



Senate Economics References Committee
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into *Regional inequality in Australia*. Our submission focuses on some of the broader issues underlying, and appropriate responses to, entrenched locational disadvantage. Given our work in the Northern Territory, which has the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among Australian jurisdictions, particular challenges in this context are also a focus of this submission.

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has over 40 years' experience working with individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage. Our work draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on.

We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion. We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them to reach their potential and exercise their full citizenship. Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the key areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and well-being; settlement and community-building; education, training and employment; gender and ecological justice.

Jesuit Social Services' research and advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence participants' lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Entrenched disadvantage

Jesuit Social Services' own research has demonstrated the concentrated and overlapping nature of disadvantage. Certain locations in Australia experience significantly more social disadvantage than others. In 2015, Jesuit Social Services along with Catholic Social Services Australia released the findings of its fourth *Dropping off the Edge* (DOTE) report, which found that complex and entrenched disadvantage continues to be experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia. The report identified concentrated disadvantage across a broad variety of locations, from remote and rural communities to regional and metropolitan areas.

In New South Wales, for example, just 37 postcodes (6 per cent of the total) accounted for almost 50 per cent of the most disadvantaged rank positions. Communities such as these experience a web-like structure of disadvantage, with significant problems including unemployment, a lack of affordable and safe housing, criminal convictions, and domestic violence.

A major theme of DOTE 2015 was the consistency with which localities identified as extremely disadvantaged in 2015 resembled those similarly ranked in earlier studies. This was especially true of the localities comprising the two top 'bands' (12 most disadvantaged places) derived by a statistical tool that captures what the indicators share in common.

Another common feature across the jurisdictions was the prominence of disadvantaged localities in rural areas and on the fringes of metropolitan areas. In Queensland, for example, the majority of communities ranked as most disadvantaged were located in remote areas.

Place-based approaches

There is growing recognition that place-based approaches are an appropriate response to addressing entrenched locational disadvantage. Place-based approaches aim to empower communities to develop and deliver local solutions over the long term by bringing together members of the community, community organisations, businesses, government and public services like schools and health centres. Place-based approaches focus on the causes rather than the consequences of entrenched disadvantage, embracing prevention and early intervention in an effort to resolve issues before they escalate.¹ Individuals and groups work together to design and implement innovative solutions to complex social issues specific to their community, drawing on local strengths, opportunities and goals.²

Without a sustained, collaborative, long-term commitment across the government, community and business sectors, there is a significant risk that some of Australia's most severely disadvantaged communities will continue to 'drop off the edge'. The web of disadvantage can be broken effectively by a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community. This strategy should be:

- **Targeted** – Concentrated to specific areas of the most severe disadvantage
- **Tailored** – Meet the community's needs and respond to the unique mix of issues facing the community
- **Integrated** – Recognising the web of multiple and interconnected causes of disadvantage
- **Cooperative** – Responses are founded on a strong relationship between government and departmental portfolios, integrated community initiatives and coordination between different levels of government
- **A long-term horizon** – A long-term commitment of 20 years to address complex, entrenched disadvantage
- **Community owned and driven** – Community leaders drive the agenda, recognising the strength within communities and work with them to build capacity, generate action, attract external resources, and maintain direction and energy
- **Engaged at the individual, community and national levels** – Recognising the complex interplay of the individual, their family circumstances, their community, and the broader social and economic environment in causing and addressing disadvantage.

Critically, place-based approaches must encompass interventions from birth across the life span, such as early childhood, school, mental health, justice and crime prevention, and building the capacities and resources of local

¹ Victorian Council of Social Service. (2016). *Communities Taking Power: Using Place-Based Approaches to Deliver Local Solutions to Poverty and Disadvantage*, pp. 7-9.

² Ibid., pp. 5-6. Jesuit Social Services, (November 2017) *Flourishing Communities: Taking lessons from place-based approaches, justice reinvestment and social cohesion*, position paper.

communities.

The Victorian Government's place-based Neighbourhood Renewal Program, launched in 2001, is an example of a positive initiative targeted at specific communities that worked across government, in partnership with local residents, businesses and the community sector, and combined social investment, service coordination and community involvement in decision making. A 2008 evaluation of the program found it reduced disadvantage and narrowed the gap between renewal areas and the rest of the state, as well as lowering unemployment, increasing further education qualifications, and raising perceived levels of community participation.³ In spite of promising outcomes, the Neighbourhood Renewal Program no longer receives funding, which highlights the need to maintain a long-term commitment to and investment in local programs that are proven to make a difference.

