

# CHiLD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

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## ***World Pneumonia Day 2 November 2009***

Despite being an industrialised country, New Zealand has worse rates of pneumonia amongst children than other OECD countries.

Dr Cameron Grant, pneumonia expert and Associate Professor in Paediatrics at Starship Children's Hospital, reports that pneumonia hospitalises more than 3,000 children under age 14 in New Zealand each year, a rate five times higher than in the United States. At Starship Children's Hospital, the admission rate for children with pneumonia each year is 14 per 1000 for Pacific, nearly 7 per 1000 for Maori, and almost 3 per 1,000 for European/other children.

Professor Innes Asher says "Poverty is a key reason for the high rates of pneumonia admissions and deaths." The recent MSD's 2009 *Social Report* shows 1 in 5 New Zealand children living in a household under significant financial stress. "Pneumonia occurs when there is inadequate nutrition, missed immunisations, overcrowded and substandard housing, or delayed treatment. Many families cannot afford good food, suitable housing, and GP fees, particularly afterhours and weekend costs."

Poorly treated pneumonia or repeated episodes of pneumonia can go on to permanent lung scarring (bronchiectasis) that can cripple the lungs and lives of our young people. Professor Asher says "New Zealand children are 18 times more likely to develop this permanent lung scarring than children in Britain, with even higher risks in Māori and Pacific children. The type and frequency of the lung scarring seen in our children is only found in other severely disadvantaged communities such as Australian Aboriginal, Native American and Native Alaskan communities.

Professor Asher urges the government to recognise the harm that poverty is doing to our children. Dr Grant and Dr Richard Milne have calculated that pneumonia in children costs New Zealand at least \$7 million dollars per year in direct medical costs, and the subsequent health care costs are likely to far exceed the direct costs.

Professor Asher urges the government to honour World Pneumonia Day and address the appalling statistics for child health by relieving the poverty of the poorest families and improving access to primary health care. She says "Why not spend money on prevention of pneumonia rather than spending millions only on its direct treatment?"

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**On this issue, see: [NZ Herald Op-Ed 5 November 2009](#)**