

Media release

Report highlights children's vulnerability in tough times – Children's Commissioner

Children experiencing poverty are at greater risk of poor health outcomes according to a report on children's social health released today.

Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills says today's Children's Social Health Monitor 2012 update shows that increased efforts to support families during tough economic times is a 'must do'.

"There is a clear correlation between an increase in socioeconomically sensitive medical conditions and the economic downturn. This must be top-of-mind when decision-makers are setting policy and allocating resources for communities experiencing hardship.

"There are things government is already doing that will be helpful, including encouraging parents into work, on-time immunisation, and reducing acute rheumatic fever and rates of assaults on children. But clearly this effort needs to continue and be strengthened.

"For example, the Social Health Monitor shows that the numbers of children being admitted to hospital for infectious and respiratory conditions like rheumatic fever and skin infections are still unacceptably high.

"Although the rates are dropping, there is an average of around 36,000 hospital admissions a year. This is still a startlingly high number of children suffering from poor health as a result of conditions that a country like New Zealand should simply not be seeing.

"The admission rates are particularly concerning for communities already experiencing disadvantage like Maori, Pasifika and young people. There are life-long impacts of experiencing poor health in childhood and we should be very worried about the numbers in these communities who are not thriving.

"There are some positives however. It's pleasing to see the decrease in vaccine preventable diseases which are sensitive to the new pneumococcal vaccine such as otitis media (ear infections) and bacterial pneumonia.

"Plus, admissions for assault appear to be falling at last, which I'm relieved to see. Deaths due to assault however haven't really changed and this is why I'm supporting the White Paper reforms. The bottom line is that we need to do more for children, particularly in times where the economic conditions are tough.

"My expert group on solutions to child poverty will release their final recommendations tomorrow. Many of the solutions in that report will directly address the issues and concerns raised in the Children's Social Health Monitor. I look forward to the government's response to these suggestions."

Ends.