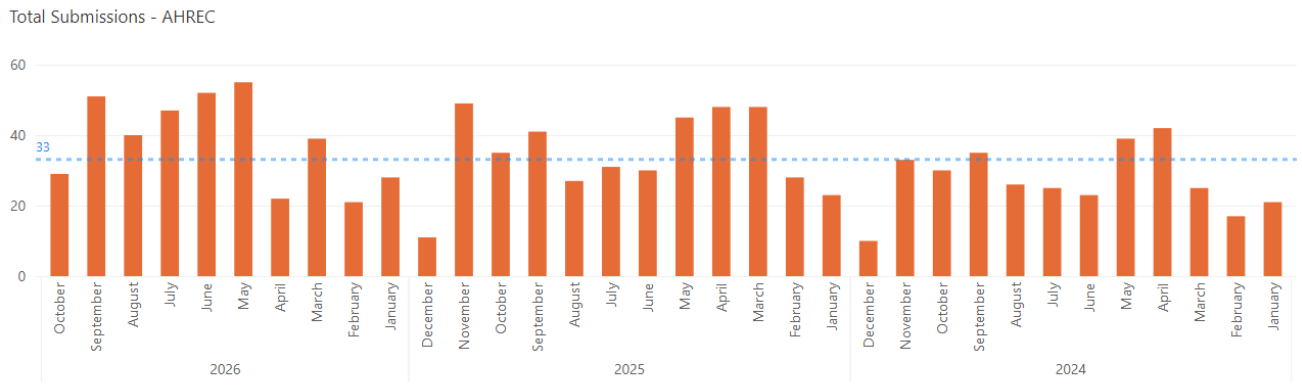
Service Commitments

From November 2026, the Human Ethics Secretariat will implement the following Service Commitments for AHREC and UAHPEC, providing researchers with a clear indication of expected processing timeframes at the point of application.

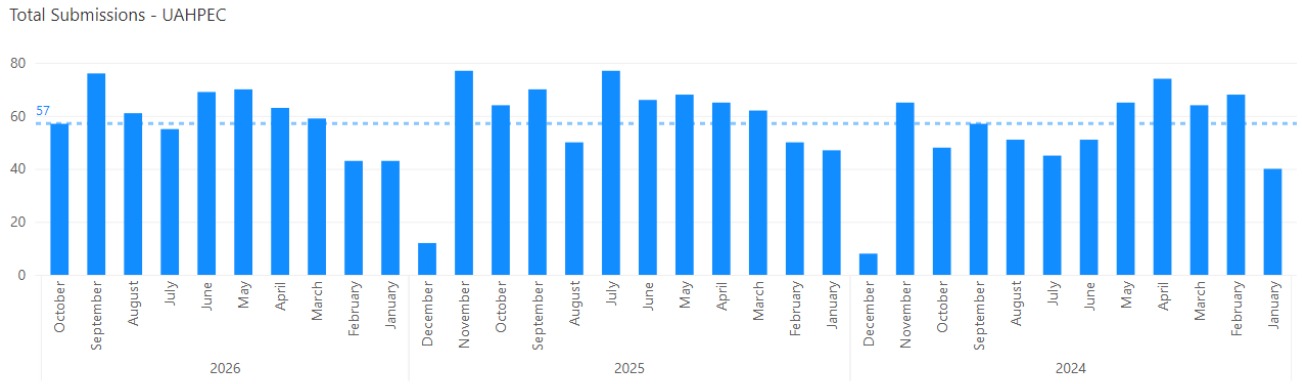
Indicator	AHREC	UAHPEC
Approval throughput	45 applications per month	61 applications per month
Median processing timeframe, all applications	70 days or less	60 days or less
Median processing timeframe, Expedited Review	60 days or less	50 days or less
Median processing timeframe, Full Review	80 days or less	70 days or less

Submission Volumes

Submission volumes remained high in 2026, with 951 applications received across AHREC and UAHPEC between January and October. This was 2% above the same period in 2025 and 24% above 2024. The increase was driven by AHREC, which received 377 submissions (up 8% on 2025 and 51% on 2024). Demand was sustained from May to September, with 240 submissions received at an average of 48 per month, well above the longer-term average of 33 submissions per month. AHREC now accounts for around 40% of combined submissions, compared with 33% in 2024, indicating a continuing shift in workload towards AHREC.



