



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

**Children's
Commissioner**

Press Release

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Budget announcements on child poverty a good start

Today's budget announcements on child poverty are good first steps for our most vulnerable children, says Dr Russell Wills, Children's Commissioner.

"Ministers have clearly read our report: *Solutions to Child Poverty*, released in December 2012, and listened to New Zealanders' concern about children living in poverty, says Dr Wills.

"There is much in today's package to be impressed with, particularly given the government's constrained finances. We might just be becoming a country that prioritises its children.

Co-chairs of the expert advisory group Dr Jonathon Boston and Dr Tracey McIntosh agree today's announcement is a good starting point: "I welcome any measures to alleviate child poverty and improve children's wellbeing, but there is much more work to be done," says Dr Boston.

"It is important government take steps to address these issues and start to make a difference in the lives of children, communities and families," adds Dr McIntosh.

Dr Wills says he is pleased to see the increased support for parents on benefits: "It is good to see government moving towards a more hands-on and supportive approach for Work and Income clients.

"It is very pleasing to see resourcing to implementation of the vulnerable children's action plan. This programme of work is critical in changing the way services respond to vulnerable children and provide effective services to them and their families.

"The additional funding for Kin Carers and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren is essential funding and should give real support to children and families. I also welcome the increased funding for early education, particularly the \$41.3m for services working with vulnerable families. This extra resource means more children will be able to access early education. This focus on early years will make a long-term difference to our children's educational outcomes.

"We know crowded, cold and damp houses contribute greatly to dismal health and education outcomes for children. So, I am also pleased to see the first serious efforts to increase housing supply - a necessary first step towards improving housing affordability. Increasing the number of affordable houses and the number of bedrooms will help address over-crowding issues.

"I note the focus is on Housing New Zealand properties and it is good to see the introduction of a basic minimum standard for these properties and continued funding for insulation. These initiatives, combined with work and funding already announced to address rheumatic fever, and the expansion to B4 schools checks, will make a positive difference in the lives of many children.

"However, I note that no action is being taken on a warrant of fitness for privately-owned rentals at this stage. Given that two thirds of children in poverty living in rented housing are in private rental homes, I look forward to hearing government's plans to improve the standard of private rental accommodation.

"The announcement regarding increased support for budgeting services and the intention to further progress work on microfinance is also more good news for families. We know problem debt is a serious issue for poor families with children. Banks, NGOs and Work and Income working together to give families access to affordable credit will be a major step forward. Directors of banks keen to be involved should know it will make a great difference to families.

"We understand that further work is being done on food in schools and I look forward to seeing what that package is. I am also pleased to hear that a formal response to the Expert Advisory Group's report will be made shortly.

"Child Poverty is complex and it takes time to get the policy work right. I will continue to work with officials to progress the Expert Advisory Group's recommendations specifically to action work on food in schools, microfinance, the Vulnerable Children's Action Plan and working to improve child health services," says Dr. Wills

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The final report of the Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty was released in December 2012. The report can be found at www.occ.org.nz and contains 78 recommendations designed to reduce child poverty and its effects.

To arrange an interview with the **Children's Commissioner, Dr. Russell Wills**, please contact: Victoria Parsons, Communications Advisor, **027 696 5101**

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