

## **Good progress on child poverty but big task still ahead, Children's Commissioner's expert group says**

Reducing child poverty is our most important social challenge and New Zealand needs to get more serious about the task ahead, an expert group on child poverty says.

Today the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Solutions to Child Poverty released a progress paper on recommendations they made in December. While the EAG says good work is underway, it recommends some urgent next steps if a significant reduction in child poverty and deprivation is to be achieved.

These include the creation of a comprehensive child poverty strategy, steps to address income poverty and improved access to affordable, good quality housing and to healthcare.

Professor Jonathan Boston, EAG co-chair says it is heartening to see the work underway by the Government, business and in the community.

"We've seen a more concerted effort over the last year and the range of activity is very pleasing," he says.

"A good example was this year's Budget – with the Government committing additional resources to addressing child poverty. This included \$100 million for the Warm-Up New Zealand: Healthy Homes programme, \$21 million towards rheumatic fever and \$9.5 million for the KickStart breakfast programme.

"The Government is also looking more closely at the impact of poor quality housing on our children, with a Warrant of Fitness scheme to be rolled out across the state housing sector and \$2.9 billion funding to expand social housing.

"Business and communities have also stepped up. For example, significant business funding has been put into food-in-schools programmes, Dunedin City Council is looking to improve the quality of private rental accommodation and a number of charities have put money into child poverty initiatives.

"While this groundswell of work is positive, it will not be adequate given the magnitude of the challenge. Working in a piecemeal way, no matter how well-intentioned, is no way to tackle a complex problem like child poverty."

The EAG's report, *Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand: Evidence for Action*, recommended a comprehensive, holistic and sustained response.

"We need a proper strategic approach, with specific poverty reduction targets and a clear monitoring and reporting framework. A good start would be to include child poverty in the Better Public Service targets," Professor Boston says.

Dr Tracey McIntosh, EAG co-chair says there is also a pressing need to fill the gaps in areas where children experiencing poverty are most at risk of poor outcomes. These gaps are around inadequate family income and access to healthcare and affordable, good quality housing.

"We're recommending that the Government review the Family Tax Credit system and target additional support to where it's needed – for younger children and larger families," she says.

"We also think more needs to be done to tackle the shocking health of our poorest children. While better healthcare will not solve the root cause of poverty, it will help those children suffering at the sharp end. Investing more in maternity services and universal 24 hour access to healthcare and medication for all children would be a good start.

“While there is positive movement on our recommendations to improve housing, we think much more needs to be done. Children are still living in poor conditions and this is having flow-on effects on their health, educational and social outcomes. We need more quality social housing and for the Warrant of Fitness system to be implemented and extended to private rentals.”

“We’re heartened by the growing public understanding of the harmful impact of child poverty and the amount of energy committed by so many around the country. There really is no better time than now to harness the momentum and get this right for children and New Zealand. “

Ends.