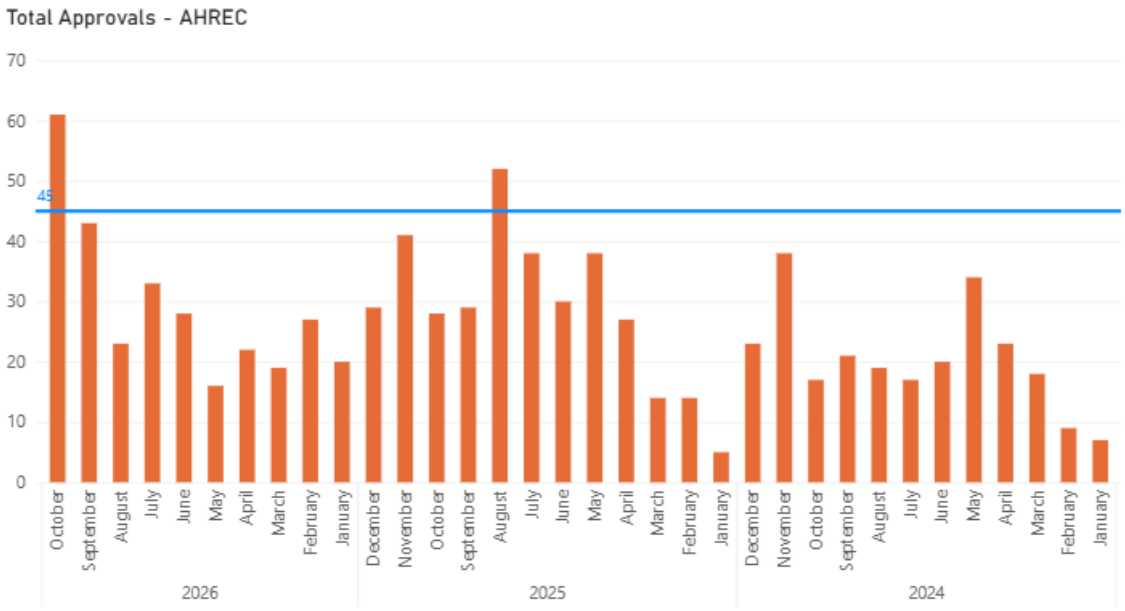
UAHPEC received 574 submissions between January and October 2026, broadly consistent with the 582 submissions received over the same period in 2025 and 11% above 2024. Monthly volumes averaged 57 applications, in line with the longer-term average.



