

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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CPAG welcomes Children's Commissioner's plan of action on child poverty

Child Poverty Action Group has welcomed today's report to the Children's Commissioner and Barnardos, which urges the government to adopt a sustained, coordinated plan of action to end child poverty in New Zealand.

The group also endorses the Commissioner's call to set national targets to ensure progress. According to the report one in every five New Zealand children remain in poverty despite seven years of strong economic growth.

"This situation is unacceptable and unsustainable," says CPAG economics spokesperson Dr Susan St John. "The report's recommendations are responsible, and will go a long way to addressing this."

"Fortunately most poverty in New Zealand is preventable," adds social security spokesperson Assoc-Prof Mike O'Brien. "We need a concerted effort to make a greater investment in children. The failure to do so will be costly for all of us."

"Children are poorer than people in other age groups," he says. "Poverty increases the chances that children's health, education and future prospects are compromised."

Improving family incomes, starting at the bottom of the scale, is not the only thing we need to do, but it is the most important, says Dr St John. The social safety net that is meant to protect family incomes during the vital years of childhood has been eroded, and needs to be rebuilt. Tax credits for children are too complex and leave the poorest children, who are in families on benefits, well behind their peers, she notes.

Assoc-Prof O'Brien agrees that with many families living on less than \$370 per week, it is obvious parents need more assistance to feed, house and provide for their children. Better policies can make the difference, as international evidence shows. Yet New Zealand's current policies leave children vulnerable to labour market fluctuations and miserable benefits.

CPAG says the country should start to count the high cost of our high levels of poverty, compared to the cost of greater investment in our children. The group calls on all political parties to commit to ending child poverty by 2020. New Zealand cannot afford not to act on the report's proposals.