

Politicians told to stop targeting and to value and invest in all children

Public Health Association media release

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The government must make it a priority to ensure all children grow up in healthy, nurturing and safe environments, and not just target some, politicians were told today at the Women and Children Summit convened by Women's Refuge in Wellington.

Public Health Association National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating said ensuring the wellbeing of all our children pays back huge dividends – both socially and in savings to the tax payer.

"It's the wise thing to do, but it will only work when everyone is included. Singling out some families makes things worse, socially dividing the nation into stereotyped 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Who is helped by being classified that way?"

Dr Keating spoke to 190 people from across the country, including many Members of Parliament, who attended the Women's Refuge State of the Nation discussion: *And are things getting better for our most vulnerable in 2011?*

"The early years are vital to the health of children, now and into adulthood," she said.

"New Zealand was once an international leader in child health, and a great place to bring up kids. In recent years we have made some improvements, but we've slipped behind other countries.

"The only areas where New Zealand is at the top of the tables is for the things we don't want to be known for – high rates of unintended teen pregnancy and death from injuries and child abuse."

Dr Keating identified the improvement in immunisation rates in the past three years as an example of what can be done to improve the situation of children under two years.

"It can be done when there is the political will to do it – and when the approach is for all children, not just those you've picked out because you think are 'at risk'.

"What works is when services are universal for everyone, and where extra support is provided wherever there is extra need."

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