

To: Chair, Maori Affairs Select Committee

Re: Inquiry in to the Determinants of well-being of Maori children

From: The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges on

"The real wealth of a nation is its people"
Mahbub UI Haq 1990

He tohutohu te mahi a nga kaumatua. Tikina nga tamariki katoa

This submission reflects the views of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges on the Maori Affairs Select Committee inquiry. It will also feed in to the Movement's response to the Government's Green Paper on vulnerable children due early 2012.

This submission makes some general comments and then looks at some specific areas that impact on the well being of Maori tamariki.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this critical issue.

Overview – the extent of the problem.

Over recent months much has been made of the fact that poverty is a major problem facing nearly a quarter of a million New Zealand children.

We are concerned that a significant number of these children are Maori. These children face not only problems of poverty but violence and poorer social and health outcomes too. These issues compound with one another and have life long impacts which lead to diminished prospects in all aspects of well being.

We were appalled with the findings of the August 2011 Report commissioned by Every Child Counts. This Report highlighted that New Zealand has one of the poorest rates of investment in the first years of our children's lives in the OECD. That results in poor outcomes for our children costing the economy about 3 percent of GDP.

The Report also found that New Zealand is one of the poorest performing countries in the OECD in terms of outcomes for children (28th out of 30

countries). It also found that we have one of lowest rates of public investment in children in the OECD (less than half the average public spend per child under the age of 6 years).

Worse still, it seems the investment we do make ranks as one of the least effective. The Report's tentative estimate is that the cost of poor child outcomes in New Zealand is approximately 3 per cent of GDP (around \$6 billion). All this goes to highlight that not only is addressing issues around child wellbeing a moral and ethical priority - it is also an economic imperative.

The time to act is now.

General comments around well-being

In our own work, we know that there is a causal link between poverty and violence and that specific attention has to be made in poorer communities where violence is occurring.

It is our view that the determinants for a Maori child's well being are multi dimensional. We also support the notion that children and families can and should assess their own well being based on their own subjective needs, culture and aspirations.

For us, child well being is strongly underpinned by whakapapa, identity, tikanga, belonging, language and culture. These are all significant factors in a child's development and underpin what is important for Māori.

In this regard we would like to support the recent work of Manuka Henare and others in their August 2011 report called *'He Ara Hou: The Pathway Forward'*. In this Report, the authors criticise the analysis that compares how Maori (and Pasifika) children are doing compared with other children. The authors argue that the 'closing the gaps' approach means that the 'gap' becomes the problem rather than viewing the well being of Maori children through the 'notion of what Maori consider constitutes a good life (page viii).

This argument, called the 'Capacities Approach', looks at determining well being based on the gap between the aspirations of Maori for what they see as well being and the actual realities. The view is that this approach is preferable than comparing how Maori are doing on the basis of national measures.

"Policy makers reliance on the gap analysis has meant the policy has prioritised areas where Maori are significantly different to the rest of the population, rather than using what is important for Maori as the basis of policy (page 24)".

We note and support the comments made by Henare et al in the 2011 Report that *'the challenge is to identify culturally appropriate spiritual, environmental, extended family and economic indicators of a quality of life for a child.*

Whānau, hapū and iwi have a significant role in making collective decisions for the well being of tamariki. There needs to be greater recognition in the role Whānau, hapū and iwi have and acknowledgment that implementing a Māori framework is essential for the development, growth and well being of tamariki.

As well as promoting and supporting the role of whānau, hapū and iwi, we believe the Government should look more to the knowledge and experience of groups such as Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke¹,

Māori Women's Welfare League, the National Collective of Women's Refuges – Mauri Tau, Te Korowai Aroha², Pharmac Māori Unit³, Te Kōhanga Reo Trust⁴, Tamariki Ora⁵ to name a few, in their work around the well being of Maori tamariki.

It is unacceptable that Maori tamariki continue to have poor outcomes and to be harder hit by issues such as poverty and the effects of poor housing and health. To do this the Government must properly invest in programmes that will eliminate the disparities that remain present in education, health, housing and employment impacting on Māori tamariki and their whanau.

Specific Comments

Education

The right to education is a universal entitlement to education, a right that is recognised as a human right.

