

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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Children continue to be left behind

Child Poverty Action Group is again urging the government to put children at the centre of its policies, in the light of two new reports highlighting many New Zealand children's poor health and housing.

CPAG's children's health spokesperson, Professor Innes Asher says the high levels of child poverty in New Zealand should disturb decent New Zealanders.

"We are well behind comparable countries in the OECD. More investment in children is urgently needed, and the wisest use of funds this country could make. We quite rightly feel outraged when children are abused, but the many thousands more that are hospitalised due to preventable third-world diseases, some left with permanently damaged bodies, seem not to bother us."

Professor Asher says the Public Health Advisory Committee's report demonstrates clearly the direction the government should take.

"In our hospitals and schools we are seeing the results of years of scrimping on children's wellbeing every day, especially among Maori and Pasifika children who have been hit particularly hard by the recession. Unless we act to take up the recommendations of the report New Zealand's future will be irrevocably compromised."

General practitioner Dr Nikki Turner says the message from the reports is clear. "We need to be investing a great deal more attention to services for the early childhood years, and we need sustained and integrated services to ensure all children get the care they need. We especially need better information systems so we can monitor children and detect early if they are unwell or their families are not coping.

“Integrated care means improving housing, ensuring families have sufficient income to eat well, and have access to healthcare. While we hope whanau ora can begin to address some of these issues, it is too little given the gaps that currently exist.”

“We need to rethink what is important to us,” said Dr Turner. “We have a Minister for the Rugby World Cup, but do not have a Minister for Children. We’ve had endless debates about party central, but despite plenty of rhetoric still lack the real focus needed for our children.”

The reports can be found here:

[The Best Start in Life: Achieving effective action on child health and wellbeing](#)

[Children’s housing futures](#)