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PRESS RELEASE: In Work Payment fails Maori and Pasifika children

Rather than reversing existing disadvantage, the burden of discrimination built in to the new In Work Payment (IWP) will fall particularly hard on Maori and Pasifika families, says the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

CPAG research analyst and author of *Hard to Swallow: Foodbanks in NZ* Donna Wynd says tamariki Maori and Pasifika make up just over half of all those excluded from the IWP's largesse. The IWP fails to address the poverty of 230,000 New Zealand children.

The IWP is a major plank of the Working for Families package, and was introduced on April 1 2006. "It is based on the idea that parents' paid work is *the* way out of child poverty," explains Wynd. Children whose parents cannot work the required number of hours weekly, or receive a benefit, are excluded. CPAG alleges this is discrimination on the basis of parental work status.

An increasing proportion of children are of Maori or Pacific descent, and this group has been particularly adversely affected by the rise in child poverty in recent decades. CPAG's Dr Lorna Dyall says "Tamariki Maori and Pasifika are more likely to be in families reliant on insecure jobs, insecure working hours and benefit income. They are thus more likely to miss out on the new, long-delayed assistance."

Wynd agrees, adding "Children who, as a matter of government policy, fall behind because of their family situations are unlikely to grow into the educated, healthy adults our country needs. Spending on the bottom income groups needs to increase for these families to recover the ground they have lost since the economic and labour market restructuring of the late eighties and nineties."

Dr Dyall points out that, as it is currently designed, the IWP undermines the Government's commitment to address health disparities for Maori and Pacific families, along with other national and international obligations. "Access to secure, adequate income is urgently needed to safeguard and enhance the health of generations to come," she says. "More than any adult lifestyle choices, income status in childhood helps determine health status for a lifetime."

Wynd emphasises "The Government's stated goal is to ensure 'that families, young and old, are able to be secure and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.' Under the IWP this goal will only become more elusive as many of the poorest become relatively worse off. CPAG believes the discrimination built into the IWP must be removed, as a matter of social justice."

- In 2001, 35% of children under 15 were of Pacific or Maori descent, as compared to 21% for the population as a whole. For children under five years of age the proportion was 38%.
- For more information, see Donna Wynd's background paper ***Committed to Fairness and Opportunity? A brief analysis of the impact of the In Work Payment on***

Maori and Pasifika families. Freely downloadable from
www.cpag.org.nz/resources/backgrounders/

- For information about CPAG's legal case concerning discrimination in the IWP, see www.cpag.org.nz/campaigns/Child_Tax_Credit_IWP.html