

## Media release

Embargoed until **5am TUESDAY 13 December**



# Child Poverty Monitor 2016: Targets and a plan are overdue

Setting targets and creating a plan to reduce the number of children in poverty is well overdue and vital if we want to prevent entrenching a third generation of children in poverty, says Children's Commissioner Judge Becroft following today's release of the Child Poverty Monitor.

"We are past distracting debates about whether there should be measurements and targets for reducing child poverty. There is a suite of government measurements which are not impossibly complex. These measurements create a clear and distressing picture of child poverty - as set out in our Monitor. Creating targets should not be beyond a modern, prosperous country such as New Zealand," Judge Becroft says.

"In any case New Zealand already has one such target. In September 2015, along with 193 other countries, we signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are little known to most New Zealanders. One goal is to halve poverty in all its forms, including child poverty, by 2030.

"To attain this goal within the next 14 years, we need a plan to reduce child poverty. The time has come to commit ourselves to real action. This is a challenge for the whole country. It must be a government led plan all New Zealanders can work towards. It should involve business, community and non-government groups," Judge Becroft says.

The Monitor is now in its fourth year of tracking various measures of child poverty and reporting on the impacts of poverty on children's health, education and housing. It is a joint project by the Children's Commissioner, J R McKenzie Trust and Otago University's NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES). The Monitor uses various government data sources, including the Ministry of Social Development's *Household Incomes in New Zealand* report.

Child poverty has been identified by New Zealanders in recent opinion polls as one of the most significant issues facing our country. While New Zealand's economy continues to grow and prosper, the 2016 Child Poverty Monitor shows there has been no real improvement in child poverty rates.

"New Zealanders are starting to wake up to the serious problem we face. We are in real danger of creating pockets of a third generation of ingrained poverty - which seriously impacts children's health, ability to learn and contribute to society. We can't accept that," Judge Becroft says.

Key data from the 2016 Monitor:-

- 14% of children are living in material hardship. That means 155,000 New Zealand children are in households that are living without 7 or more items, from a total list of 17, which are considered necessary for their wellbeing.
- 8% (or 85,000) of New Zealand children are experiencing even worse material hardship with households missing out on 9 or more items from the list of 17. This is a new measure for the Child Poverty Monitor following its introduction to government reporting last year.

- 28% of children are living in low income homes. That means 295,000 New Zealand children are in homes where money is tight and are considered to be in income poverty.
- More than 8% of children are in severe poverty. That means 90,000 New Zealand children are experiencing both material hardship and living in a low income household.
- While child poverty has been reasonably stable for a number of years, it is significantly worse than the 1980s. In 1982 the percentage of children in families experiencing income poverty was 14%, compared to 28% now.

“This is not the New Zealand I grew up in nor is it the New Zealand most of us want. However you cut it, there are at least 85,000 children in this country who are living in very tough circumstances. I accept it’s not the sort of abject poverty you see on the banks of the Ganges River – but it’s not what we want for our children. It is significant, enduring and seriously affects a child’s ability to grow.

“My real concern is that we can’t have another winter like this year – with children living in cars and Marae having to take people in. Our Monitor shows that New Zealand’s lowest income earners are spending an average of 50% of their income on housing. As the Auckland City Mission well knows, this means families are forced to line up for food banks and use emergency accommodation.

“I want to emphasise this is not a recent problem – it goes back several decades and rates of child poverty have not improved. I don’t want to criticise or lay blame. My simple plea today is for the Government urgently to provide a plan to tackle child poverty in New Zealand.”

Dr Jean Simpson, the NZCYES’s Director says the impact of poverty can be seen every day in hospital wards and classrooms around the country.

"Living in poverty has serious implications for children’s health, well-being and life outcomes. We know, for example, that children living in the lowest income households are far more likely to be living in households that are crowded. They are much more likely to be in homes that have major damp and mould problems and where the family is struggling to pay to heat the home. That can lead to diseases that we simply shouldn’t be seeing still happening in 21st century New Zealand – like chronic lung disease and rheumatic fever.

“The number of times children go to hospital with conditions related to disadvantage has increased since 2007 – we see that in the rates of hospital admissions for infectious and respiratory diseases. Research tells us that children living in the most disadvantaged communities are about 18 times more likely to miss out a visit to the GP when they are unwell due to a lack of transport to get there than those in the least disadvantaged communities. Reducing the number of young children living in poverty is critical to improving the health of the whole population,” Dr Simpson says.

The Child Poverty Monitor is funded by the J R McKenzie Trust, an organisation with over 75 years of involvement in important social issues. The Trust’s Executive Director Iain Hines says child poverty is quite rightly a top concern for many New Zealanders.

“Children are our taonga and our future. They live in families which love and care for them, in many cases despite amazingly difficult circumstances. Currently we’re letting too many down by tinkering around the edges to alleviate the impacts of poverty, rather than creating a plan to reduce poverty on the scale needed.

“We’re realistic that it’s likely to take some years to get a drastic drop in child poverty rates. But let’s not sit on our hands and wait for that to happen – we’re looking to the Government to provide a

clear and comprehensive plan so we all know where our place is in reducing the rates of poverty,”  
Iain Hines says.

Ends.

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**Notes:** You can access the Child Poverty Monitor and the *Child Poverty Monitor: 2016 Technical Report* at [www.childpoverty.co.nz](http://www.childpoverty.co.nz) Twitter: @povertymonitor Facebook: Child Poverty Monitor

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**Background Information on the Child Poverty Monitor**

In 2012 the Children’s Commissioner’s Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty recommended New Zealand develop a set of child poverty reduction targets and measures that are reported on annually.

During 2013 a partnership was formed between the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, the University of Otago’s NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES) and the J R McKenzie Trust. The aim of this partnership is to compile, publish and disseminate annual measures of child poverty in New Zealand in a way that is accessible to all.

The resulting Child Poverty Monitor builds on the work of the Children’s Social Health Monitor (CSHM), produced by the NZCYES between 2009 and 2012. It includes all of the CSHM’s original indicators, as well as extra detail on the child poverty measures recommended by the Children’s Commissioners EAG on Solutions to Child Poverty. Data is sourced from the Ministry of Social Development, Statistics NZ and other government sources.

The Child Poverty Monitor ([www.childpoverty.co.nz](http://www.childpoverty.co.nz)) includes high level information on key measures of child poverty in infographic form. The more detailed Technical Report, the source of this data, contains additional information on child poverty, issues around overcrowded housing, and a range of socioeconomically sensitive health outcomes. The infographics are available for download and free for organisations to use for their own advocacy purposes. The Technical Report is available on the website in PDF format.