

Media Release

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Child Poverty Monitor 2018: Four Areas Where Poverty Affects New Zealand Children

With no new data on child poverty in New Zealand, this year's Child Poverty Monitor puts a spotlight on critical areas in a child's life where poverty continues to have an adverse impact.

This year, the Child Poverty Monitor is providing specific examples of four critical areas where poverty affects children and families in New Zealand: Health, food insecurity, education and housing.

Health

Children in New Zealand's most disadvantaged communities are twice as likely to end up in hospital as children living in the most advantaged communities.

Food insecurity

Around one in five New Zealand children – that's more than 160,000 kids - live in households without access to either enough food or enough healthy food.

Education

68% of students from the most disadvantaged communities achieved NCEA level 2 in 2017, compared to 93% from the most advantaged communities

Housing

39% of households in the lowest income quintile spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs compared to 14% of households in the highest income quintile.

"The indicators are clear. Poverty is limiting the health and wellbeing of our children," Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft says. "For many, it is also a risk that may limit their future opportunities," the Commissioner says.

For the last 5 years the Child Poverty Monitor has been a gauge of the extent of child poverty in New Zealand. In previous years, the Child Poverty Monitor has featured Ministry of Social Development data on children in households experiencing income poverty and material hardship. In 2018, due to data quality issues, the Ministry of Social Development, with the support of StatsNZ, decided not to report on low-income and material hardship rates for children.

"This is frustrating because it doesn't allow us to update the sequence of measures we've provided for the last 5 years," Commissioner Becroft says.

"However, this is a data issue. On the ground, the same level of hardship persists for children and their families. The other indicators we usually follow have shown little sign of either a significant increase or decrease in recent years.

"Simply put, the number of children in material hardship in New Zealand is unacceptably high. Gathered together, those children would fill Eden Park twice over."

Fortunately, the government has invested in Stats NZ to provide both a much larger sample and other improvements to ensure that future child poverty statistics are robust and able to be used in relation to the requirements of the Child Poverty Reduction Bill.

With the Bill soon to pass its third reading, the government will then be responsible for providing and reporting regularly on measures of child poverty, something the Child Poverty Monitor has been seeking to achieve since its inception.

"This significant breakthrough holds the potential for child poverty statistics to provide even more robust measures of what continues to be a persistently harsh reality for too many New Zealanders," says Dr Mavis Duncanson of the University of Otago, one of the partners, with the J R McKenzie Trust and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, that produces the annual Child Poverty Monitor.

Robyn Scott, Executive Director of the J R McKenzie Trust, says the new legislation is an acknowledgement that in order to move children out of poverty in New Zealand, we need to boldly address the systemic issues at the heart of the problem.

"The early cross-party support of the bill underscores an encouragingly broad-based desire to help lift our children out of poverty," she says.

The passing of the Child Poverty Reduction Bill will provide an appropriate occasion to underscore the contribution of the Child Poverty Monitor. Since its inception in 2013, the Monitor has:

- Helped build nationwide awareness and understanding of the reality and effect of child poverty
- Kept the issue in the public arena and significantly reduced tolerance of child poverty in New Zealand
- Set measures to track progress in response to child poverty.

"The Child Poverty Reduction Bill provides a good plan," Commissioner Becroft says. "We will all be watching its implementation closely."

"And while the government has a key part to play, the continuing role of communities, whānau and families should not be forgotten," he says. "Many are already looking for and delivering locally-driven solutions."

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Media Contact:

Chris Nichol
027 696 5101
c.nichol@occ.org.nz

About the Child Poverty Monitor Project

The Annual Child Poverty Monitor is a partnership project between the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the JR McKenzie Trust and Otago University.

In 2012, the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty put forward 78 recommendations on a range of ways to address child poverty.

One of those recommendations identified was the need to measure and report on child poverty rates annually. We believe this is a vital step in reducing child poverty in New Zealand and that is why this project was born.

Each year we report on a suite of measures of child poverty to paint a picture of how children in New Zealand are faring. We also include information on child poverty-related indicators from health, housing and education.

The measures of child poverty we are reporting on come from a base of research and data already collected here in New Zealand.

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner is an Independent Crown Entity, appointed by the Governor-General, carrying out responsibilities and functions set out in the Children's Commissioner Act 2003. The Children's Commissioner has a range of statutory powers to promote the rights, health, welfare, and wellbeing of children and young people from 0 to 18 years. These functions are undertaken through advocacy, public awareness, consultation, research, and investigations and monitoring. The role includes specific functions in respect of monitoring activities completed under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. The Children's Commissioner also undertakes systemic advocacy functions and investigates particular issues with potential to threaten the health, safety, or wellbeing of children and young people. The Children's Commissioner has a particular responsibility to raise awareness and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Commissioner's activities must comply with the relevant provisions of the Public Finance Act 1989, Crown Entities Act 2004 and any other relevant legislation.



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