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PRESS RELEASE: Back to the Future for National's Housing Policies

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) says reintroduction of market rentals for state housing would hit poor families hardest. CPAG invites Dr. Brash to take a crash course on the reality for poor families in New Zealand.

Interviewed on National Radio's Nine to Noon show yesterday, Don Brash stood by his party's plans to exhume its 1990s policy of market rentals for state house tenants. However, Mr. Brash admitted ignorance of the policy's well-documented devastation, which affected a generation of kiwi kids.

CPAG economics spokesperson Donna Wynd recently completed a report on the use of foodbanks in New Zealand. She says, "In the last 15 years private-sector housing costs have exploded, well ahead of increases in low wages and benefits. This is reflected in ongoing increases in demand at foodbanks across the country.

"Low-income families are already struggling to pay for basics such as food, electricity and school fees. This includes families in state housing. The children in these families should not be exposed to further cuts in necessities because the state landlord suddenly changes the rules about rent, as happened in the nineties.

"Nor will the Accommodation Supplement solve the national housing affordability crisis, as Dr Brash has suggested. It has not done so in the eleven years it has been around, and probably helped fuel the property bubble in the first place. And at a cost to the taxpayer of about \$800 million this year alone, it is not a cheap solution to the housing problem."

Children need decent, stable housing. When housing needs are not met, the resulting childhood problems have wide-ranging and long-lasting effects on their health, education and future prospects. Avoidable death and illness are strongly linked to overcrowding and unsafe housing, says CPAG health spokesperson Dr Nikki Turner.

Dr Turner says, "In the 1990s New Zealand children's health outcomes for pneumonia, serious skin infections, meningococcal disease, and chronic lung infections rapidly worsened as child poverty rates tripled and housing costs soared. For Don Brash to say that we need to bring back market rents because we still have Meningococcal B after six years of income-related rents is flippant. The problem remains one of overcrowding, and a lack of affordable housing."

Dr Brash, the evidence on your policies is in. Adequate housing is vital for children's well-being. We cannot afford to leave our poorest children's health at the mercy of the speculative property market.

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