

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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Children's needs must come first, say advocates.

Child Poverty Action Group is asking the government to put children at the centre of its policies as unemployment puts greater stress on families.

Economics spokesperson Dr Susan St John says that it is time to rethink family assistance so that the mistakes of the 1990s are not repeated.

"We are doing almost nothing to prevent another generation of young people reaping the consequences of the poverty and inequality that plagued their older siblings and cousins. As more families lose their jobs, possibly for many weeks, it is important that their child-related assistance is not reduced as well. Keeping assistance related to work when unemployment is forecast to rise to 8% or higher is sheer folly," she said.

Foodbanks and budgeting services have reported record numbers of clients as families struggle to put food on the table. While the government's ReStart package is available to some families, it has only been taken up by about 3,200 families across the country.

"When we are losing 1,000 jobs per week, it is obvious Restart falls well short of any measure needed to relieve the hardship faced by families out of work. It is time to make sure that all children are supported through the recession, and make the In-Work Tax Credit available to low-income families regardless of whether they are working, on benefits or recently redundant. The OECD has said that children should not be held responsible for their parents, yet this is what we continue to do."

CPAG is also calling on the government to put measures in place to ensure children's health is not the first casualty of the recession.

"New Zealand's rates of preventable childhood diseases are already high and we are concerned that poor nutrition and inadequate income will make children even more vulnerable to winter illnesses," said Dr Nikki Turner.

Dr St John says the In-Work Tax Credit now will cost much less than illness now, and well into the future. "Let's put the needs of our most vulnerable children first," she says.

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