

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Whangarei leads the way prioritising better healthcare for young children

Manaia Health PHO has just announced that they will be subsidising after hours and weekend care for all children under 6. The cost per visit will drop from \$15 to \$5.

CPAG health advisor, Professor Innes Asher, notes that “any parent knows that children, especially pre-schoolers, often get sick out of normal business hours”. With 75% of the week ‘after hours’, this is bound to happen.

New Zealand’s appalling statistics for child health are highlighted in a recently released OECD report, *Doing Better for Children*. One in six New Zealand children lives in poverty, and one in three children live in overcrowded conditions. Poverty increases the chances of inadequate nutrition and thus low resistance to disease, and overcrowded living conditions increase the chances of contracting and transmitting infectious disease.

The high cost of after-hours care is a real barrier to seeking timely treatment, and it can put off parents seeking help. Such delays often mean that a child’s condition has deteriorated to the point where hospitalisation is necessary, which is not only very costly but also traumatic for the child and family.

Professor Asher is deeply concerned about how badly out of line New Zealand is compared with other OECD countries in the cost of after hours primary medical care for children. In Europe including the UK, in Canada, and in Australia’s bulk billing practices, it costs the parent nothing for a child to see a doctor at any time of the day or night, any day of the week. In those countries, rates of hospitalisation for serious diseases which are preventable by timely primary health care are much, much lower than in New Zealand.

Professor Asher congratulates Manaia Health PHO and challenges other primary care doctors to reduce the cost of after-hours care for young children.