

Media Release

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Public Health Association applauds child poverty report

The Public Health Association (PHA) strongly supports the findings and recommendations of the report released today by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Barnardos.

The report says 22 percent of New Zealand children are living in poverty. It finds that child poverty is unevenly distributed across society, and rates of poverty for children living in sole-parent families are five times as high as for children in couple households. Poverty rates are also significantly higher among Maori and Pacific and other children, than Pakeha children.

The national executive officer of the PHA, Dr Gay Keating says *A fair go for all children: Actions to address child poverty* must be taken seriously by policy makers, politicians and community leaders across the country.

"This report is underpinned by strong international evidence. Investing in all children is mainstream policy thinking in OECD countries," Dr Keating says.

"It highlights the public health approach – get in early and prevent problems from developing. Don't wait until the damage by childhood poverty is done and then try to repair it; we need government policy that puts children first now, and on a broad scale.

"Things like housing, income and education have immediate and flow on effects on health and wellbeing. It is the duty of every leader in the country to make sure all children are in families with sufficient income to provide the basics; that every child living here does so in warm, dry surroundings; that families can afford both housing and food costs; and that every child gets the education they need to make the most of their potential."

Dr Keating says the report also highlights the critical importance of experiences in the early years – a key finding of World Health Organization experts.

"A child growing up in a low-income household in New Zealand has an almost one and a half times higher risk of dying in childhood than a child from a high-income family. They are more likely to be sick, they do worse at school, are more likely to be poor themselves as an adult and are more likely to be sick and die early themselves as an adult.

"It cannot be said enough – this means higher costs to the country not just now, but for years into the future," says Dr Keating, "and it robs New Zealand of many of our potential "knowledge economy" workforce.

"While initiatives such as Working for Families are to be applauded, we need to extend our focus to all children irrespective of their family circumstances."

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