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Landmark report reveals complex, entrenched disadvantage experienced by Australian communities

A small number of communities across Australia have disproportionately high levels of unemployment, low family income and education, housing stress, domestic violence and prison admissions, severely limiting life opportunities and placing significant social and economic costs on the broader community, according to a landmark national report released today.

Dropping off the Edge 2015, produced by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, maps disadvantage across the country based on 22 social indicators including long-term unemployment, criminal convictions and domestic violence.

The report is authored by Professor Tony Vinson and Associate Professor Margot Rawsthorne from the University of Sydney. Professor Vinson authored locational-based studies in 1999 and 2004 as well as the ground-breaking 2007 report *Dropping off the Edge*, which received over 284 scholarly citations and supported the establishment of the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards says the report shows disadvantage is entrenched in a small number of communities across Australia, most of which have remained similarly disadvantaged for more than a decade.

“The ranking of 10 of the 12 most disadvantaged communities in Victoria has not improved since the 2007 report, likewise nine of the 12 most disadvantaged communities in New South Wales and eight of the 12 most disadvantaged communities in South Australia.

“While our social support structures work for many Australians, this report released today shows clearly that there are a small but significant number of communities that we have failed and that a new structure and a new approach is needed,” says Ms Edwards.

Catholic Social Services CEO Marcelle Mogg says current policies are not working for these communities.

“People can’t overcome structural disadvantage when all the odds are stacked against them. These communities are not failing – Australia is failing these communities. *Dropping off the Edge 2015* outlines that residents in these communities aren’t just dealing with one form of disadvantage but multiple, complex barriers to individual wellbeing and community participation.

What we need now is for Government, the business and community sectors and the communities themselves to develop and implement tailor made, long term and sustainable solutions to build better futures.”

Dropping off the Edge 2015 was compiled using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, NAPLAN, the Australian Early Development Index and state and territory government human services agencies. The report calls for a new approach targeted at reducing the most severe deep-seated disadvantage, taking into account the unique characteristics and circumstances of each community.

Dropping off the Edge 2015 is supported by an interactive website at www.dote.org.au, allowing users to view colour-coded maps of five states and search for a particular location to see where it ranks on a range of indicators.

Professor Tony Vinson, Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards and Catholic Social Services Australia CEO Marcelle Mogg are all available for interview. Community case studies and community leaders can be provided.

Dropping off the Edge 2015: concentration of disadvantage in Australian communities and dominant factors within:

- **In New South Wales:** just 11 postcodes (1.8% of total) account for 21.4% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors in these postcodes include criminal convictions, unemployment, no internet access, domestic violence, lack of qualifications and young adults not fully engaged in work or study
- **In Victoria:** just 11 postcodes (1.6% of total) account for 13.7% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors include unemployment, criminal convictions, disability, low education, child maltreatment, family violence and psychiatric admissions
- **In Queensland:** just 11 statistical local areas (2.3% of total) account for 26% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Eight of these SLAs are considered 'very remote.' Dominant factors include young adults not fully engaged in work or study, long-term unemployment, prison admissions, no internet access, low family income and criminal convictions
- **In South Australia:** just seven statistical local areas (5.5% of total) account for 57% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors include unemployment, long-term unemployment, overall level of education, criminal convictions and young adults not fully engaged in work or study
- **In Tasmania:** just six local government areas (21% of total) account for 80% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors include criminal convictions, long-term unemployment, juvenile offending, young adults not fully engaged in work or study, disability and low family income
- **In Western Australia:** just six local government areas (4.3% of total) account for 28.6% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors include no internet access, young adults not fully engaged in work or study, overall education, Year 3 reading and prison admissions
- **In Northern Territory:** just four statistical local areas (25% of total) account for 47% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Only one of 16 statistical local areas recorded no 'most disadvantaged' rankings
- **In Australian Capital Territory:** just two postcodes (7% of total) account for 25% of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Dominant factors include rental stress, limited qualifications, low family income, no internet access, limited work skills, disability and unemployment.