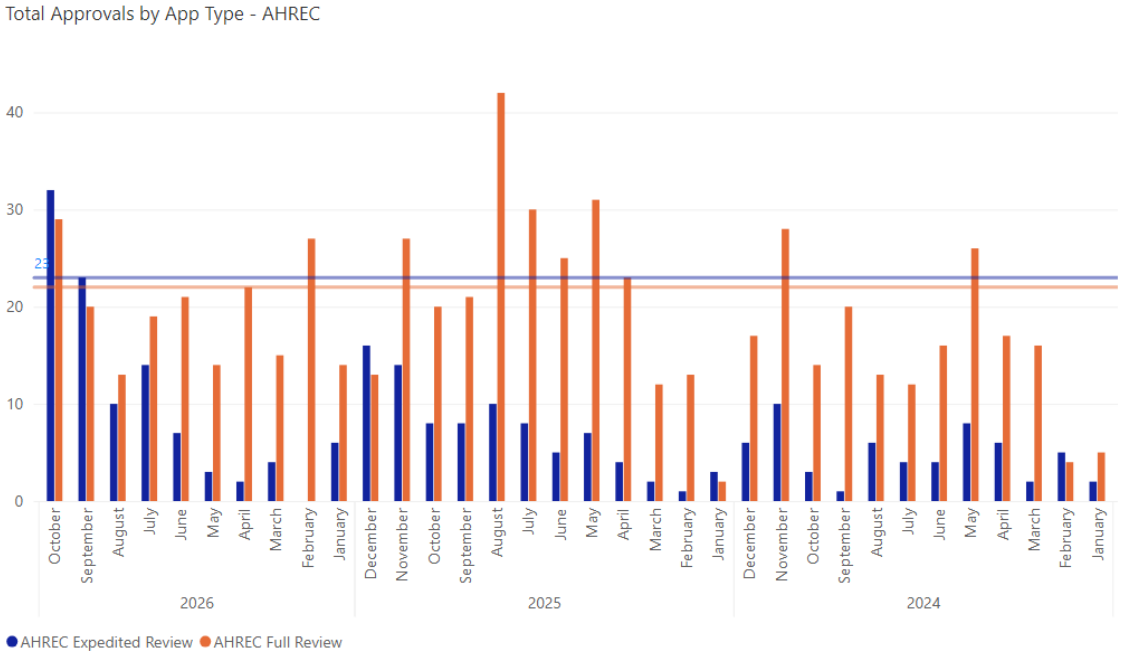
AHREC Approval Volumes

AHREC approval volumes were lower than submission volumes in seven of the first ten months of 2026, reflecting unplanned leave and wider resourcing challenges within the Human Ethics Secretariat. Across this period, AHREC received 377 submissions and recorded 292 approvals, with approval throughput particularly constrained between March and August.

Performance improved materially in September and October, with 43 and 61 applications approved respectively. October recorded the highest monthly approval volume in the three-year period, allowing the Human Ethics Secretariat to materially reduce the backlog that had accumulated by the end of August 2026.



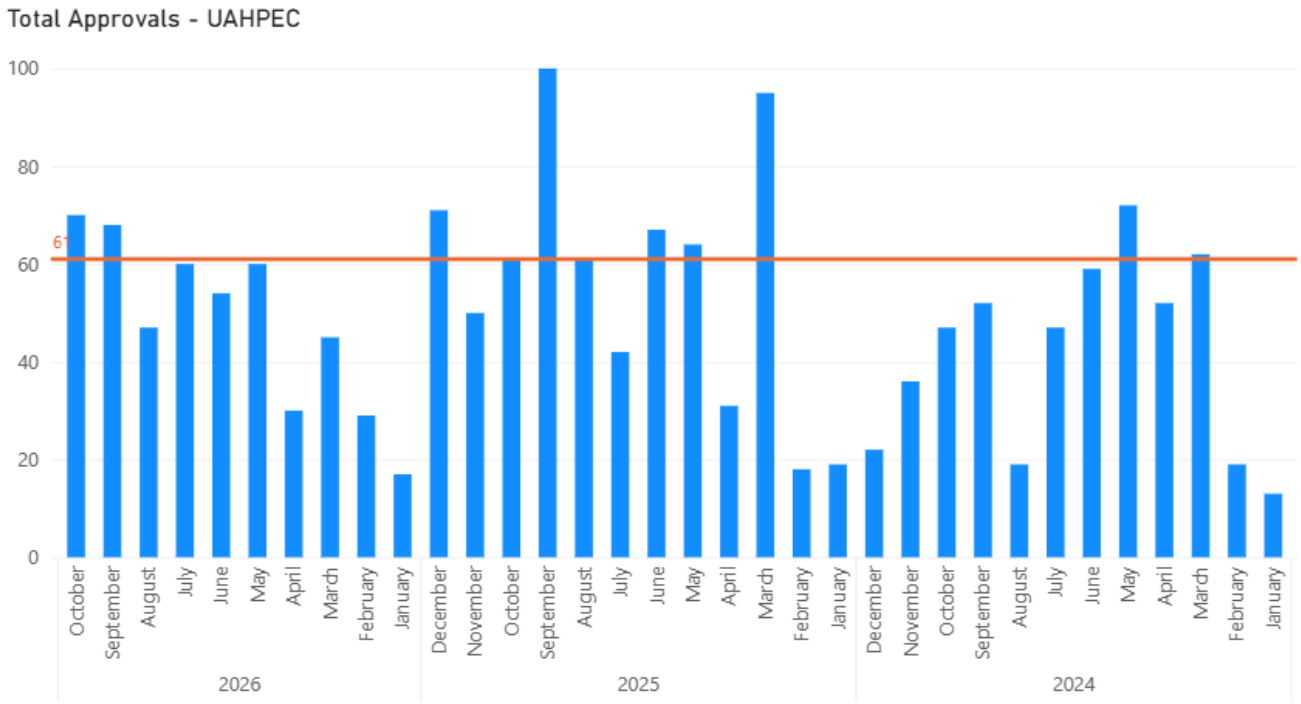
The use of the Expedited pathway for Low-Risk applications increased materially following implementation of the Ethics Improvement Plan changes in April 2026. Monthly Expedited approvals rose from 7 in May to 32 in October, and exceeded Full Review approvals in both September and October. Expedited Reviews accounted for 53% of all AHREC approvals in October, compared with approximately 23% across the period from January 2024 to March 2026. This represents a material shift towards more proportionate review pathways and should support sustained improvement in approval throughput.