According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the right to education includes the right to free, compulsory primary education for all and an obligation to develop secondary education accessible to all including free secondary education.

We see education as something acquired throughout one's life and not just via a learning institution. We learn to eat, crawl, walk, talk and socialise. We learn in formal settings too. Through our lives we have many different teachers.

From birth, a child's learning begins in the home. Māori have traditionally had a strong commitment to learning within their whānau. This is especially reflected in the special role a Koro and Kuia play in whānau. Within the whanau a child can learn language, whakapapa, whānau, hapū and iwi, pakiwaitara, rituals, waiata, moteatea, belief systems and traditions are all learnings that have their beginning in the home.

¹ Atawhaingia Te Pa Harakeke: One example of a Māori model of evidenced based best practice, www.tekomako.org.nz

² www.tekorowai.org.nz

³ He Rongoā Pai, One Heart Many Lives, Te Whaioranga, www.pharmac.govt.nz

⁴ www.kohanga.ac.nz

⁵ Kidshealth.org.nz

Attending marae events also secures a child's knowledge and identity in her/his community.

The Government needs to support and foster learning for Maori children wherever it happens. This includes within whanau, at the marae, in early childhood facilities, in our communities, via the media and at schools (kaupapa Maori and mainstream).

One of the ways this could happen is to develop community relations that include whānau, hapū and iwi in mainstream decision-making alongside school boards, could also make significant differences to the future for tamariki and rangatahi.

We believe that performance measures for schools with Maori students (both mainstream and kaupapa Māori) should be implemented. The success of a school should be measured on its student retention rates including lowering or eliminating truancy.

Te Reo

The Ministry of Education sets out some excellent reasons why te reo Maori is so important.

We endorse the following points:

- Te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are intertwined, and so learning te reo Māori gives students access to te ao Māori (the Māori world) and to Māori world views.
- The insights and experiences that students gain as they learn the language will enrich and broaden their understandings of the uniqueness and complexity of te ao Māori.
- Supporting te reo means children will develop an understanding of the central roles that language, culture, place and heritage play in shaping identity and in giving direction and meaning to life.
- These understandings can lead students to think about their own cultural identity and their personal place in the world. This may be especially important for those students who identify as Māori and for whom te reo Māori is a second language. For these students, the enhanced sense of connection to a rich cultural heritage can be deeply empowering. Indeed, Durie (2003) argues that education should enable Māori to live as Māori.

We urge the Select Committee to act to persuade the Government to give more weight to these endorsements of the Maori language. Maori identity and well being is intricately tied in with language.

Indeed, we believe the importance of te reo Māori is central to the long term well being for tamariki. There is much to learn from the successes of

Kōhanga Reo (early childhood), Kura Kaupapa (year 1 to year 8), and Kura Tuarua (year 9 to year 15).

To support te reo Māori to flourish we need well qualified and well resourced teachers throughout New Zealand. We need to see more te reo in our every day life – spoken by our leaders and heroes.

A positive initiative could be for all mainstream schools to work harder at implementing positive learning attitudes to reo Māori alongside an accurate understanding of the history of the Treaty of Waitangi. This will send a message to all New Zealanders that being Māori is valued and that te reo Māori is a normal part of New Zealand life to be spoken, nurtured and promoted.

Health

There are several points to be made around the issue of health. There are the obvious general comments around the fact that Māori continue to experience poorer health outcomes more than the general population. This sorry state of affairs has immediate and long term social and economic costs attached.

New Zealand has appalling rates of child abuse and domestic violence. In terms of the women, children and whanau we work with violence exacts both a human and an economic toll on our nation and costs our economy many millions of dollars every year.

We have to do everything we can to prevent violence and reduce its impact. This takes dedication, resources and time. It also takes a genuine joined up approach where even political parties come to the issue with a unified voice. There should not be any politics in the death of a child or his/her mother.

General health

On the first issue, tamariki experiencing chronic health conditions and risk factors will carry these through to their adulthood. Their health often deteriorates dramatically when intervention isn't sought. This possibly attributes to lower life expectancy rates for Māori than the general population.

