

PHA wonders whether New Zealand Children count

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The Public Health Association (PHA) says children seem to count for very little in New Zealand. Some of the most important things about its most vulnerable citizens are not even recorded.

UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre has just released its latest report on children in wealthy countries, *The Children Left Behind*.

"New Zealand barely features in it," says the PHA's National Executive Officer, Dr Gay Keating.

"This is not because New Zealand is not a rich country, but because New Zealand hasn't asked the questions about its own children.

"The UNICEF report shows in many rich countries there is only a small gap between the 'normal' standard of child wellbeing and that for children who are at the 'bottom end'. But in other countries the 'bottom end' is a very long way below normal.

The report says many children risk being left behind – neither included nor protected – by the wealthy societies in which they live.

"A child has only one chance to develop normally in mind and body. And it is a primary responsibility of governments to protect that chance – in good times and in bad. The economic crisis of 2008 and its continuing aftermath will test government commitments," Dr Keating said.

"But when it comes to asking the tough question, 'How far behind is the tail for our New Zealand children?' a comparison between New Zealand and countries like Portugal or Slovenia cannot be made. Those countries, and a score of others that we liken ourselves to, honestly and responsibly face the truth about their children. We can't even see how we stack up."

A 2007 UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre report shows New Zealand scores badly for child health and safety and below average on education.

"You can't blame the children who get left behind, the situation is bigger than any individual child – and having too many children left too far behind will cause problems for all of us. It's time for the government to make sure every child is supported, irrespective of their parents' circumstances."

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UNICEF Innocenti report cards <http://www.unicef-irc.org/>