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## **Budget 2020: COVID-19 response leaves many children disadvantaged**

The Children's Commissioner says Budget 2020 is a realistic response to the crisis but is insufficient, especially for the 150,000 children who were already doing it tough before COVID-19.

"These are immensely challenging times for everyone. So many New Zealand children and their families are hurting right now, and it's absolutely critical that our government responds to that," says Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft.

"However, the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown has not been and will not be equally shared. 150,000 of our children who were already living in material deprivation will most keenly feel the weight of this pandemic, as well as families who will find themselves out of work in the coming months," Commissioner Becroft says.

"COVID-19 has shone a light on the glaring inadequacies in our welfare system we already knew have long existed, since the 1991 benefit slashes.

"Of course, it's good to see the wage subsidy extended for businesses that are still struggling. This will benefit children."

"But I sincerely hope this is not the last word in addressing the shame that is our child poverty statistics. More will desperately be needed later in the year and I'm assuming this will happen," he says.

"As our Finance Minister Grant Robertson said today in his speech, investing in our children and their wellbeing will have significant long-term benefits for our economy and broader society, long after COVID-19 has passed.

"This pandemic has presented us with a unique opportunity to do things fundamentally differently. We also need a bottom-up, community, whānau, hapū and iwi approach to supporting children and their families.

"Three things I'd like to see in a child-focused budget later in the year: First, free medical and full dental care together with free and nutritious school lunches for all children until the age of 18.

"Second, fold the controversial in-work tax credit into the family credit for all parents who would otherwise qualify, whether in work or not.

"Third, we must further lift benefits that specifically relate to children. Indexing benefits to wages and the \$25 per week increase announced in March are a good start.

"But if we're serious about reaching our child poverty targets, there has to be continuous fundamental change," says Commissioner Becroft.

“Children will always be at the heart of this crisis and therefore their interests must remain a priority.”

ENDS

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