



Plunket



Submission on the Child Poverty Reduction Bill

4 April 2018

Royal New Zealand Plunket Trust

Contents

Introduction	3
Recommendations	5
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	7
The voice of tamariki and whānau	7
The well-being of tamariki	8
It takes a village and not all villages are the same	9
Technical considerations	10



Introduction

“...cold to the bone, damp and covered in mould, there are often no curtains, holes in the floor and families cannot afford to heat them. This means cold homes, sick kids, and consequent increases in days absent from work and loss of income”. Hawke’s Bay Plunket nurse.

Plunket works with families across Aotearoa and sees first-hand the damage poverty does to children’s health and well-being. Many of New Zealand’s children who live in poverty are not able to get the best start in their first 1000 days of life; the most important time in their development.

Child poverty is a critical issue for New Zealand. It is systemic, life-threatening, and can be seen in homes in every corner of our country. The evidence is irrefutable that poverty has implications for the quality of the life outcomes for all; especially children and especially in the early years – it can have a flow on effect that can span a lifetime and even inter-generationally.¹

Eliminating child poverty is fundamental to our nation’s future. We all have an obligation to contribute to levelling the playing field for our tamariki in New Zealand. All of us across all sectors, including government, need to invest in the well-being of all children living in poverty in order to make the difference of a lifetime and create generational change.

Each year Plunket nurses see over 85% percent of families with newborn babies and they are seeing more and more whānau who are struggling to make ends meet. The results can be devastating - poor child health, stressed families and poorer outcomes for children – especially for our Māori and Pacific communities who bear the brunt of this burden on our children.

Whānau across the country are experiencing financial stressors, with a flow on effect that is significantly impacting on our tamariki. The ability of families to meet children’s day to day basic needs such as nutritious meals and keeping warm and dry, is increasingly seen to be a struggle. Every day Plunket nurses see the impacts of the lack of affordable and liveable rental housing on children’s health and well-being. Families are living in houses that are damp and cold. Overcrowding is rife. Houses are being divided up and rented by the room.

A Canterbury Plunket nurse describes the significant amount of overcrowding she sees in her area as just one symptom of poverty that families face today. She gives the example of one family renting a room for mum, dad and three children including a newborn baby. There is an increased SUDI risk as baby shares a bed with mum because there is no room for a bassinet or cot. The dad and two older children sleep on a mattress on the floor.

While in Wellington, a Plunket nurse worked with a family with a new baby who were living in a damp, cold, overcrowded house, and together with a number of health and social work professionals advocated successfully to find them a better home. But

¹ Poulton, R., Caspi, A., Milne, B., Thomson, W., Talyor, A., Sears, M., & Moffitt, T. (2002) Association between children’s experience of socioeconomic disadvantage and adult health: A life-course study. *The Lancet*, 360, 1640-1645

there is only so much our nurses can do, and there are many families who are unable to move from homes that are making their children ill.

Such stories are heart-breaking, and far too common across New Zealand. This needs to change and legislation which commits to eliminating child poverty and defines a set of measures, transparent accountability and reporting across successive governments is a critical first step.

Plunket strongly supports the intent of the Child Poverty Reduction Bill. Accountability for meeting agreed consistent targets and reporting on progress towards eliminating poverty, is a significant and welcome step towards a collaborative approach to reducing child poverty.² It provides an opportunity for government to put the well-being of children, particularly those living in poverty, at the forefront of legislation. We are encouraged that this Bill and the task of reducing child poverty is being driven from the Prime Minister's office and by the Prime Minister.

However, we believe this Bill does not go far enough to protect every child from the impacts of poverty.

This submission outlines Plunket's recommendations for the Bill – informed by Plunket's unique position of working in partnership with whānau, and our relentless commitment to the well-being of tamariki across Aotearoa.

² Office of the Commissioner for children. (2012). Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand - evidence for action. New Zealand: New Zealand Children's Commissioner.

Recommendations

1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

- 1.1. That the Bill commits to upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- 1.2. That the Bill has a clearly defined and specific reporting commitment to reducing child poverty for Māori, with a focus on reducing inequity.
- 1.3. That the clause regarding the development of a well-being strategy includes the requirement for specific strategies and action plans for Māori tamariki and whānau, and includes the concepts of whākapapa, whānaungatanga, mana atua, mana whenua, manu tūpuna, and mana tangata, and considers the use of Te whare tapa whā.

2. The voice of tamariki and whānau

- 2.1. That the Bill makes specific reference to and includes the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).
- 2.2. That the Bill works in partnership with children and whānau in designing strategies to improve their well-being. This is particularly essential for the development of the well-being strategy.
- 2.3. That the Bill incorporates voices of whānau and tamariki in the development of measures and setting of targets.