Barriers to accessing health care

We believe there are several barriers for Māori accessing health care that need to be addressed. These include:

1. Māori may not engage a doctor or health practitioner for fear of being viewed as a bad parent and risk being reported to the authorities.
2. Māori are less likely to seek early health intervention thinking that cost for health visits and prescriptive medicines are unaffordable.
3. Parents may not take tamariki to the doctor's because a suitable appointment time wasn't agreed, it was after hours and there are other

- children to take care of, or they didn't have transport, or they couldn't get time off work to take the child.
4. Going to emergency areas of the local hospital is an option but these days, whānau are being turned away and told to see a doctor.
 5. The sterile reception areas of many health providers are culturally daunting. Mainstream makes no attempt to include whānau areas or seating e.g. group support for an ill whānau member, or kitchen facilities.
 6. A parent may wait up to 15 minutes if doctor's lag behind on their appointments. Parents may then see their doctor later than planned. This can result in a parent returning to work late and being penalised to work late, asked to make up the time, or not being given permission again.
 7. Maori are less likely to question a doctor and more likely not to reveal that they don't understand what they are being told.

So what do we need to do?

- Address the above barriers
- Increase health literacy and public awareness
- Have more child and whānau areas centred health facilities
- Have health policies developed by Māori for Māori that will take in to account the Maori world view
- There is likely to be a huge uptake of health services when these are inclusive of tikanga Māori
- Support Māori participation in tertiary health and science
- Develop Maori health performance measures

Housing

It is a widely accepted view that housing and well-being are interconnected. We are extremely concerned that Government has reduced its housing assistance over the last three years and worry about the impact this will have on women and children fleeing violent relationships.

Māori continue to be a growing proportion of the New Zealand population. Most Māori live in urban areas and nearly one quarter of Māori live in Auckland.⁶

According to Housing New Zealand, Māori children are more likely to rent than own homes and many of these rental properties are in very poor conditions (over 70% of children living in rentals are living in private rentals). Housing New Zealand has also reported that nearly six times as many Māori as European people lived in crowded housing.

⁷ Children's Housing Futures – A report prepared for the Centre for Housing Research Aotearoa New Zealand. March 2010

New Zealand research carried out by Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith in 2010 found associations between children's housing conditions and their health outcomes, educational achievement, social integration, propensity to be involved in offending or antisocial behaviours and exposure to criminality, violence and victimisation.

Their report also found:

- Children are particularly vulnerable to unsafe or insecure housing conditions because they are in the process of physiological and psychological development.
- Housing issues for children are multi-dimensional and include: dwelling performance; dwelling accessibility and size; affordability, and the amenities, connectivity and character of the neighbourhood in which a child's dwelling is located.
- Housing problems impact on the ability of families to care for their children.
- Housing problems inhibit others caring for children when parents and families are unable to do so.
- Children's housing needs and the housing conditions that are optimal for children can be different from the immediate housing or other needs of adults.
- Some children are particularly vulnerable to unsafe and insecure housing including disabled children; children in families with very low incomes; children needing care or protection; new settler and refugee children; and children vulnerable to exclusion because of their ethnicity.
- The burden of poor housing falls unevenly. It is more likely to fall on children than adults and it is more likely to fall on: rural children; children in low incomes families; children living in rental dwellings; children from large families; and children living in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Resolution of unmet housing need among children is a platform for optimising their potential, and a first and essential step in resolving a range of issues for children with high and complex needs.

The research concluded that to address the persistent problems with housing and its impact on the well-being of children we need (page 112):

- policy and delivery frameworks with children at the centre;
- to improve the stock;
- to address affordability;
- improve the operation of the private rental market;
- expand home ownership;

- improve neighbourhoods; and
- improve housing services, programmes, and delivery

There needs to be mandatory compliance requirements that ensure private landlords are providing properties fit to be used as a dwelling for whānau and their children.

This should include the use of non-toxic building materials and paint, ceiling and flooring insulation, quality chattels, smoke alarms, energy-efficient heating, range-hoods, easy-clean surfaces, working plumbing and electrics, energy saving lighting, flooring that is safe, non-worn, and non-allergic. The property should also be safe for children (i.e. fencing).

Likewise the State also needs to regularly invest in the upkeep and maintenance of its properties so that these are fit for dwelling and meet the same mandatory compliance as private landlords.