With the kind of place-based strategies outlined above as a starting point, and bearing in mind the interrelated factors that cause and compound disadvantage, we would like to highlight several key areas where reform is needed.

Welfare reforms

The most vulnerable in our society will not succeed without broad and intensive support. Nor will they succeed if the welfare system punishes them for not being in work. There has been ongoing underinvestment in the social safety net and coordinated measures to lift the most disadvantaged out of poverty.

A recent report by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) in partnership with the University of New South Wales found that more than one in eight people in Australia (13.2 per cent) are living below the poverty line.⁴ The report also found that those experiencing poverty at the highest rates are those relying on social security payments such as Youth Allowance and Newstart — underlining the importance of reforming the income support payments system to bring it up to standard.

Jesuit Social Services endorses ACOSS's campaign to raise the single rate of Newstart, Youth Allowance and related payments. We also support Catholic Social Services Australia's call for elected leaders to establish an independent commission to develop evidence-based benchmarks to ensure that income support payments are adequate for people to live a dignified life and have a realistic opportunity of securing a job.

Rethinking employment services

Our work with people experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation shows us that individuals may need support to be equipped with the right skills and training to attain meaningful employment. Jesuit Social Services' education and training programs support participants to gain the essential vocational and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to employment. While the right support can assist people to secure meaningful work, we cannot ignore the structural barriers to employment many people face.

The federal employment services system, with its focus on compliance and meeting narrowly prescribed outcomes, is clearly failing the most disadvantaged people. Many of the people we work with have little stable

³ Department of Human Services, 2008, *Neighbourhood Renewal: Evaluation Report 2008*, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

⁴ Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2018), *Poverty in Australia, 2018*. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 2, Sydney: ACOSS.

employment experience, low levels of basic skills, and a range of other barriers to inclusion. As a starting point, we believe that for this group of people, the employment and wider human services system needs to broaden its focus from the narrow aim of securing short-term employment outcomes. Instead, disadvantaged Australians should be supported on a journey to social inclusion that can be measured against a wider range of social markers.

As noted in our submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee's inquiry into jobactive,⁵ providers of support should focus on building foundational learning skills and participation in prevocational training that offer clear pathways to inclusion for disadvantaged and marginalised people. We need to rethink the nature of support and the relationships between different services, with particular consideration in the jobactive context given to the quality of employment services; lower caseloads; comprehensive assessments; offering targeted assistance; and post-placement support.

Case study – African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP)

We believe that the role of business as an enabler of social inclusion should be more actively explored and promoted. This requires moving away from a transactional relationship between business and disadvantaged people to one grounded in an understanding of the capacity of business to work with organisations and the community.

A key example is our African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP), formed in partnership with the National Australia Bank, which offers six-month paid work placements, including mentoring and career coaching, to qualified African-Australians. Over 380 participants have taken part in the AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney since its inception in 2009. As we head into our ninth year, more than half of the alumni are still working at NAB. In the last eighteen months, this figure has been above 85 per cent at the end of each round.

A program such as the AAIP not only performs a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of disadvantaged people, but also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way.

Building on this success, Jesuit Social Services has developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers. We have partnered with the Australian Taxation Office as part of their 'Opening Doors' initiative to offer roles across a number of disciplines and also with John Holland, one of Australia's leading engineering, contracting and service providers to the infrastructure, energy, resources and transport sectors.

The Australian Government should explore how such initiatives that promote social leadership among business could be developed to help open pathways to employment for disadvantaged people in regional areas, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities with high unemployment rates.

⁵ Jesuit Social Services, October 2018, Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee's *Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive*

African Australian Inclusion Program

We provide African-Australians with corporate sector experience

- There are systemic barriers to entry to the Australian corporate workplace for qualified African-Australians – including lack of Australian experience, non-recognition of qualifications, lack of business networks and bias (both conscious and unconscious).
- The program provides African-Australians with the opportunity to showcase their capabilities as well as specific development to become effective, independent professionals working in their chosen field.
- The roles include finance, IT, business administration, business analysis, corporate responsibility, project management, marketing and customer contact.
- Through AAIP, participants:
 - undertake a paid internship in their chosen field
 - immerse themselves in Australian workplace culture and build powerful professional networks
 - receive mentoring to achieve assigned tasks and duties
 - work with a coach to achieve broader career goals
 - at a minimum, obtain a professional reference at the end of their placement

We offer career coaching to ensure job success beyond the program

- With the help of NAB career coaches, AAIP's impact lasts beyond the program itself.
- Participants work with a coach to help them achieve broader careers goals and search for job opportunities both within and outside NAB once the internship is complete.

