

Media release

Thursday 7 December

Child Poverty Monitor 2017: Sustainable improvements needed

The growth in child poverty has been halted and relevant indicators are dropping, says the Children's Commissioner on release of the latest Child Poverty Monitor data. However, sustained progress is needed so that all children have the same opportunities to flourish and thrive

"Following an increase in benefit levels in 2015 and other adjustments by the previous Government, we have seen a small drop in the number of children living in households on low incomes or lacking the items they need for everyday living", says Judge Andrew Becroft.

"But there are still 290,000 children in households on low incomes and up to 135,000 children lacking basic items. All of this combines to produce a poverty of opportunity for children which we want to undo.

"We are very encouraged to see the commitment to put child poverty measures and an obligation on governments to set regular targets into legislation, as well as the number of Government initiatives signalled in the 'first 100 days' work programme, including the proposed Families Package, Best Start and increases to Paid Parental Leave. These policies will make a real difference in reversing the trend.

"But it is essential that we keep up this momentum. One small step will not be enough. We need to see changes like these every year to see a substantial long-term decrease in poverty, and ensure these gains are not cancelled out by increases in the cost of living. We can see for the first time some real progress towards wiping out child poverty, but it will take many small steps to get there."

Dr Mavis Duncanson, the Director of the NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service at Otago University says "All children need the same things to support their physical, mental and emotional well-being, such as a warm, dry home, a sustaining meal with vegetables and protein regularly, clothes and shoes that fit properly, a place to study quietly, and the use of a computer and internet at home. They gain enormous benefit from going on school trips, and joining in activities such as sports or kapa haka.

"Children in households with the lowest material living standards are much more likely to lack these basic needs as well as miss out on the experiences and life chances that we would want for all children."

The Child Poverty Monitor is funded by the J R McKenzie Trust, an organisation with over 75 years of involvement in important social issues. The Trust's Executive Director Robyn Scott says solving child poverty remains the responsibility of all New Zealanders.

"The Child Poverty Monitor lets us see how we are making progress. The Government initiatives are very welcome, but we mustn't lose sight of the fact that everyone can play a part in improving children's lives. Supporting organisations such as Auckland City Mission and Eat My Lunch is one way to do that. But community groups, businesses, schools and individuals can also help by providing the range of opportunities and experiences all children need."

The Monitor is now in its fifth year of tracking various measures of child poverty and reporting on the impacts of poverty on children's health, education and housing. It is a joint project by the Children's Commissioner, J R McKenzie Trust and Otago University's NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service

(NZCYES). The Monitor uses various government data sources, including the Ministry of Social Development's Household Incomes in New Zealand report.

Key data from the 2017 Monitor:

- 12% of children are living in material hardship. That means 135,000 New Zealand children are in households that are living without 7 or more items, from a total list of 17, which are considered necessary for their wellbeing. This is down from 14% or 155,000 in 2016.
- 6% (or 70,000) of New Zealand children are experiencing even worse material hardship with households missing out on 9 or more items from the list of 17. This is down from 8% or 85,000 last year.
- 27% of children are living in low income homes. That means 290,000 New Zealand children are in homes where money is tight and are considered to be in income poverty. This is down from 28% or 295,000 in 2016.
- More than 7% of children are in severe poverty. That means 80,000 New Zealand children are experiencing both material hardship and living in a low income household. This is down from 8% or 90,000 in 2016.
- While child poverty has been reasonably stable for a number of years, it is significantly worse than in the 1980s. In 1982, the percentage of children in families experiencing income poverty was 14%, compared to 27% now.

Ends.

The Child Poverty Monitor and the *Child Poverty Monitor: 2017 Technical Report* are available at www.childpoverty.co.nz Twitter: @povertymonitor Facebook: Child Poverty Monitor

Launch events

<p>Auckland Thursday 7 December 2017, 9.45 for 10am – 11.30am</p> <p>Auckland City Mission 140 Hobson Street</p> <p>Panel discussion: Where to next for child poverty solutions, featuring the Child Poverty Action Group, KidsCan and South Seas Healthcare.</p>	<p>Wellington Wednesday 13 December 3.45pm for 4pm – 5.30pm</p> <p>Lecture Theatre GBLT3, Old Government Buildings - ground floor of the main building Victoria University of Wellington (Best access from Stout Street or Bunny Street)</p> <p>Panel discussion: Where to next for child poverty solutions, with participation from Professor Girol Karacaoglu, Head Of School and Professor Jonathan Boston.</p>
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Editor's notes

In 2012 the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty recommended New Zealand develop a set of child poverty reduction targets and measures that are reported on annually.

During 2013 a partnership was formed between the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the University of Otago's NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES) and the J R McKenzie Trust. The aim of this partnership is to compile, publish and disseminate annual measures of child poverty in New Zealand in a way that is accessible to all.

The resulting Child Poverty Monitor builds on the work of the Children's Social Health Monitor (CSHM), produced by the NZCYES between 2009 and 2012. It includes all of the CSHM's original indicators, as well as extra detail on the child poverty measures recommended by the Children's Commissioners EAG on Solutions to Child Poverty. Data is sourced from the Ministry of Social Development, Statistics NZ and other government sources.

The Child Poverty Monitor (www.childpoverty.co.nz) includes key measures of child poverty in infographic form. The more detailed Technical Report, the source of this data, contains additional information on child poverty, issues around overcrowded housing, and a range of socioeconomically sensitive health outcomes. The infographics are available in PDF/JPG for organisations to use for their own advocacy purposes. The Technical Report is available on the website in PDF.