

## Media release

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# CHILD POVERTY: IT'S NOT CHOICE

**CHILD  
POVERTY  
MONITOR**

This year's Child Poverty Monitor has a simple message for New Zealand about the high number of children living in poverty: "It's not choice."

Now in its third year of tracking various measures of child poverty, the Monitor is a joint project from the Children's Commissioner, J R McKenzie Trust and Otago University's NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES). It monitors trends in four measures of child poverty: income poverty, material hardship, severe poverty and persistent poverty.

Highlights from the 2015 Monitor show:

- Child poverty is now significantly worse than the 1980s. In 1985 the percentage of children in families experiencing income poverty was 15%, compared to 29% now
- Children are far more likely to be in poverty than those 65+. The rate for children is 29% compared to 13% for the over 65s
- 14% of children are going without basic essentials like fresh fruit and vegetables, a warm house and decent clothing.
- About 9% of children are in severe poverty
- Around three out of five kids living in poverty will live this way for much of their childhood.

"We know that many children growing up in this country are falling behind. Put simply, it's not choice. It's not choice that our kids are suffering with poor health, living in damp homes and less likely to do well at school. It's also not the child's choice – or their families – to live in poverty," says Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills.

"There *is* choice around how we as a country respond to this. We have to take it seriously, we need a clear national plan for doing better and we need to show empathy for those whose choices are limited. There is plenty of great stuff happening out there for children – from the Government making doctor's visits free, to mums in Invercargill setting up school food programmes.

"But the data we released today shows we are still far, far behind where we need to be. When almost one in ten of our children are at the very hardest end of poverty it tells us we've got a long way to go.

"No matter how you measure poverty, everything points to things being far tougher than they were 30 years ago. That's not right in a country like ours and it's not fair.

"Today I'm asking New Zealanders to show they share our concern by spreading the message #itsnotchoice. If they visit our website they can take part in a selfie campaign and show that we're all behind the need for things to change for our kids."

Dr Jean Simpson, the NZCYES's Director says things must change if we want to see fewer children experiencing poor health as a result of persistent child poverty.

"Evidence tells us that high rates of child poverty are a serious concern. We know children in our most deprived communities are more likely to die before they turn one-year-old than children from communities that are better off.

"The negative health outcomes associated with child poverty are also starkly apparent in our high rates of hospital admissions for infectious and respiratory diseases. These diseases are related to living conditions. Being in damp, cold houses where there is overcrowding is bad for children's health. Diseases such as rheumatic fever can have serious lifelong implications for those who have suffered them in childhood. Reducing the number of young children living in poverty is critical to improving the health of the whole population," she says.

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 Iain Hines says child poverty is a concern for all of us and a social issue we cannot ignore.

"Children are over twice as likely to be in poverty as people over 65. We are really pleased that so few older New Zealanders face poverty, and we firmly believe that – with commitment from us all – we can make a real difference for our children too.

"While we'd love child poverty rates to fall rapidly, it's more likely that it will take some years. The Child Poverty Monitor will allow New Zealanders to track progress on this important issue. To sustain progress it needs to remain high on the public agenda," Iain Hines says.

Ends.

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**Notes:** You can access the Child Poverty Monitor and the *Child Poverty Monitor: 2015 Technical Report* at [www.childpoverty.co.nz](http://www.childpoverty.co.nz) Twitter: @povertymonitor Facebook: Child Poverty Monitor

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**Background Information on the Child Poverty Monitor**

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 four child poverty measures recommended by the Children's Commissioners EAG on Solutions to Child Poverty.

2015 is the third year the Child Poverty Monitor has been published.

The Child Poverty Monitor ([www.childpoverty.co.nz](http://www.childpoverty.co.nz)) includes high level information on the four 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 for download and free for organisations to use for their own advocacy purposes. The Technical Report is available on the website in PDF format.

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