

# CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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## **MAJOR REPORT URGES GOVERNMENT TO PRIORITISE ENDING CHILD POVERTY IN NEW ZEALAND**

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has today released a major research report calling for New Zealand to make a commitment to ending child poverty by 2020.

Government must set targets to measure progress towards that goal, CPAG says. One in five children remain in poverty, despite the recent economic boom.

*Left Behind: How social and income inequalities damage New Zealand children* has been written by health, education, economics and other experts, including Dr Susan St John and Donna Wynd who also edited it.

“Poverty in the early years of life imposes very high costs on children, their families and society,” says CPAG director Janfrie Wakim.

The Government has invested significantly in many areas of children’s lives, for example with the Working for Families package, but there is much more to be done.

“Increasing income and wealth gaps are wreaking havoc in our communities. Too many children have been left behind in current policy,” says Donna Wynd.

“Income is a very important determinant of a child’s life chances,” says Dr St John. “We need to learn from other countries what works to protect children from poverty. Paid work is important but only part of the answer. Universal child benefits that work well elsewhere have been abandoned here and complex work-related tax credits for children have been emphasised.”

*Left Behind* spells out how inequality is harming all aspects of children’s lives and how to address this. It also outlines recommendations for how those might be addressed. The solutions must be co-ordinated across all sectors.

“In the health sector we see first-hand the devastation caused by poverty,” says contributing author Dr Nikki Turner.

“New Zealand children have higher rates of preventable illness and deaths from injuries than children in almost any other OECD country. Poverty is a key factor in that.

“We know the single most important determinant of health is income. Insufficient disposable income, substandard housing, inadequate nutritious food and unequal access to health care all contribute to the risk of poor health.

“This is especially clear for Māori and Pasifika children. They are much more likely to grow up in poverty, and correspondingly are most at risk of poor health,” explains Dr Turner.

Dr St John and Ms Wynd say *Left Behind* shows the ways in which income and social inequality compounds, leaving too many children vulnerable to a cycle of disadvantage. Left unchecked, the cycle of poverty is a far greater factor in producing inter-generational disadvantage than any individual lifestyle or behavioural choices.

CPAG says substantial, ongoing redistribution of resources will be needed if we are serious about making a difference to children’s life chances. This would represent a just and wise investment as well as acknowledgement of the vital social and economic contribution made by good parenting.

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