Poverty in New Zealand
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Health spokesperson, Child Poverty Action Group
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What is Poverty

**Absolute poverty**: A lack of resources for the bare minimum existence.

**Relative poverty**: Exclusion from the minimum acceptable way of life in one’s own society because of inadequate resources. Often complex origins and solutions.
Why does childhood poverty matter?

Poverty in childhood affects their whole life

– affecting every health outcome
– educational outcome
– secure relationships
– future jobs and income
Poverty leads to poor health

"Income is the single most important determinant of health. There is a persistent correlation worldwide between low income and poor health."

The National Health Committee in its report to the MOH in June 1998

“Determinants of Health in New Zealand: Action to Improve Health"
“The primary determinants of disease are mainly economic and social, and therefore its remedies must also be economic and social.

Medicine and politics cannot and should not be kept apart.”
recognition
Juliette

- 7 months old
- Presents to GP on Monday morning
- Only 1 vaccination
- Admitted to hospital with pneumonia

- Solo mother, 17 years, one other sibling
  - No education past 14 years
  - History of physical/sexual abuse
  - Significant debt, Car repossessed
  - Very shy of authority figures – health, social services...

- Abusive partner, awol, drugs, criminal conviction
  ...........

- Moved 4 times since child is born
  - Currently with Aunty’s whanau, 16 in house, cold, damp, smokers
Why does she get sick?

- **Spread of the ‘bug’**
  - Overcrowded
  - Surrounded by other sick people
  - Hygiene – coughing, handwashing

- **Weaker immune response**
  - Stressed
  - Not fully immunised
  - Poor nutrition

- **Reduced access to health care services**
  - Mother knowledge level
  - Late presentation
  - Cost/access
Taking a life course approach to prevention

Picture: www.mailman.Columbia.edu
Jack is a 9 year old boy well know to my general practice. He has come in very many times to us and the local A & M with a range of health issues: asthma, eczema, chest infections, skin infections, injuries.

Since birth he has had TEN hospital admissions: bronchiolitis (baby x2) asthma (x3), broken leg, head injury, cellulitis (x2), dental abscess
Jack is overweight, doing poorly at school, described by the school as having a learning difficulty. Furthermore, the school are concerned because he is a playground bully.

His father is in jail. He has a brother and a sister and another died as an infant.

His Mum is 29 with a chronic medical condition. She has been in and out of a lot of jobs, never lasts more than a few months.
WALK IN MY SHOES FOR A DAY...
Jack’s future......

• Poor health lifelong
• Obesity
• Drug and alcohol abuse
• School failure, limited occupational options
• Criminality
• Broken relationships
• Shorter life expectancy
knowledge
80% agreed that child poverty is a problem in New Zealand

But the scale is underestimated:

Only eight percent thought the number of children in poverty was between 200,001 to 300,000

Half (49%) thought the number was less than 100,000
Child poverty is much worse than in the 1980s, regardless of the measure you use.

Kiwi children living in poverty over the last three decades compared to Oceania.

Child poverty in 1984 was 15%.
Child poverty today is 29%.
305,000 KIWI KIDS LIVE IN POVERTY

THAT'S 29%

148,000 KIWI KIDS GO WITHOUT THE THINGS THEY NEED

THAT'S 14%
9% of Kiwi kids are at the hardest end of poverty.

3 out of 5 children living in poverty live this way for many years.
Hospitalisation rates for serious bacterial infections and respiratory diseases
International Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Other OECD Countries Relative Rate</th>
<th>NZ Relative Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rheumatic fever</td>
<td>1 (OECD)</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious skin infections</td>
<td>1 (USA, Australia)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whooping cough</td>
<td>1 (UK, USA)</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
<td>1 (USA)</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronchiectasis</td>
<td>1 (Finland, UK)</td>
<td>8-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Several Changes in Policy Adversely Affecting Incomes of Low Income Households With Children

- **Low wages** and relatively high taxes for the low paid.
- **Family income support** inadequate for low income families:
  - No indexing of family income support for 20 years (1989-2008).
- **Beneficiary families** treated very harshly:
  - 1991: Benefits cut by 21% and not restored relatively.
  - 1996: Child Tax Credit introduced excluding children of beneficiaries (2007 became Working for Families In Work Tax Credit)
### Who is in most hardship in NZ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% in severe/significant hardship 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children 0–17 years</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24 years</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–44 years</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–64 years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Perry B Non-income measures of material wellbeing and hardship: results from the 2008 New Zealand Living Standards Survey. MSD Wellington Dec 2009. p, 22
Why has NZ has been so successful protecting older people from poverty?

We made income a priority with NZ Superannuation

- Universal - everyone gets it
- Simple & adequate
- Does not change with work status
- Does not reduce in hard times
- Linked to prices and wages (indexed)
- We don’t judge
empathy
What does it mean to be poor?

• Your parents are stressed
• You are stressed
• You can’t afford regular nutritious food
• You get sick more often
• You often live in a cold, crowded house
• Your neighbourhood has more crime
• You often have to shift house and school
• You can’t participate in hobbies, sports
‘Multiple bee stings’
anger
1 in 5 children

29%

305,000
...without you
action
Child poverty is not inevitable

Child poverty has got worse in NZ since early 1990s

More children are poor in NZ than other age groups

Child poverty rates are affected by policy
• Child poverty is costly
• Child poverty can be reduced
• A multipronged approach is need

• The first step is a strategic framework for addressing child poverty issues and ensuring accountability for outcomes. This includes the enactment of legislation requiring the measurement of child poverty, setting of short and long terms poverty reduction strategies, monitoring and regular reporting.
Commissioner for Children:

EAG solutions to child poverty 2013

Affordable, safe, healthy homes

Accessible health services

Supportive education sector

Adequate income to meet needs

Stable, nurturing family

Supportive community
Our children, our choice: priorities for policy
Some recommendations

• Children’s rights and needs at the centre of policy
• A comprehensive national plan with actions, targets, measurable outcomes and regular reporting

Examples of specific recs:
• Universal health services for children, with targeted extra services based on assessment of further need
• A national housing plan
• A housing WOF
• Increase minimum wage and address the needs of children in low income families through well-supported benefits and tax credits
• Review social welfare benefits for adequacy
• Abolish sanctions which reduce the income of beneficiary families with children
Things could be different, you know...
collective action...
Poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

"The long term prosperity of New Zealand utterly depends on all of our children reaching their potential." (Sir John Kuriharo)

It's time for a budget to end child poverty in New Zealand for good.

It's time for a Budget to end child poverty in NZ for good.
"Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed; his blood is being made; his mind is being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow. His name is today."

Gabriela Mistral
Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi ēngari he toa takimano e

My strength is not mine alone, but that of many
Thank you!