

Children's Sector Joint Submission on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill

"He kai tahu me kikini, he kai tahu me tihore, mā te tamaiti te iho"

"Pinch off a bit, peel off a bit, the inside is for the child" (said of the potted bird) – we save the best for the child

There is a significant opportunity right now to achieve real change in the lives of Aotearoa's children; to do so we must work collaboratively and urgently.

For nearly three decades, too many children's lives and outcomes have been compromised by deep-seated disparities, including prevalent and persistent child poverty with high rates of very severe income poverty (140,000 children) and severe material hardship (70,000)¹. Rather than treating children as the taonga they are, children's wellbeing has historically been given low priority in public policy and decision-making.

The Child Poverty Reduction Bill (the Bill) aims to reduce child poverty by setting measures, which will be monitored according to agreed targets, and reporting on progress as part of a strategy to improve the wellbeing of all children. The Bill is a significant, welcome step forward and an opportunity for government and non-government organisations, communities, children, whānau and families to work together, to create a society where all children live safe and fulfilling lives, and are supported to reach their potential.

This submission sets out the high level, collective views on the Bill of many who work with and for children in Aotearoa. It is supported by individuals and organisations as listed below.

As a collective, united in the same cause, we are committed to working together to hold this and future governments to account so there is significant progress on the wellbeing of Aotearoa's children.

This legislation is important for all children in Aotearoa

We support the Bill's definition of a child as a person aged under 18 years. Within that definition, the diversity of children's rights and needs must be recognised, including those of older children and children in their early years.

The Bill needs to uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and respect tamariki Māori as tangata whenua.

Actions to enhance the wellbeing of different groups of children must take their particular needs and rights into account, so no child is left behind. Children with disabilities, for example, are more likely to live in low-income households and face greater costs, resulting in higher rates of material hardship. Yet children with disabilities are largely invisible in child poverty data. Other groups of children that will require specific attention include: tamariki Māori, Pasifika children, refugee and migrant children, children living in rural areas, as well as those already specifically mentioned in the Bill – children in care, at risk of abuse or neglect, and those involved in the youth justice system.

Working in partnership towards realistic and enduring child poverty measures and targets

In aiming to reduce poverty within a normal period of economic activity, the Government is signalling an intention to set its targets realistically – given the depth of child poverty, it will not be an easy task to bring the numbers down.

However, realism must not become an excuse for inadequate action. A broad and strategic approach is needed to ensure the targets are met, and to ensure that a reduction in child poverty is sustained long-term and that it makes a real difference to children's wellbeing.

Policies and actions to reduce child poverty need to be developed transparently and in partnership with the children's sector to support community-led development and to enable whānau, families and children themselves to contribute to identifying problems and shaping solutions.

Effective planning and policy-making for children requires good information

Robust, disaggregated data and other evidence such as qualitative research and children's views must be used to inform decision-making affecting children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention) provides an existing framework for planning to promote and protect children's wellbeing and should underpin the Child Wellbeing Strategy, as well as cross-government approaches that affect, and give effect to, children's rights.

We suggest that a set of rights-based principles be incorporated in the Bill to encourage coordinated, child-centred and whole family and whānau approaches to policies across government.

These principles should help define child wellbeing and what it will take for all children to have good childhoods where they can holistically exercise and enjoy their rights to, amongst other things: be treated with respect and dignity; be cared for by their parents and whānau, with support where needed; live free from violence; have an adequate standard of living; timely access to quality healthcare and education; opportunities to play and be with friends; and be connected to their own culture.

We recommend principles similar to those set out in section 5 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017 be used so that the Bill embeds children's rights, is mana enhancing and gives effect to the principles of whakapapa and whanaungatanga.

Being child-centred across government

Measures to reduce child poverty will potentially be undermined unless the way children's rights and interests are taken into account across all of government is improved. In addition to sectors traditionally associated with children's wellbeing, such as health, education, housing and social services, decisions about transport, justice, the labour market, climate change, privacy and data protection and collection also impact on children.

Quality universal services are essential for all children

Reducing child poverty and mitigating its impact on children depends on all children being able to access and benefit from quality universal public services, such as health, education and social services.

