Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand

No child should experience severe and persistent poverty, least of all in a land of relative abundance. Child poverty imposes costs on the children involved and on our society.

Costs for individual children: the short-term impacts include having insufficient nutritious food, going to school hungry and living in a cold, damp house. It often means missing out on important childhood opportunities like school outings and sports activities. The impacts also include lower educational achievement, worse health outcomes and social exclusion. These differential outcomes, as well as the neurological responses to growing up in poverty, mean that childhood poverty can leave life-time scars, with reduced employment prospects, lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of criminal offending in adulthood.

Costs for society: the economic costs of child poverty are in the range of $6–8 billion per year and considerable sums of public money are spent on remedial interventions. Failure to alleviate child poverty now will damage the nation’s long-term prosperity. It need not be this way; nor should such outcomes be tolerated.

Some children are at greater risk:
We need to give specific attention to:

- overcoming inequalities for Māori and Pasifika
- the particular issues facing children in sole-parent families
- children facing severe and persistent poverty
- young children experiencing poverty as many significant aspects of child development occur in the earliest years and harm in this period has life-long impacts.

There is no simple solution to address the causes and consequences of child poverty – solutions need to address a range of factors.

A significant and durable reduction in child poverty is possible, but will take time and money. It requires political vision, courage and determination. Above all, it means making children our priority and making effective use of the best available evidence.

The first step: Adopt a strategic framework for addressing child poverty issues and ensuring accountability for outcomes.

- enact of legislation requiring the measurement of child poverty
- set short-term and long-term poverty-reduction targets
- establish various child poverty-reduction indicators
- monitor and report on results.

Priorities shown on figure:

- For immediate attention at relatively low-cost: Practical, cost-effective and relatively inexpensive actions that will mitigate some of the worst consequences of child poverty.
- For the longer-term: A more ambitious package of policy measures designed to reduce child poverty over time to a much lower rate (e.g. at least 30–40 percent below the current rate). These changes will be more costly.
- Identified by children: Children need the opportunity to play, have fun and ‘just be kids’, even if they are poor. Free local recreation activities matter.

The initial priorities identified here will assist in reducing child poverty and mitigating some of the worst impacts of poverty on children.

To reduce child poverty in a comprehensive way we need to move beyond the starting point that these priority lists provide.

See overleaf for listing of all 78 Recommendations.

78 Recommendations mutually reinforcing and covering a range of factors

as many as 270,000 children need our help

Health services, antenatally and throughout childhood

- fund free primary care visits for all children (R52)

- support young people who are pregnant and/or parenting to remain engaged in education (R63)

- view of all child-related benefits rates (R10)

- micro-financing to help families manage debt (R48)

Engaged in learning from ECE onward

- create a new, simpler income support payment (R11)

- pass-on child support payments (R13)

Adequate income to meet basic needs

- support effective delivery of local services through community hubs (R66)

Supportive community

- collaborative food-in-schools programmes (R63)

- Warrant of Fitness for all rental housing (R20)

Affordable, safe, healthy homes

- increase the number of social housing units (R22)

Stable, nurturing family

- parks, playgrounds and public spaces are safe and welcoming (R72)

- support community hubs (R57)

- support effective delivery of local services through community hubs (R66)

- rented housing (R20)

Costs for individual children: the short-term impacts include having insufficient nutritious food, going to school hungry and living in a cold, damp house. It often means missing out on important childhood opportunities like school outings and sports activities. The impacts also include lower educational achievement, worse health outcomes and social exclusion. These differential outcomes, as well as the neurological responses to growing up in poverty, mean that childhood poverty can leave life-time scars, with reduced employment prospects, lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of criminal offending in adulthood.

Costs for society: the economic costs of child poverty are in the range of $6–8 billion per year and considerable sums of public money are spent on remedial interventions. Failure to alleviate child poverty now will damage the nation’s long-term prosperity. It need not be this way; nor should such outcomes be tolerated.

Some children are at greater risk:
We need to give specific attention to:

- overcoming inequalities for Māori and Pasifika
- the particular issues facing children in sole-parent families
- children facing severe and persistent poverty
- young children experiencing poverty as many significant aspects of child development occur in the earliest years and harm in this period has life-long impacts.

There is no simple solution to address the causes and consequences of child poverty -- solutions need to address a range of factors.

A significant and durable reduction in child poverty is possible, but will take time and money. It requires political vision, courage and determination. Above all, it means making children our priority and making effective use of the best available evidence.

The first step: Adopt a strategic framework for addressing child poverty issues and ensuring accountability for outcomes.

- enact of legislation requiring the measurement of child poverty
- set short-term and long-term poverty-reduction targets
- establish various child poverty-reduction indicators
- monitor and report on results.

Priorities shown on figure:

- For immediate attention at relatively low-cost: Practical, cost-effective and relatively inexpensive actions that will mitigate some of the worst consequences of child poverty.
- For the longer-term: A more ambitious package of policy measures designed to reduce child poverty over time to a much lower rate (e.g. at least 30–40 percent below the current rate). These changes will be more costly.
- Identified by children: Children need the opportunity to play, have fun and ‘just be kids’, even if they are poor. Free local recreation activities matter.

