

Wednesday, 12 February 2003

Public Health Association calls for child poverty strategy

The Public Health Association is calling on Government to introduce a comprehensive strategy to eliminate child poverty.

In a submission on the 2003 Budget Statement to Parliament's Finance and Expenditure Committee, the PHA urges the Government to invest in children and families as an immediate priority. The Government has indicated it will assist low income families in the 2004 budget but the PHA believes that immediate action is needed now to prevent long term costs to the country.

PHA director Dr Gay Keating says Ministry of Health data shows that 15 percent of all households cannot afford to eat properly all the time, and other research shows a clear link between inadequate housing and poor health. Dr Keating says recent news items about school students unable to afford exams and the educational disadvantage facing transient children highlight some of the issues of poverty in New Zealand.

"Invest in children and families now to limit the costs in health, crime and lost productivity later."

Dr Keating says a comprehensive strategy on child poverty needs to be a substantive part of government planning and reporting every year. The PHA is also calling for immediate action, including giving significant relief to the poorest families, extending the Child Tax Credit to families and ensuring the special benefit is allocated to all eligible families.

It is also vital for Government to assess and monitor the effects of all economic policy on the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, according to the PHA. Dr Keating says the health and wellbeing of communities should be monitored regularly at national and regional level.

In addition, the PHA submission also calls for an increase in the tax on tobacco, alcohol and gambling taxes. The PHA says increased taxes reduce consumption of tobacco and alcohol and gambling taxes should be used to fund problem gambling prevention and treatment services.

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For a copy of the submission, please phone Noeline Holt on 04 472 3060