3. The well-being of tamariki

- 3.1. Given that well-being for all children is placed at the forefront of this Bill, the impact on children's well-being should also be considered in all future policy development and implementation.
- 3.2. That the government works in partnership with NGOs and community organisations working in the child sector to inform progress on measures and targets.

4. It takes a village and not all villages are the same

- 4.1. That the Bill recognises the child in the context of their family and wider community by reflecting this in the defining of measures and setting of targets, as well as in the well-being strategy.
- 4.2. That the Bill ensures adequate reporting on specific populations as a critical part of reducing inequity and providing insight in developing the well-being strategy.
- 4.3. That the Bill sets specific priority for actions towards eliminating child poverty amongst Māori whānau as tangata whenua, with a focus on eliminating inequities.
- 4.4. That the Bill sets specific actions for eliminating child poverty for other key population groups who are overrepresented in child poverty and health outcomes statistics, with a focus on eliminating inequities.

5. Technical considerations

Definitions:

- 5.1. That the Bill has clear and consistent definitions to reduce ambiguity and support collaboration.
- 5.2. That the Bill uses stronger language throughout to show commitment, not just intention, to eliminate child poverty. For example “eliminate” not “reduce” and “accountable” not “encourage”.
- 5.3. That the term “any classes of children” is defined more clearly in the Bill, as it is not currently understandable.
- 5.4. Plunket welcomes the name change of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014 to the Children’s Act 2014.
- 5.5. Plunket suggests that the creation of a technical advisory group and an independent monitoring agency would support the reduction in variation of, reporting, interpretation of results and progress towards targets.

Provisions:

- 5.6. That the Bill specifies a system be put in place to ensure consistency of focus and approach to child poverty reduction, especially across successive governments.
- 5.7. That there is more clarity around what is meant by political accountability set out in the Bill and that the Bill then considers and states how accountability will flow down throughout the sector.

Measures:

- 5.8. That the Bill requires a co-design approach working with whānau and tamariki to come up with measures that accurately represent what New Zealand families are experiencing.
- 5.9. That the Bill requires government to look further than income and collect a wider range of data to inform measure development, including data provided by NGOs working in the child sector.
- 5.10. That the Bill recognises the work of NGOs from the children’s sector by making a commitment to consulting with them around the development of measures.
- 5.11. That the date required for having a definition for “persistent poverty” is brought forward and prioritised.
- 5.12. That the Bill requires that the measures of child poverty be reviewed to ensure they remain relevant.

Targets:

- 5.13. That the Bill lays out clear parameters under which targets can be changed, and consideration needs to be given to independent monitoring, so that accountability of government can be guaranteed.
- 5.14. That a technical advisory group be established to support the implementation of targets and to ensure accountability is transparent.

1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Plunket is concerned that there is no mention of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in the Bill.

Each piece of legislation should be underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in the context of a Māori worldview. The Child Poverty Reduction Bill is no different, and should clearly state how it will make a commitment to uphold the principles of the treaty.

In addition to this, there is no specific priority applied to lifting Māori tamariki out of child poverty in recognition of their place as tangata whenua. We know that the impact of child poverty on Māori tamariki is significant, with the children of this land experiencing inequity in regards to many life outcomes. It is essential for legislation to recognise this if we hope to diminish the inequities Māori face.

Recommendations

- 1.1. That the Bill commits to upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- 1.2. That the Bill has a clearly defined and specific reporting commitment to reducing child poverty for Māori, with a focus on reducing inequity.
- 1.3. That the clause regarding the development of a well-being strategy includes the requirement for specific strategies and action plans for Māori tamariki and whānau, and includes the concepts of whākapapa, whānaungatanga, mana atua, mana whenua, manu tūpuna, and mana tangata, and considers the use of Te whare tapa whā.

2. The voice of tamariki and whānau

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Plunket is concerned that the Bill does not reference the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention, UNCROC).³ UNCROC should underpin all legislation about children.

UNCROC guarantees basic and fundamental rights that establish human rights standards for the treatment of children and young people, and sets out in detail what every child needs to have a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood.

As a signatory to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), New Zealand has affirmed that children should be given the opportunity to achieve their full potential and participate as equal members of New Zealand society. An essential step to ensure this is upheld, is the eradication of child poverty. This Bill should be underpinned by UNCROC's accountabilities and principles.

³ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/monitoring/uncroc/>

“There is much in the Convention that can improve the quality of our policy and processes. For example, Article 12.1 of the Convention directs that: “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” If this practice was ingrained in government departments and community groups, there would be a significant change in the way policy is created here – for example in areas of education, health and housing, and in the way we respond to child poverty”

-Judge Becroft on UNCROC

Working in partnership

It is important for the Bill to clearly state a commitment to working in partnership with whānau and tamariki in both defining measures and the setting of targets, as well as the development of the well-being strategy. The importance of reflecting this approach, specifically for tamariki, is consistent with UNCROC and is supported by current literature.⁴

Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Bill makes specific reference to and includes the principles of, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).
- 2.2. That the Bill works in partnership with children and whānau in designing strategies to improve their well-being. This is particularly essential for the development of the Well-being Strategy.
- 2.3. That the Bill incorporates voices of whānau and tamariki in the development of measures and setting of targets.

3. The well-being of tamariki

Plunket welcomes the Government’s commitment to child well-being. In particular we support the development of a well-being strategy as a positive step forward.

Plunket supports the provision to ensure that children’s agencies are consulted and worked with to achieve the outcomes identified in the strategy. This will ensure that there is a whole-of-government approach to achieving outcomes for children.

The role NGOs and other community agencies working in the child sector have to play needs to be recognised in regards to actually making a difference for families. The importance of working in partnership with these organisations cannot be overstated.

Given that well-being for all children is placed at the centre of this Bill, the impact on children’s well-being should also be considered in all future policy development and implementation. This includes a focus on the importance of the implications of the

⁴ Roelen, K & Gassmann, F. (2008). Measuring Child Poverty and Well-Being: a literature review. Working Paper MGSOG/2008/WP001. Maastricht University. Available from www.lisdatacentre.org.

social and economic determinants of health and well-being if we hope to achieve sustained outcomes for children and their families.

Plunket recognizes the importance of getting this well-being strategy right, if we are to really make a difference for our tamariki living in poverty. As such, the strategy must be adequately resourced and budgeted for, to ensure the government makes good on its promise to improve the wellbeing of all children.

Recommendations

- 3.1. Given that well-being for all children is placed at the forefront of this Bill, the impact on children's well-being should also be considered in all future policy development and implementation.
- 3.2. That the government works in partnership with NGOs and community organisations working in the child sector to inform progress on measures and targets.

4. It takes a village and not all villages are the same

It takes a village...

Plunket sees and cares for children in the context of their whānau, hapū, iwi, communities and wider environment. Children are born into and grow up in complex inter-related systems of influences, including but not limited to individual, family, community, institutional and societal.

Long-term positive outcomes for children and their families cannot be achieved unless we also address the social and economic determinants of health and well-being. It is essential to consider children within the wider context of their families and the communities they exist in.

Plunket is concerned that the Bill does not acknowledge the importance of whānau and community, and the role they have to play in child poverty reduction and child well-being. Reducing child poverty and the devastating impact that it can have is dependent on all children being able to benefit from quality universal public services, and this stems from well-resourced communities and families.

A coordinated and cohesive system of support and services is required to ensure the well-being of all children and their families.

And not all villages are the same...

Plunket is concerned that the Bill does not refer to specific population groups who experience inequity in regards to child poverty. In its current state the Bill suggests applying the same changes to all, focusing more on equality than equity. An unintentional result of this is that there could be an overall impact on children with regard to poverty but no increase in equity between population groups.

It is essential to consider New Zealand's rapidly increasing diversity and, within the Bill and well-being strategy, Plunket would also suggest that an increased reference on reducing inequity is important to consider. In addition to a specific commitment to reducing child poverty for tamariki Māori, the Bill should also consider other groups

such as Pasifika, Asian, refugee and migrant children, sole parents, children living with disabilities, children living in rural areas, as well as those already specifically mentioned in the Bill – children in care, at risk of abuse or neglect, and those involved in the youth justice system.⁵

Recommendations

- 4.1. That the Bill recognises the child in the context of their family and wider community by reflecting this in the defining of measures and setting of targets, as well as in the well-being strategy.
- 4.2. That the Bill ensures adequate reporting on specific populations as a critical part of reducing inequity and providing insight in developing the well-being strategy.
- 4.3. That the Bill sets specific priority for actions towards eliminating child poverty amongst Māori whānau as tangata whenua, with a focus on eliminating inequities.
- 4.4. That the Bill sets specific actions for eliminating child poverty for other key population groups who are overrepresented in child poverty and health outcomes statistics, with a focus on eliminating inequities.

5. Technical considerations

Definitions

The Bill should have very clear definitions of key terms, particularly with regard to “Material Hardship” and “Essential needs” that reduce the potential for different interpretations and measurements. This would support the child health and well-being sector to work collaboratively to meet targets and improve outcomes using a common language.

Plunket is concerned that there is potential for varying interpretation of key terms and ambiguity, particularly the Statistician’s definitions, and believes it is important to have clarity to support consistent action and reporting.