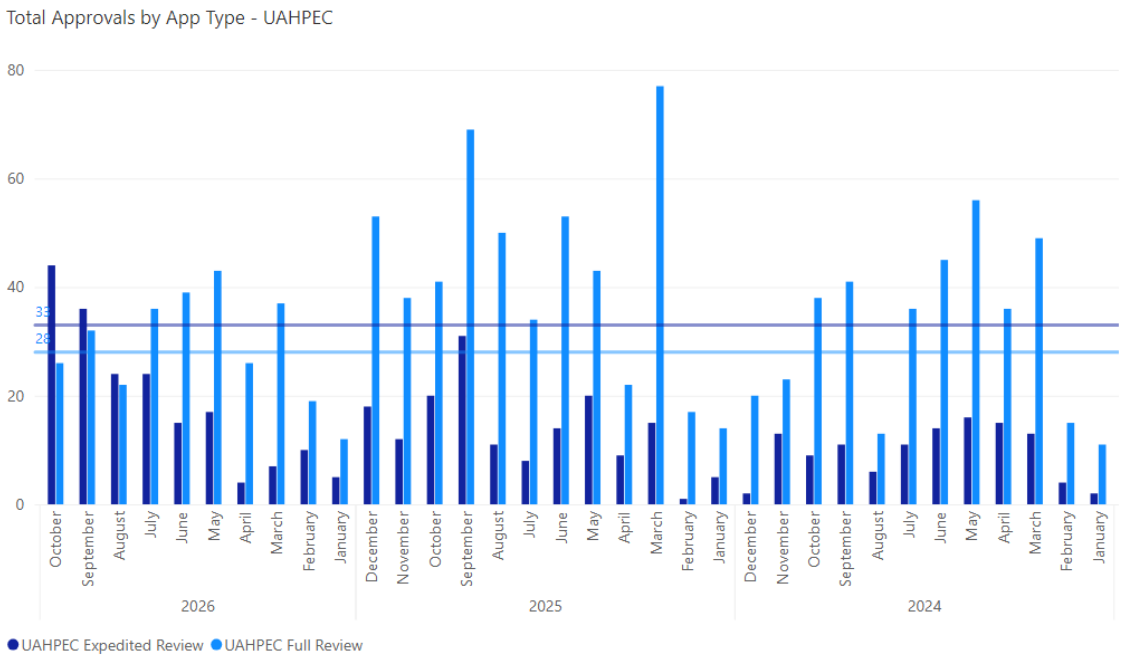
UAHPEC Approval Volumes

UAHPEC approval volumes were lower than submission volumes in eight of the first ten months of 2026. Across this period, UAHPEC received 574 submissions and recorded 480 approvals, with approval throughput particularly constrained during the first four months of the year. This contributed to an accumulation of applications awaiting approval.

