

New book seeks to address child poverty

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A new book by a professor of Public Policy at Victoria University and a University of Otago academic sends some clear messages around what can be done to alleviate child poverty in New Zealand.

Professor Jonathan Boston from Victoria University and Senior Research Fellow Simon Chapple from the University of Otago have published a short book, *The Child Poverty Debate*, highlighting the contrast between the way New Zealand society views poverty among the elderly compared to vulnerable [children](#). The book builds on their highly acclaimed work, *Child Poverty in New Zealand*, published last year.

New Zealand has an opportunity to tackle its high levels of child poverty by prioritising the needs of children just as it has done for the elderly, the two prominent academics say.

Figures show the rise in hardship during the financial crisis and recession (from 2007-2012) was much more pronounced for children than for retired New Zealanders and for most other groups of New Zealanders.

By 2013, only 7 percent of older New Zealanders were poor (using a 60 percent measure of the median income, after housing costs) compared with 22 percent of children.

"New Zealand can realistically aspire to be world-leading in addressing child poverty," says Professor Boston. "At the moment we fall behind a number of other OECD countries. The forthcoming budget in May provides a welcome opportunity to make meaningful progress.

"We achieved ambitious outcomes for retirees a generation ago. Surely our children deserve the same. We have an opportunity to secure rates of child poverty and material hardship that are among the lowest in the developed world by setting explicit targets for reducing [child poverty](#) that are ambitious yet credible.

"If all children are to participate in, and belong to, New Zealand society we also need to change the basic structure of welfare benefits and tax credits so they are adjusted regularly to reflect not only changes in prices but also movements in wages. This is what already happens for elderly people—and it is working."

In addition, Professor Boston says we need to change the way we are supporting our youngest citizens.

"There is a strong case to focus support on children under the age of five—giving them better access to social assistance and improving support for parents so they can provide the intensive parenting we know is so vital.

"Once the youngest child in a family gets to a certain age the emphasis should shift to getting parents into employment. There is a strong case for Government to provide a policy framework that encourages and properly supports parents back into the workforce once the youngest child is beyond a certain age."

Provided by Victoria University

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