



Health, housing, education sectors must work together to address poor child health

Public Health Association, 26 November 2007

The Public Health Association (PHA) is calling on all social sectors to work together to address the much poorer health of Maori and Pacific children and young people.

PHA Director Dr Gay Keating is making the call following the release by the Paediatric Epidemiology Service and Paediatric Society of *Monitoring the Health of Children and Young People: Indicator Handbook*. The report shows that Maori and Pacific children and young people, and those living in most deprived areas, have far worse health than children and young people in other groups.

“Despite New Zealand having record low unemployment and strong economic growth, we still have an ‘underclass’ of children and young people with poorer health. They are more likely than children and young people in other groups to suffer from infectious diseases such as meningococcal disease, rheumatic fever and gastroenteritis; suffer from respiratory diseases such as bronchiolitis and pneumonia; less likely to be immunised; and have higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies.”

Dr Keating says responsibility for these appalling statistics is shared by a number of agencies, and these agencies need to work together to turn things around.

“We need a major re-think to show we value our children. All sectors – including health, housing, education, work and income and the voluntary sector – need to invest in children and young people so they can achieve their full potential.

“For example, poverty and poor housing experiences now will affect future health. The social conditions of families now can make children sick now and into the future. Respiratory diseases, meningitis and skin infections all flourish when parents can’t afford to buy disinfectants, skin dressings and supply clean towels. Disease is more likely in houses that are overcrowded and damp.”

To address the frightening picture painted by the report, the PHA is calling for the following action:

- the development and funding of food policies to ensure all families have adequate access to sufficient nourishing food

- the development and funding of housing policies to ensure all New Zealanders have access to adequate housing
- ensuring all children have access to a secure, adequate standard of living, irrespective of the employment/beneficiary status of their parent or guardian
- the development and funding of policies to eliminate racism both within the health and disability system and in our wider community
- the allocation of new or additional health care funding for preventive and early intervention services to reduce the number of avoidable hospital admissions and preventable deaths, to reduce inequalities in health and to improve health overall
- an increase in tobacco taxation to help people to quit smoking. Some of the additional tobacco tax gathered should go into tobacco control programmes.

“This report paints a gloomy picture of poor child health across a number of measures and should be a wake-up call across all social sectors.”

For further information:

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