



## MEDIA RELEASE

December 11, 2013

### Child Poverty – not just a money issue

Pacific health researchers have called for a greater focus and action around Pacific children in their early years to break the cycle of poverty before this sad legacy is passed on to the next generation.

Pacific children are more likely to be living in poverty and deprivation compared with other children, and some will never break free of it, according to New Zealand's first annual monitor of child poverty released earlier this week.

The Child Poverty Monitor, which reports on four measures of child poverty – income poverty, material hardship, severe poverty and persistent poverty – found that 30% of Pacific children live in poor households, similar to Maori rates, while 51% of Pacific children were in families experiencing material hardship, the highest rate for all ethnic groups in NZ.

The monitor also reported on hospitalisations related to poverty, with Pacific children consistently showing the highest rates of hospital admission for diseases with a social gradient such as asthma/wheeze and bronchiolitis.

Dr Teuila Percival, director of TAHA and Pacific Health Research at the University of Auckland, believes that focusing on Pacific children both short and long-term is vital to avoid these disparities being passed on to subsequent generations.

“There continues to be an urgent need for our country to address child poverty as some of our Pacific families struggle to provide for their children and it is continuing from one report to the next. We need to include a focus on the long term solution of investing now in the development and education of children during the first few years of life,” says Dr Percival.

Dr Karlo Mila of the University of Auckland reflects on the report using the analogy of an average classroom of 28 children.

“This report tells us that seven children are living in poverty, and of those seven children, four of them will remain in hardship their whole life never managing the dream of upward mobility or an easier, more productive, prosperous life” says Mila. “Of the seven children living in hardship right now, approximately four of them will be Pacific and Maori and then three will be of other ethnicities - predominantly of European descent.”

Mila describes our society's culture to seek out 'good suburbs/good schools' as having implications on child poverty. In particular, she says, for those families who are unable to break the cycle of

poverty, the four children of that seven who will experience relentless poverty their whole lives and never break out of it, is a reality check.

“It is statistically proven that we have become this kind of society, where upward mobility is not for everyone, where children are left behind, and it is getting worse.”

Mila believes that the solution may not be clear-cut, but we can start with small practical changes within our own communities.

“We are a small enough country to be able to make a difference in the lives of those most vulnerable. This report is both a challenge and a call to action. The children in poverty are not people you don't know. They are a quarter of the children in every classroom in this country and one day, our prosperity as a country, will be very much determined by the quality of their futures,” she says.

Jacinta Fa'alili-Fidow, manager of TAHA and a member of the Child Poverty Measures Committee affirms the importance of the monitor.

“The data comes as no surprise, but the consistency of Pacific deprivation and hospitalisations is concerning,” she comments.

She says the link between poverty and infant hospitalisations is compelling and yet we continue to invest in the treatment end of the health spectrum.

“We as a society have the intelligence and the means of finding ways of investing in a sustainable solution to end child poverty, and to improve the health of all our babies; we just need to collectively express the will.”

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