

## 2014 Wellington Post Budget Breakfast Report

On 16 May 2014 the Child Poverty Action Group and the Wellington Branch of the Public Health Association (PHA) hosted the annual Wellington Post Budget Breakfast at Loaves and Fishes, one of several hosted around the country. The Breakfast offered child-focused analyses and commentary of this year's Budget and how it affects children and young people. This year the theme of the breakfast was "Childhood Inequality – A Budget Priority?" and several important guests spoke.



Maria Cotter

The Breakfast was attended by politicians and journalists and more than 140 members of the public who shared an interest in ending child poverty and improving the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders. In fact it became standing room only.

While acknowledging some positives, such as free access to primary care for under-13s, the speakers generally expressed disappointment with the Budget, especially in regards to addressing the issues New Zealand's youngest and most vulnerable citizens face.

The Breakfast was opened by Maria Cotter, the Chair of the PHA's Wellington Branch. Before introducing the two main speakers, she talked briefly about how we should be interpreting the Budget.

"There's been a lot of talk this year about surplus and being in the black, but Budgets are about so much more than just accountancy – they reflect the values, goals and priorities of the Government, which can tell us a lot about what to expect in the near future."



Suzanne Snively

Suzanne Snively, 2013 Wellingtonian of the Year, was the morning's first main speaker, and she discussed three of the main issues children are facing: equity, inequality and poverty.

"Did the Budget nail these three things? No – this Budget was about being safe and secure. The Government wanted to show to other countries that we're capable of running a surplus and producing an orthodox Budget. If equity, inequality and child poverty are going to be addressed, it will require a reasonable investment, which is never going to happen when a surplus is the priority.

"New Zealand used to be a much better place in which to live. It was once ranked first for its distribution of wealth, fourth as one of the best places to live and, when I came here 40 years ago, had a total of 212 people unemployed. Now New Zealand has the second lowest wages rate in the OECD.

"During the 1990s there was a significant increase in inequality. Governments now look at the current rate of inequality, and don't see any growth, so see no need to address it. But we shouldn't be happy with the standard of inequality in New Zealand, especially when children are affected."

Alan Johnson, CPAG Co-Convenor and Housing spokesperson, was the Breakfast's second main speaker, and expressed disappointment in the Budget's priorities.



“My hope for the Budget was we’d begin to make children, especially poor children and at-risk youth, a greater priority.

“Tied up in this are a number of significant problems New Zealand faces, such as an ageing population and a serious housing crisis in Auckland and Christchurch. So it’s startling to see no investment in housing, and a decline in spending on health.

“To its credit, the Government has tried hard to engage the poorest families with children, by increasing access to early childhood education, but this year we’re also seeing a decline in spending on education, which will affect primary and secondary students.

“So this Budget has continued in the vein of previous Budgets by avoiding addressing any of these big issues.”



**Alan Johnson**



**Bill Rosenberg**

CTU Economist Bill Rosenberg said the priority of getting our Budget being into the black ignores the other issues society is facing – poverty and inequality – and that the Government needs to take a more balanced approach in its Budgets.

Child advocate Beth Woods briefly discussed the need for greater efforts on prevention for child abuse. She said the Government’s focus is on children who have already been abused is good, but there’s no effort or spending on prevention.

CPAG's Dr Nikki Turner said there are three things essential to reducing inequality and poverty: access to primary care; better housing and nutrition; and adequate income.

"It's great to see the Government acknowledging the value of primary care and we're grateful for what's been done in this Budget. However, we need to do much more on housing, nutrition and, particularly adequate income. If we don't make a comprehensive plan to address all these things we will not make progress in reducing inequality and poverty."



**Beth Woods**



**Nikki Turner**



**Judith Nowotarski**

Early childhood teacher Judith Nowotarski said she was excited to see the Budget had increased access to primary health care for 6-12 year-olds, but said she was underwhelmed about the announcements regarding early childhood services.

"Increasing access to early childhood education is great, especially for children suffering from poverty, but we also need investment in our early childhood services."