

**PRESS RELEASE:**

**Income support proposals fail children, say advocates**



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Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is concerned that the proposed changes to the treatment of beneficiaries announced today appear to have overlooked the needs of children in a drive to push parents into the workforce.

"Children's needs do not seem to be part of the 'work first' picture. Secure, adequate family income – not parental employment - is the first important requirement of child wellbeing," says CPAG economics spokesperson Dr Susan St John.

"This government has failed to lift benefit incomes since coming to power. Net income gains from the generous Working for Families package have been nearly nil for 175,000 children in families on benefits. The present focus on getting parents into work ignores the woefully inadequate income many families endure," said Dr St John.

CPAG health spokesperson, paediatrician Professor Innes Asher, expressed concern about the proposed changes. "National health statistics show that New Zealand's large income gap contributes to the poor health of low-income earners and their children. The failure to address these low incomes is bad news for the kids in our poorest families."

CPAG is also concerned about the effects on the wider community. "Community workers tell us they have grave concerns for the children of parents pushed off benefits into unsuitable jobs," says researcher Donna Wynd.

"Here we have a government that refuses to acknowledge that caring for children makes a worthwhile contribution to society. Looking after children is real work, but only if someone else is paid to do it. Sole parents need much better support and recognition of the importance of their parenting role. Even more worrying is that there may be sanctions of up to 50% of a household's benefit for failures to comply with new work requirements," Wynd says.

Dr St John also expressed concern that the legislation, due out in December, would be rushed through without full public consultation and input. "It is important that these major changes are scrutinised through the select committee process," she said. "Everyone has an interest in our children's wellbeing, and the legislative process must reflect this."