Plunket is also concerned that the language used in the Bill is not powerful enough to show a commitment to eliminate child poverty. For example, sentences such as “encourage a focus by government”, or even “child poverty reduction” only imply the intent and do not promise action.

Recommendations

- 5.1. That the Bill has clear definitions to reduce ambiguity and support collaboration.
- 5.2. That the Bill uses stronger language throughout to show commitment, not just intention, to eliminate child poverty. For example “eliminate” not “reduce” and “accountable” not “encourage”.
- 5.3. That the term “any classes of children” is defined more clearly in the Bill, as it is not currently understandable. The Bill should clearly lay out what this means and how their consultation will be included in strategy development and implementation.

⁵ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/monitoring/uncroc/>

- 5.4. Plunket welcomes the name change of the Vulnerable Children Act 2014 to the Children's Act 2014. This move away from the word "vulnerable" is important if we want to clearly signal that the legislation is to be applied to all children and to avoid the unintended consequence of families being stigmatized or filed into the category of vulnerable.
- 5.5. We would suggest that the creation of a technical advisory group and an independent monitoring agency would support the reduction in variation of the reporting and interpretation of results and progress towards targets.

Provisions

Plunket supports the intent for a long term focus on reducing child poverty by successive governments. To break the cycle of poverty political accountability in relation to setting and meeting targets on child poverty reduction and the commitment to transparent reporting is necessary beyond the three-yearly election cycle.

However, Plunket is concerned that there is a very real risk that a focus on child poverty reduction across successive governments will not eventuate. There needs to be a system in place that guarantees this long-term non-partisan commitment to child poverty reduction.

Plunket is also concerned that the notion of political accountability is not clearly defined in the Bill. It is crucial for this to be clear upfront if there is to be real commitment to reduce child poverty beyond the election cycle.

Recommendations

- 5.6. That the Bill specifies a system be put in place to ensure consistency of focus and approach to child poverty reduction, especially across successive governments.
- 5.7. That there is more clarity around what is meant by political accountability set out in the Bill and that the Bill then considers and states how accountability will flow down throughout the sector.

Measures

Plunket welcomes the intent and introduction of measures for child poverty. However, we are concerned that these measures don't go far enough to capture an accurate picture of child poverty in New Zealand.

Measures for child poverty are complex and development of them is not straight forward. There is no internationally agreed standard⁶, and international literature suggests that they often vary from and within countries. Plunket is concerned that the current measures do not recognize the complexity of child poverty and do not provide enough of a platform for making the biggest difference.

There needs to be a commitment to include children's and families' voices in the development of the measures to better understand what their needs are.

⁶ Statistics New Zealand (2012). Measuring child poverty in New Zealand: Issues and practicalities. Paper prepared for the Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty.

In addition to this, the government needs to develop a multi-dimensional approach in regards to measures, recognizing that measures that only consider income alone are not sufficient. There needs to be a commitment to ensure that a wider range of information is collected in relation to the measures to get a more accurate picture of what families are experiencing poverty.

Plunket is concerned that definition for “Persistent Poverty” is not required until 2025. As persistent poverty is the most severe that children experience we believe this timeline should be brought forward and that providing a definition should be prioritized.

Recommendations

- 5.8. That the Bill requires a co-design approach working with whānau and tamariki to come up with measures that accurately represent what New Zealand families are experiencing.
- 5.9. That the Bill requires government to look further than income and collect a wider range of data to inform measure development, including data provided by NGOs working in the child sector.
- 5.10. That the Bill recognises the work of NGOs from the children’s sector by making a commitment to consulting with them around the development of measures.
- 5.11. That the date required for having a definition for “persistent poverty” is brought forward and prioritised.
- 5.12. That the Bill requires that the measures of child poverty be reviewed to ensure they remain relevant.

Targets

The introduction of required measures on child poverty and the setting of long term and short term targets which are reported on will result in New Zealand being able to quantify child poverty. Plunket acknowledges this requirement within a legislative framework as an essential step towards reducing poverty for tamariki in NZ.

We welcome the focus on realistic and achievable targets; however we want to be certain that with this there is a clear focus on strong action to eliminate inequity.

We believe more work needs to be done in regards to time frames to find a balance between what is achievable and what needs to be done to make the biggest difference for families.

Recommendations

- 5.13. That the Bill lays out clear parameters under which targets can be changed and consideration needs to be given to independent monitoring, so that accountability of government can be guaranteed.
- 5.14. That a technical advisory group be established to support implementation of targets and to ensure accountability is considered.

“Take care of our children, Take care of what they hear, Take care of what they see, Take care of what they feel, For how the children grow, So will the shape of Aotearoa”.

Dame Whina Cooper