The initial priorities identified here will assist in reducing child poverty and mitigating some of the worst impacts of poverty on children.

To reduce child poverty in a comprehensive way we need to move beyond the starting point that these priority lists provide.

See overleaf for listing of all 78 Recommendations.

No child should experience severe and persistent poverty, least of all in a land of relative abundance. Child poverty imposes costs on the children involved and on our society.

Costs for individual children: the short-term impacts include having insufficient nutritious food, going to school hungry and living in a cold, damp house. It often means missing out on important childhood opportunities like school outings and sports activities. The impacts also include lower educational achievement, worse health outcomes and social exclusion. These differential outcomes, as well as the neurological responses to growing up in poverty, mean that childhood poverty can leave life-time scars, with reduced employment prospects, lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of criminal offending in adulthood.

Costs for society: the economic costs of child poverty are in the range of $6–8 billion per year and considerable sums of public money are spent on remedial interventions. Failure to alleviate child poverty now will damage the nation’s long-term prosperity. It need not be this way; nor should such outcomes be tolerated.

Some children are at greater risk:
We need to give specific attention to:

- overcoming inequalities for Māori and Pasifika
- the particular issues facing children in sole-parent families
- children facing severe and persistent poverty
- young children experiencing poverty as many significant aspects of child development occur in the earliest years and harm in this period has life-long impacts.

There is no simple solution to address the causes and consequences of child poverty -- solutions need to address a range of factors.

A significant and durable reduction in child poverty is possible, but will take time and money. It requires political vision, courage and determination. Above all, it means making children our priority and making effective use of the best available evidence.

The first step: Adopt a strategic framework for addressing child poverty issues and ensuring accountability for outcomes.

- enact of legislation requiring the measurement of child poverty
- set short-term and long-term poverty-reduction targets
- establish various child poverty-reduction indicators
- monitor and report on results.

Priorities shown on figure:

- For immediate attention at relatively low-cost: Practical, cost-effective and relatively inexpensive actions that will mitigate some of the worst consequences of child poverty.
- For the longer-term: A more ambitious package of policy measures designed to reduce child poverty over time to a much lower rate (e.g. at least 30–40 percent below the current rate). These changes will be more costly.
- Identified by children: Children need the opportunity to play, have fun and ‘just be kids’, even if they are poor. Free local recreation activities matter.

The initial priorities identified here will assist in reducing child poverty and mitigating some of the worst impacts of poverty on children.

To reduce child poverty in a comprehensive way we need to move beyond the starting point that these priority lists provide.
We recommend that the government develop a range of measures to increase the income of low-income households to purchase their own homes.

We recommend that the government commission independent research and ongoing monitoring of housing issues affecting children, including:
- piloting and evaluating innovative approaches to improving a rental housing
- Warrant of Fitness at a local community level
- analysis of the supply and demand for housing including social housing
- broad community consultation
- assessment of the quality of rental housing
- ongoing monitoring of the quality of existing and new health services amongst children linked to poor housing
- clarification of the legislation and regulation underpinning the quality of existing housing.

We recommend that the government undertake an annual calculation and publication of information on the take-up grants for all children living in poverty by:
- using the National Administrative Guidelines (NAG) section on how to apply for children's services to address the needs of children and young people from low-income families.
- providing an inventory of activities currently underway to assist schools and Boards when deciding on which programs to support
- encouraging more schools and community organisations in low socioeconomic communities to apply for programmes that support children in high deprivation areas.
- offering incentives for programmes that include children with disabilities and providing flexible hours to accommodate the needs of students and their families.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government establish framework agreements with housing providers, so as to provide a comprehensive assessment service for people in housing need.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government develop a range of measures to increase the income of low-income households to purchase their own homes.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government develop a range of measures to increase the income of low-income households to purchase their own homes.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government develop a range of measures to increase the income of low-income households to purchase their own homes.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government develop a range of measures to increase the income of low-income households to purchase their own homes.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government establish a single point of contact for housing needs assessment, which is monitored periodically and effectively enforced, and gradually increased over time.

We recommend that the government address the serious undersupply of affordable housing for families with children living in poverty

We recommend that the government provide sustainable funding for effective Whänau Ora initiatives and prioritise the establishment of a public-private partnership model with the banking sector and community groups, with the aim of providing modest low-income and zero-interest loans, as a mechanism to enable the access of affordable and sufficient food and make effective food stores.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government take additional action to reduce poverty and mitigate its effects for Pacifica children and young people (including children in families who have recently arrived in New Zealand) so that they are on a par with other children in the wider community. This could include:
- increasing the rates further for children aged 0 to 5 years inclusive.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.

We recommend that the government establish a single point of contact for housing needs assessment, which is monitored periodically and effectively enforced, and gradually increased over time.

We recommend that the government ensure that all policies with major impacts on child poverty be subject to periodic and effective monitoring and reporting to Parliament of progress towards the achievement of the medium-term targets set out in the Improvement Policy Options report.