

**WHO report confirms importance of social factors on health:  
Public Health Association  
Thursday 28 August 08**

A global study into the social elements affecting health has found that action in those social areas is vital if the health of different groups of people is to be made equal and the ever-accelerating demand for health funding addressed.

National Executive Officer of the Public Health Association (PHA) Dr Gay Keating says the final report from World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, Closing the gap in a generation, reiterates what the PHA has been saying for years.

"Factors like housing, education and income contribute to a person's health just as much as their physical make-up or behaviour.

"The opportunity to have a healthy life is not equal across all New Zealanders: it is still linked to social and economic circumstances, in particular childhood deprivation.

"This means many New Zealanders have poorer health, reduced quality of life, and early death.

She says these health inequalities cost every New Zealander in at least two ways. Firstly, the country is diminished by the lack of participation in society by New Zealanders with lifelong poor health. And secondly, taxpayers pay out millions of dollars annually to fund the repair of preventable poor health. The health system devotes resources to patching up people who should never have become sick in the first place.

"The key to reducing health inequalities is prevention and early intervention. Prevention works, if we put the time and money into it."

Dr Keating says that means the provision of warm, dry and secure housing that's affordable; making sure all children live in a family with an adequate household income; making sure that every New Zealander can afford to see a doctor any time of the day or night; and providing opportunities for everyone to have good education and training from kindergarten to tertiary levels.

"As it says in the report, health inequalities are not a natural phenomenon but the result of a toxic combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics.

"The PHA endorses this view and believes reducing inequalities requires strong political leadership and a comprehensive whole-of-government response.

"All policies should be assessed for their impact on health, including the impact on disadvantaged groups. Avoiding trips into hospital is good not only for the individual but also for the economy!"

**More information:**

For more information contact Dr Gay Keating, Public Health Association: (04) 472 3060, (0273) 414 708.

A key messages summary is available here:

<http://www.pha.org.nz/documents/SDHmessagesNZPacific.doc>.

169Kb Word (six pages)

The full report is available here:

[http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/final\\_report/csdh\\_finalreport\\_2008.pdf](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/csdh_finalreport_2008.pdf)

10.31 MB (256 pages)

The Executive Summary is available here:

[http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/final\\_report/csdh\\_finalreport\\_2008\\_execsumm.pdf](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/csdh_finalreport_2008_execsumm.pdf)

5.34MB (36 pages)