

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5AM TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER

CHILD POVERTY MONITOR: NO BETTER TIME TO TRACK PROGRESS ON POVERTY

Today's release of the second annual Child Poverty Monitor shows a slight reduction in the number of children living in income poverty but reveals Kiwi kids are still more than twice as likely to be in poverty than our senior citizens.

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). It monitors trends in four measures of child poverty: income poverty, material hardship, severe poverty and persistent poverty.

Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills says given the growing concern and action on child poverty the Monitor is a critical tool for those wanting to track progress and see if the downward trend continues.

"With the Prime Minister's recent commitment to make child poverty his priority in this term of Parliament, we need clear and accurate information to inform policy choices. The Child Poverty Monitor provides this. In time we will hopefully see a decrease in the number of children missing out.

"Children are not statistics. We know that. But when you want to track progress on child poverty over time, you have to use numbers. These statistics take time to change so we also monitor other indicators, like child health and housing issues, to show early indications of progress," Dr Wills says.

The 2014 Monitor shows:

- 260,000 (or 24 percent) of Kiwi kids are growing up in income poverty – a slight decrease from 285,000 in the 2013 Monitor as we move on after the global financial crisis
- This compares with only 10 percent of those aged 65+ experiencing income poverty
- 17 percent of children are going without the basic essentials like fresh fruit and vegetables, a warm house and decent clothing
- Around 10 percent of children at the hardest end of poverty
- Around three out of five kids living in poverty will live this way for much of their childhood

The Monitor also reveals there are more than 40,000 hospitalisations each year of children under 14 for conditions related to a social gradient. A special section on housing shows 43 percent of children in the poorest areas of New Zealand are living in a crowded home.

The data is backed up by an extensive report produced by the NZCYES, the *Child Poverty Monitor 2014: Technical Report*, building on last year's inaugural report.

Dr Russell Wills says “Child poverty has become one of the most talked about issues in New Zealand in recent months and we’re starting to see a swell of action. There are more initiatives happening in communities, within government and by the business and philanthropic sectors to improve children’s lives and the country’s future.

“It is encouraging to see a slight decrease in the number of children growing up in income poverty since last year. However, I am really worried about the ten percent of children living in severe poverty, and the number who are staying in poverty for long periods. Any action to reduce child poverty needs to focus on these children as a matter of urgency,” he says.

Dr Jean Simpson, the NZCYES’s Director stresses the negative health consequences 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 wealthier communities.

“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 include bronchiolitis, acute upper respiratory infections, pneumonia and rheumatic fever, which can have 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 a 75 year 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.

“Children are also 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.

“We are pleased to see child poverty is high on the public agenda, and we want the Child Poverty Monitor to allow New Zealanders to track progress on this important issue over time. In time the reports will allow New Zealanders to evaluate what is working and what is not.

“We know the Child Poverty Monitor will become an indispensable tool for those working to improve the lives and futures of our children,” Iain Hines says.

Ends.

Notes: You can access the Child Poverty Monitor and the *Child Poverty Monitor: 2014 Technical Report* at 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.

2014 sees the second annual monitor produced.

The Child Poverty Monitor (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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