Many Māori have a bond with the land rather than an ownership. Māori view their role to be one of guardianship of the land which relates to social, spiritual and emotional value associated with land which is about handing on to future generations.⁷

An option for the state could be to provide rent-to-buy options for low waged New Zealanders.

Employment

Employment and a decent wage are important determinants of well-being for an individual and their family. The 2011 Report commissioned by Every Child Counts (page 4) found that household joblessness was a significant marker of risk for a child.

Some statistics

- According to the Department of Labour, in September 2011 there were 436,800 Māori were aged 15 years and over, of whom 66.0% were in the labour force. 34.0% were not in the labour force.
- Māori continue to be over-represented amongst New Zealand's unemployed. The unemployment rate for Māori was 13.4% in the year to September 2011.
- Young Māori (15-24 year-olds) unemployment was 25.7% in the last quarter

⁷ HNZ 2010 Māori housing trends report.

- In 2009, the outlook for Māori in the labour market showed unemployment would increase with Māori expected to remain disproportionately affected.
- Between 2003 and 2008, the median weekly personal income of Māori increased by 34% from \$372 to \$500.

The NZ workforce is largely determined by what happens internationally. Economic conditions, globalisation, technology developments and climate change all impact on what sort of jobs we have. A large proportion of Māori are employed in manufacturing, retail and tourism-related industries which are all sectors experiencing difficulties

Looking ahead, Māori need to be able to respond better to cyclical economic patterns and the demand for knowledge based staff. This involves strong education at all levels and wide support for training.

Poverty

Poverty refers to a state of being where by someone lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money.

Absolute poverty refers to an inability to afford basic human needs including clean and fresh water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter.. In New Zealand we talk about having cases of relative poverty. This refers to those New Zealanders living without the same level of resources or income than others within a society or country.

Around 22% of our 1.07 million children live in poverty. That is one in six Pakeha children and one in three Maori children⁸. Poverty rates are much higher (70%) for children in welfare dependent houses but the children of the working poor were also on the increase.

Child poverty is costing New Zealand between 6 and 16 billion per year.

Poverty is not just about money or commodities. It is critical when looking at issues of well-being for children that we cast the net wider in our analysis. We also need to look at well-being in a very holistic sense, beyond dollars and cents – and assess whether we are enhancing a child's potential and aspirations.

This said, we still believe that there is much to be done to tackle poverty. Steps include:

- Raising educational attainment,
- Responding to adverse economic conditions which have an exponential impact on Maori,

⁸ Household Incomes in New Zealand Report 2010

- Addressing unemployment,
- Raising the minimum wage,
- Providing excellent and affordable early childhood care, including kohanga reo
- Providing high standard and secure state housing for everyone who needs it
- Ensuring private rentals are kept to a high standard (monitor dampness, warmth etc)
- Ensuring free access to healthcare 2 days a week, 24 hours a day
- Monitor all major indicators of child poverty and report these on a regular basis with specific target reductions to be met on the way
- Fund child-impact assessments of existing and future national and local policies
- Create a senior Cabinet position with responsibility for children
- Remove work-based rules for child financial assistance and pay the equivalent of the In-Work Tax Credit to all low income families. Simplify the administration of tax credits;
- Provide adequate funding for low decile schools to ensure that all children have access to high quality education.

Conclusion

On November 22 2011, TV3 screened an Inside New Zealand documentary called Inside Child Poverty which looked at last 100 years of child welfare in New Zealand.

The documentary claimed 150 children who died in New Zealand in 2010 would have lived had they been born in Japan, Sweden or the Czech Republic. The vast majority of these children died of wholly preventable health conditions that are caused by poor housing, overcrowding and a lack of primary health care.

It is an indictment on us all that a raft of interrelated (and preventable) social and economic problems are killing our children.

Māori children are disproportionately impacted by negative social and economic factors. This is unacceptable and needs urgent attention.

We support whanau ora has an approach to addressing concerns around the well being of Māori children but note that positive outcomes may take many years to come about. Immediate action also needs to be taken.

We believe that Māori need to be involved and encouraged to their find solutions for Māori. Specifically in terms of determinants of well being for Māori children need to look at what well-being includes for Maori.