

CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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OECD report a shocker, says Child Poverty Action Group

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has welcomed the OECD's latest report on children's wellbeing, but says the picture it paints of New Zealand children is shocking. The report, *Doing Better for Children*, is a comprehensive cross-country comparison of children across the wider OECD, and shows New Zealand continues to lag behind in its care of children.

CPAG researcher Donna Wynd says the report confirms New Zealand's high rates of child poverty, and generally poor living conditions for low-income children. "One in six New Zealand children lives in poverty, meaning they are more likely to live in poverty than any other group. A third of children live in overcrowded conditions, and we have the highest rates of youth suicide in the entire OECD. This is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as New Zealand."

She also says the report recommends spending more on disadvantaged children, yet the government is cutting or deferring spending on the most vulnerable families. "The report makes it very clear that for fairness and effectiveness more must be done to improve the lot of vulnerable children. Increasing funding for wealthy private schools at the expense of low-income children is neither effective or fair, and suggests we are not serious about ending the blight of child poverty," she says.

"CPAG strongly supports the reports recommendation that governments establish targets to monitor children's wellbeing. This holds policy makers to account and signals when policies are not working. This is vital if we want our policies to help children live better lives."

Ms Wynd says the government has a choice about how well children live, even in a recession. Steps that would make a positive contribution to all children include:

- Acknowledge that looking after young children is work. All caregivers of young children should receive the In-Work Tax Credit regardless of whether they are on a benefit or not.
- Core welfare benefits must be raised. They have fallen behind, and too many families on benefits are in hardship.
- Equal geographical access to 20 hours early childhood education from the age of 3. While CPAG welcomes plans to build three more early childhood centres in South Auckland, this is still inadequate, and does not address access in other parts of the country.
- A more equitable share of health funding for under-fives, including free after-hours doctors visits.
- Increased funding for alternative schools for children with high needs, and support for programmes that help overcome the effects of poverty and multiple deprivation.

Ms Wynd says "We agree that failing to deal with child poverty now will cost us in the future. This cannot wait - we must act now."

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