A Ministry for Children should be for all children

We welcome that the Vulnerable Children Act 2014 is to be called the Children's Act 2014, in line with the Ministry's name change to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children. We urge government to be transparent about how Oranga Tamariki will focus on all children. We are concerned that many children who fall outside current risk criteria will have difficulty accessing services, support and interventions that are critical to their wellbeing.

The importance of getting the measures right

To accurately measure child poverty and its reduction, it is crucial that fixed line low-income after housing costs accurately represent current average housing prices and incomes. The fixed line measure takes income at a point in time (currently 2007) adjusted annually by the Consumer Price Index as a baseline. However, real incomes change over time, and while the median income may fluctuate, a reference year that is too outdated (as this one is) becomes out of touch with the reality of surviving on a low income.

The data collected by the Household Economic Survey (HES) is out of date by the time it is publicly reported on. For example, the latest income information for the 2018 Household Incomes report was collected between July 2016 and June 2017, and based on income information from the 12 months prior. This means that by the time the next report is released in July 2018, data on incomes for some families may be two years out of date.

Information in the HES is also drawn from an insufficient sample range and size. The survey is generally conducted on 3000-3500 private households, including only 1000 with children. A bigger sample size is needed, to provide an accurate representation of the population. To provide a more representative picture of the economic circumstances of Aotearoa's children, the sample needs to include a sufficient number of children with disabilities, tamariki Māori, Pasifika and Asian children, and a sample of children who are homeless. Poverty lines should be validated based on knowledge - gained through consultation with those living on low incomes - of what level of income is required to ensure a minimum adequate standard of living for children, and what is needed for them to thrive.

We support the Bill's intent and recommend:

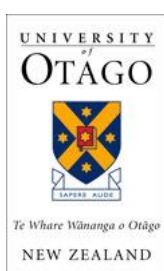
1. The development and implementation of the Child Wellbeing Strategy, including action to reduce child poverty, be consistent with and uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
2. Principles similar to those set out in section 5 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017 be included in the Bill to embed children's rights and ensure the Bill is mana enhancing and gives effect to the principles of whakapapa and whanaungatanga.
3. Poverty reduction targets and measures should be realistic and, most of all, backed by policies that will be effective in achieving them.
4. The Child Wellbeing Strategy:
 - take a child rights approach encompassing all children in Aotearoa New Zealand and all areas of their lives, as required under the Children's Convention; and
 - be developed, designed and monitored
 - in consultation with children; and
 - in partnership with iwi and Māori organisations, non-government organisations and communities; and
 - be adequately resourced and budgeted for, have clear time frames and transparent processes for review, monitoring and reporting on progress.
5. Actions under the Child Wellbeing Strategy to reduce child poverty and improve the wellbeing of children should align public policies and social service delivery with children's rights so that all children and young people, at all stages of their childhood and adolescence, have access to and equitable outcomes from:
 - a. sufficient income and an adequate standard of living;
 - b. quality housing;
 - c. free quality public education;
 - d. good health, including nutritious food, and quality healthcare when needed; and
 - e. timely, flexible and integrated social support services when they need them.
6. The reference year for the fixed-line after housing costs poverty measure be updated at least every five years.

- More resourcing should be allocated to the collection of and reporting on data so that it can be captured, disaggregated and analysed as promptly as possible and based on a larger sample than currently taken by the Household Economic Survey (HES), from which the Household Incomes Report is drawn.

*"Take care of our children
Take care of what they hear
Take care of what they see
Take care of what they feel
For how the children grow
So will be the shape of Aotearoa"*

Dame Whina Cooper ONZ

This submission is endorsed by the following organisations and individuals committed to building a better Aotearoa-New Zealand for children:

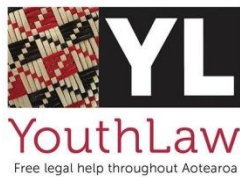


TE HUNGA HAUĀ MAURI MŌ NGĀ TĀNGATA KATOĀ



New Zealand Council Of Christian Social Services





Disabled Persons Assembly NZ



Full list of supporters below:

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[Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington](#)

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Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with tenderness and respect, as equals. They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be –the unknown person inside each of them is the hope for the future.” Janusz Korczak, 1878 - 1942

ⁱ Child Poverty Monitor.