Performance improved from May onwards, with 60 applications approved in both May and July, followed by 68 in September and 70 in October. September and October both exceeded the ongoing monthly target of 61 approvals, while October approvals exceeded incoming submissions by 14 applications. These results indicate that approval capacity has materially improved and that the Human Ethics Secretariat is now positioned to progressively reduce the remaining backlog, provided the higher level of throughput is sustained.

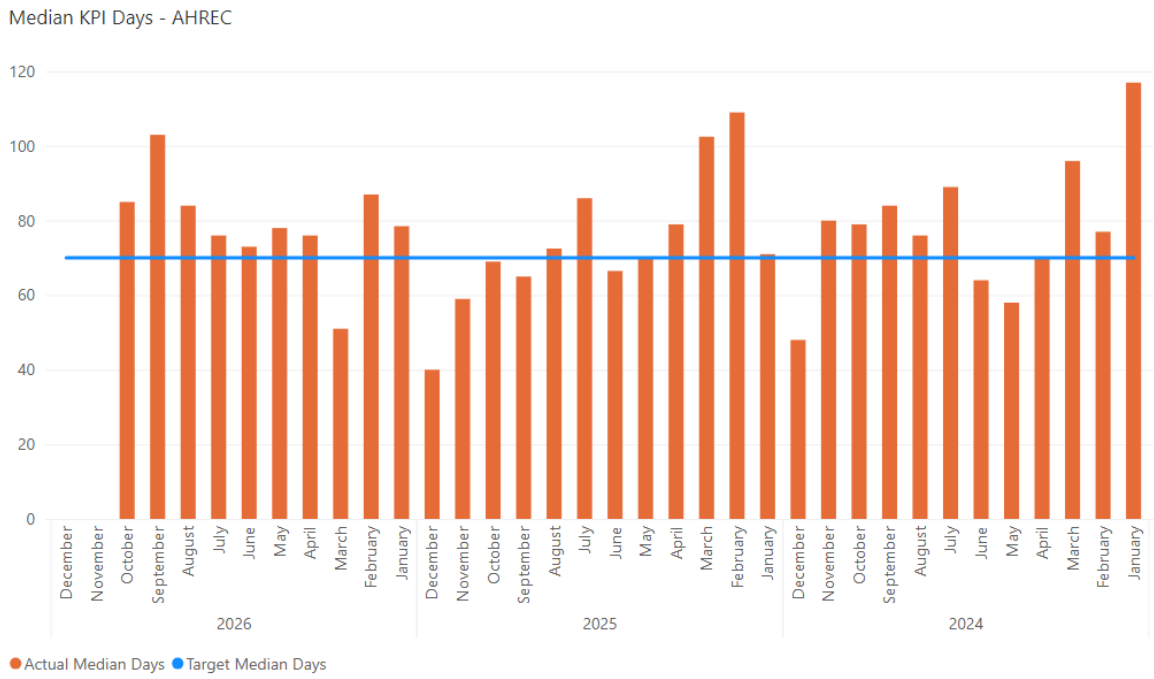


The use of the Expedited pathway continued to increase following implementation of the Ethics Improvement Plan changes in April 2026. Expedited Review approvals rose materially through the latter part of the year and exceeded Full Review approvals in each month from August to October. Expedited Reviews accounted for more than 50% of UAHPEC approvals in each of those months, compared with 24% across the period from January 2024 to March 2026.



