



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5AM MONDAY 9 DECEMBER

NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST MONITOR OF CHILD POVERTY RELEASED

Today's release of the first annual monitor of child poverty puts a spotlight on the thousands of Kiwi kids who aren't getting the start to life they deserve.

The Child Poverty Monitor is a joint project by the Children's Commissioner, J R McKenzie Trust and Otago University's NZ Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES). For the next five years it will publish four measures of child poverty: income poverty, material hardship, severe poverty and persistent poverty. The initiative aims to raise awareness of the problem and monitor New Zealand's progress in reducing each of these measures.

The 2013 Monitor shows that one in four Kiwi kids are growing up in income poverty and one in six are going without the basic essentials like fresh fruit and vegetables, a warm house, decent shoes and visits to the doctor. Ten percent of children are at the hardest end of poverty and three out of five kids living in poverty will live this way for much of their childhood.

The data is backed up by an extensive report produced by the NZCYES, the *Child Poverty Monitor 2013: Technical Report*, building on the previous *Children's Social Health Monitor*.

Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills says the project is about giving New Zealanders the full picture on child poverty rates and to get Kiwis talking about it.

"265,000 New Zealand children are living in poverty. Is this what we want for our kids? I would like to see this talked about in homes, workplaces and schools across the country.

"Child poverty hurts all of us. It harms the individual child and it has substantial long-term costs to society. If we want to be a thriving, progressive and successful country – we're not going to get there with 25 percent of our kids in poverty," Dr Wills says.

Dr Jean Simpson, the NZCYES's Director also stresses the negative consequences of child poverty.

"Evidence tells us that high rates of child poverty are a serious concern. Poverty reduces opportunities and can create life-long health issues.

Dr Liz Craig, the NZCYES' Senior Clinical Epidemiologist agrees. "The negative health outcomes associated with child poverty are clearly highlighted in this year's technical report – in the form of hospital admission for infectious and respiratory diseases. These diseases include bronchiolitis, acute upper respiratory infections, pneumonia and rheumatic fever, dermatitis and skin infections. When one in four of our children are experiencing poverty you can see how serious this is for our children and our health system," she says.

The Child Poverty Monitor is funded by the J R McKenzie Trust, an organisation with a long history of involvement in important social issues. The Trust's Executive Director Iain Hines says they initiated this project because they saw an opportunity to make a difference for children missing out.

"We are concerned that the rate of child poverty in 2013 is twice that of the 1980s. We think this is unacceptable. If New Zealand's road toll was twice that of the 80s there would be outrage and immediate action taken to reduce it. We need the same momentum and action on child poverty.

"A lot of people are working to improve things for children; we need to know if our collective efforts are making a difference or not. We're making the data around the rates of child poverty available and easy to understand with the help of a website and social media.

"This issue needs to stay high on the public agenda, and an accurate monitor of our progress will contribute to that," Iain Hines says.

Ends.

Notes:

You can access the Child Poverty Monitor at www.childpoverty.co.nz Twitter: @povertymonitor

The *Child Poverty Monitor: 2013 Technical Report* is available at www.nzchildren.co.nz

For more information contact:

Anna Santos
Office of the Children's
Commissioner
027 696 5101
a.santos@occ.org.nz

Dr Jean Simpson
NZ Child and Youth
Epidemiology Service
University of Otago
Mob: 021 279 8337
jean.simpson@otago.ac.nz

Dr Elizabeth Craig
NZ Child and Youth
Epidemiology Service
University of Otago
Mob: 027 271 9047
liz.craig@otago.ac.nz

The Child Poverty Monitor 2013

Income poverty: 265,000 children (one in four). This looks at the amount of money families have to pay bills and purchase everyday essentials. This is defined as having less than 60% of median household income, after housing costs are removed.

Material hardship: 180,000 children (17%). This means regularly going without things most New Zealanders consider essential - like fruit and vegetables, shoes that fit, their own bed and a warm house.

Severe poverty: 10% of children. This means they are going without the things they need and their low family income means they don't have any opportunity of changing this. These are the children experiencing material hardship and who are in families in income poverty.

Persistent poverty: 3 out of 5 children in poverty are in poverty for long periods. These children are likely to live in poverty for many years of their childhoods. Persistent poverty is defined as having lived in income poverty over a seven year period.