

Kiwi pre-schoolers face worse health and welfare outcomes than older children, according to new report

A new report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child paints a grim picture of health and welfare outcomes for Kiwi pre-schoolers living in low-income families.

The report, produced by Save the Children New Zealand, Whānau Āwhina Plunket, the Child Poverty Action Group and New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, for New Zealand's sixth periodic review presents a stark intersection between poverty and preventable childhood illness in Aotearoa.

The health and mortality of Kiwi under-fives is significantly impacted by four key areas – Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SUDI), oral health, skin infections and respiratory infections – and are over-represented in related poor health outcomes compared to older children up to 14 years.

Save the Children's Advocacy and Research Director Jacqui Southey says widespread inequities, combined with the impacts of colonisation and racism, are also contributing to higher rates of poverty and poorer health outcomes for Māori and Pasifika under-fives.

"When it comes to SUDI, Māori are nine times, and Pasifika are six times more likely, to die from SUDI than non-Māori and non-Pasifika infants.

"Sadly, the report reveals a bleak picture of upholding children's rights in Aotearoa with poverty directly affecting the health outcomes of our youngest citizens, who are often forgotten about in terms of rights.

"The report finds that the leading causes of ill health and mortality of New Zealand's under-fives are largely preventable and are attributable to poverty."

The report also shows:

- Rates of preventable dental caries, skin conditions and respiratory illness are all worse for children under five compared to older children. Poor health outcomes are due to inequities present in low-income families, failing to ensure timely access to healthcare, adequate levels of income and healthy housing for families with young children.
- Children under five are significantly more likely to die by homicide than older children. Between 2016-2018, 14 children under five died by homicide compared to zero children aged 5-14 years.
- Over the past five years reporting of sexual assault and related cases for under-fives have remained appallingly constant. Whereas there has been a notable decline by 35% of assaults and neglect during the same period.

Ms Southey says reducing inequities could decrease hospitalisations by up to 66% for both dental decay and respiratory related illnesses in our under-five population.

"If we are to shift the dial to significantly improve positive health and development outcomes for our children under five, we need to prioritise children (and by age and stage) as a key stakeholder group in the new health authorities; raise incomes to liveable levels; provide access to healthy homes for families with children under five; and address systemic bias and racism that continues to persist."

Whānau Āwhina Plunket Chief Executive Amanda Malu says the organisation, which works directly with tens of thousands of families every year, has witnessed first-hand the impacts that poverty has on our youngest Kiwis.

“If we are truly going to support our tamariki to thrive, we need to provide systematic and concrete solutions that ensure all of our tamariki truly get the best start in life.”

Ms Southey says that current measures of child poverty in New Zealand rely on broad-based datasets, with reporting often ranging from 0-17 years and fail to disaggregate data to a level that could capture the full effect of poverty on children under five years of age.

“Disaggregating child poverty reporting to highlight rates for children under five is critical to drive change in these areas.”

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Read report here: <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/assets/Files/Reports/Under-5s-Basic-Health-and-Welfare-Thematic-Report.pdf>

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