AHREC Processing Timeframes

AHREC median processing timeframes peaked at 103 days in September 2026, reflecting the backlog that had accumulated earlier in the year. The substantial increase in approval volumes during September and October has begun to reduce processing times, with the median falling to 85 days in October.

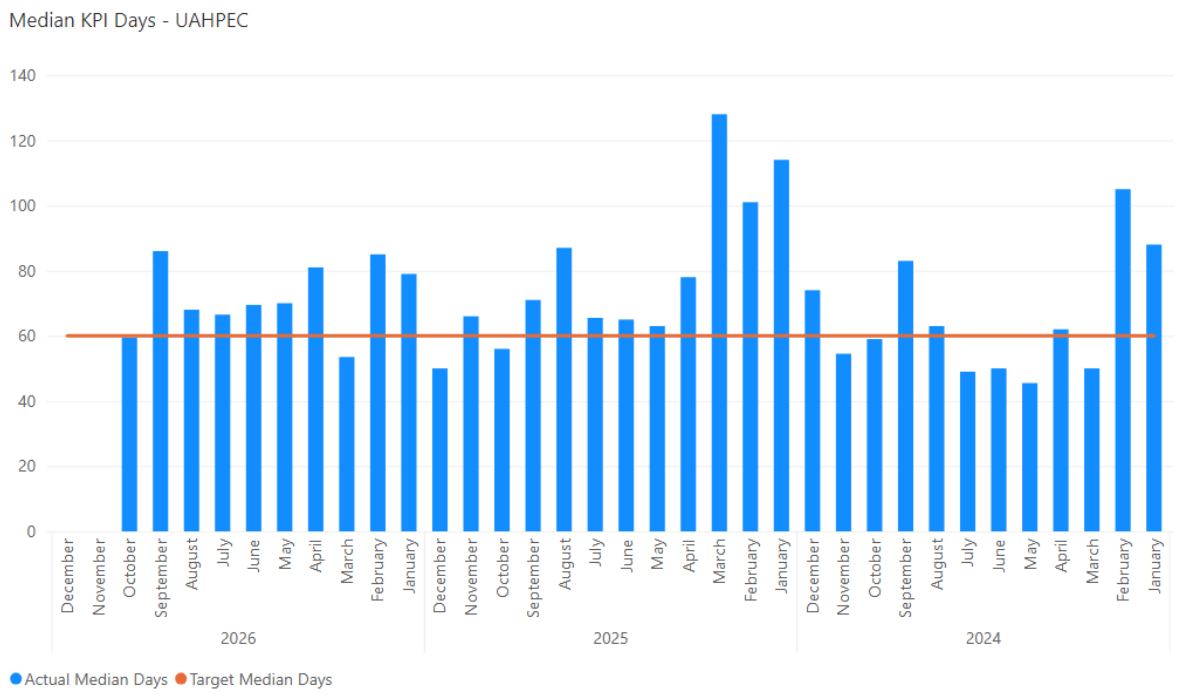


Based on current approval throughput, the median is expected to fall below 70 days in November 2026 and continue to decline through December and into 2027, provided monthly approval volumes are sustained at 45 or higher.

UAHPEC Processing Timeframes

UAHPEC median processing timeframes peaked at 86 days in September 2026, before falling materially to 60 days in October as approval volumes increased.

Based on current approval throughput, the median is expected to fall below 60 days in November 2026 and continue to decline through December and into 2027. The Human Ethics Secretariat is working towards maintaining a median processing timeframe of 60 days or less across all UAHPEC applications.



Conclusion

Material improvements in processing timeframes are expected in November 2026, with the AHREC median forecast to fall below 70 days and the UAHPEC median forecast to fall below 60 days. Further improvement is anticipated through December and into 2027, provided approval volumes are sustained at or above the monthly targets of 45 for AHREC and 61 for UAHPEC.