

Whānau Āwhina Plunket responds to 2021 Child Poverty Monitor

Whānau Āwhina Plunket says the latest child poverty figures for Māori, Pacific and children with disabilities are concerning, but our COVID response shows Aotearoa is capable of world class action to address the inequity.

The charity is Aotearoa's largest support service for the health and wellbeing of tamariki under-five and their whanau, and has contact with more than 300,000 children a year.

Its Chief Executive Amanda Malu is calling on the Government to apply the same amount of relentless focus, dedication and leadership that it has to the pandemic to safeguarding healthy futures for our children.

"When we have the right combination of political will and collective action we are able to address inequities," she says.

The Child Poverty Monitor data shows that just under 9% of Pakeha children are experiencing material hardship, but that rate is nearly double for both Māori children and children with disabilities at about 20%, and just over 25% for Pacific children.

"Our tamariki cannot be healthy without addressing the serious and significant impacts of poverty such as material hardship and secure housing." says Ms Malu.

"We need to level the playing field for our Māori, Pacific and children who have disabilities by demanding strategic investment in our tamariki.

"As a nation, we must accept that raising healthy, secure children is as critical to Aotearoa's economy and future, as tourism, farming or rugby!"

Ms Malu says that at a policy level, there have been some positive changes in recent years such as the increase in paid parental leave, the introduction of the Best Start payments and increases to the Working for Families tax credit, but the Child Poverty Monitor illustrates that we have not gone far enough or fast enough.

"Research shows the positive effects of stable, affordable housing on health outcomes. Improved health can come from simple things, such as a whānau being able to afford more nutritious food and being able to see a doctor. Affordable, healthy and stable housing can reduce stress in parents and improve children's health.

"How is it that one of the most basic requirements for our pēpi and whānau is beyond the reach of so many?" she questions.

Ms Malu says a single minded, relentless focus and leadership is needed to safeguard our children's futures and improve health and wellbeing.

“I have no doubt that we could see a real improvement in child poverty if it was treated the same way as the pandemic. The transformation of the health system and the establishment of the Māori Health Authority and empowering of iwi providers in the vaccination response shows just what can be done, and bodes well for our future,” she says.

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