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**PRESS RELEASE: Gap between poorest children and the rest continues to widen**

11 July, 2006

Research released today by the Ministry of Social Development shows that despite the economic boom, living standards of New Zealand's poorest children are slipping dangerously, says Child Poverty Action Group.

"The proportion of all children in severe and significant hardship has increased from 18% to 26% since 2000," says economics spokesperson Dr Susan St John. "Sadly, this disturbing result comes as no surprise, given the warning signs have been obvious, such as the continuing increase in foodbank use."

"Our poorest families are being left behind. For children this means postponed doctors' visits, unfilled prescriptions, and unhealthy overcrowding. The minimum wage is too low, and family support has been eroded by inflation over the years.

"Although the government has chosen to prioritise support for families with children through the Working for Families package, many of the poorest children have been left out. All families with children should be consistently supported, including during hard times when parents may not be in the full-time workforce.

"This level of deprivation means that these children are denied the opportunity to reach their full potential as contributing members of society" says St John. "The results stand as a challenge to all of us to put the welfare of children first. The social cost of not doing so is too high."

Dr Nikki Turner, CPAG health spokesperson, says the results are reflected in the shocking health status of our children. "It is shameful to us that poverty has been allowed to deepen over the course of an economic boom that has seen companies making record profits," she says. "The people who suffer the greatest poverty in New Zealand are our children with 38% in hardship categories, compared to just 8% of those aged over 65. This severely compromises their ability to grow up in a healthy environment where they can get access to basics such as decent housing and medical care. Is this really what we want as a country?"

Child Poverty Action Group congratulated the Government on the quality of the research. "While the results are certainly dismal for our poorest children, it also gives a clear direction for future policy".