

Public Health Association supports putting children first

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The Public Health Association (PHA) endorses the policy overview released today by Every Child Counts, wholeheartedly supporting its recommendation that children's interests should be placed at the centre of Government decision-making and public consideration.

The national executive officer of the PHA, Dr Gay Keating, says it makes economic sense to treat children as a special group.

"As Every Child Count's policy overview says, children are central to the present and future wellbeing of the nation. The country cannot afford, in social as well as financial terms, to leave any child behind. Ignoring vulnerable children now will mean an inevitable high payout later for the subsequent damage and loss of productive citizens."

Dr Keating says good health is a basic human right and nowhere should that right be more strictly observed than with our children.

"Deprivation in childhood can cause ill health throughout life. A child's early environment has a vital impact on the way the brain develops.

"To tackle child poverty all families need an adequate household income to enable a basic standard of living for health and nutrition."

She says children need to spend their time in caring, responsive environments that protect them from inappropriate disapproval and punishment.

"We need to address child abuse and neglect by making family violence unacceptable and providing appropriate parenting support services."

Dr Keating says a key factor that can mitigate adverse child development is education. "We need to ensure all our children, including young parents, have access to good education and training, from kindergarten to tertiary levels."

She also says that given the higher burden of illness among Māori and poor families, health services must become more responsive to family needs.

"For instance, no parent should be put off taking a child to the doctor because of the cost – whereas that is the situation for about 6000 children. And we know we are not doing enough to help parents break the legal addictions that impact on children – alcohol and tobacco.

"We need tighter enforcement of licensing laws and increased alcohol taxation to fund prevention and treatment. It also means harm reduction approaches with young people, especially Māori. Young women need to know about the dangers of alcohol to babies and children before they become pregnant.

"Tax on tobacco should continue to rise, and more of the revenue generated should go to tobacco control programmes, including cessation programmes. There should be individual cessation programmes for each pregnant woman and her partner. Tobacco companies should be publicly accountable for the addictive characteristics of cigarettes and the negative health consequences for children and adults."

For more information contact

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