We collaborate with business for stronger collective impact

- AAIP shows how the social and business sectors can collaborate to achieve a stronger collective impact.
- The program delivers genuine shared value that benefits participants, NAB and the broader community – for example as role models for younger African-Australians.
- AAIP's success has been recognised with several awards, including:
 - Diversity@Work (2010)
 - Melbourne Awards – City of Melbourne (2011)
 - Australian Human Resources Institute Diversity Award (2012)
 - Victorian African Community Award (2013 and 2014)
 - Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence – Business Award (2017).

“The African Australian Inclusion Program is not really about giving me a job – it’s about transforming my life, transforming my household, transforming my extended family and transforming the community I represent.”

Tunde Aibinu, AAIP Participant

Community Development Program

Various criticisms of the Community Development Program (CDP), the remote-area employment and community development scheme, have been well-documented. These include that participants are required to comply with work requirements (currently set at 25 hours per week, for 46 weeks each year) that are more onerous than jobactive participants, at an hourly rate below the minimum wage; that the nature of the compulsory work is ‘activity for activity’s sake’ and not an avenue to the regular labor market;⁶ the punitive nature of the scheme, with a significant number of penalties applied for failure to comply with requirements; and the centralised and inflexible nature of the system which has led to a decline in local decision-making and discretion in its implementation.⁷ In addition to these issues, Jesuit Social Services is concerned about the need to consider gender – and the impacts of harmful gender stereotypes – when assessing the delivery of the CDP in remote communities (e.g. whether the program entrenches stereotypes and the flow on effects in terms of parenting/family cohesion and expectations around roles in the community).

The CDP has around 35,000 participants, about 84 per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.⁸ As a number of submissions to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee’s 2017 inquiry into the CDP make clear, community control over program design and delivery should be central to any reform of the scheme.⁹ Jesuit Social Services believes that effective service provision in remote Indigenous communities must be based on the development of strong relationships that are built through sustained, consistent partnerships over long periods of time between the community, service providers and government. Relationship-building also strengthens the capacity of service providers and government to work effectively with a community, by learning from them about their culture, language and knowledge of their people.

Improving the responsiveness of services and effectiveness of outcomes should include the increased involvement of, and control by, communities and locally-based organisations in the planning, coordination and provision of services – as well as adopting a gendered lens to ensure the unique needs of communities are taken into account. This involves standing alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to help them make the best decisions for their community. Jesuit Social Services has signed on to the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) Principles which guide the development of partnership-centred approaches for non-Aboriginal organisations when engaging in the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As these guidelines highlight, it is imperative that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to deliver services in their communities.

In general, any new system needs to incorporate the following features:

- identify ways to create meaningful, community-led work activities for people on community;
- identify and appropriately respond to the cultural and gender-specific needs of local communities;
- should not rely on centralised control of program delivery and accountability arrangements;
- should move away from the punitive nature of current penalties; and

⁶ ACOSS, *Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee on its Inquiry into the appropriateness and Effectiveness of the CDP*

⁷ Professor Jon Altman, *Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee on its Inquiry into the appropriateness and Effectiveness of the CDP*

⁸ Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, *inquiry into the Appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP)*, December 2017.

⁹ See, for example, Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) submission 37.

- have achievable requirements that take into account issues of travel in a remote context, as well as community, family and cultural obligations.

Mental health services for Indigenous communities

Addressing the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – particularly in rural and remote areas – demands a specific response. The dispossession of ancestral lands has had devastating intergenerational social consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, resulting in disadvantage and marginalisation that is reflected in disproportionately high incarceration rates, deaths in custody and low health indicators, including impacts on mental health outcomes.

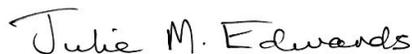
The Northern Territory recorded the highest rate of suicide per capita in 2017, at 20.3 deaths per 100,000 persons, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).¹⁰ In 2017, 165 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons died as a result of suicide, with a standardised death rate of 25.5 deaths per 100,000 persons – a slight increase from 2016. Indigenous children and young people are particularly affected, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people accounting for more than a quarter of all suicide deaths in this age group over the 5 years from 2013 to 2017 (93 of 358 deaths, or 26 per cent).

It is critical to base any services, supports, and responses on the unique conceptions of mental health within Aboriginal communities and cultures, and the understanding of mental health as part of a continuum that applies to individual people, extended families and entire communities, interconnected with physical health and spirituality. The most effective mechanism for improving the responsiveness of services and effectiveness of outcomes is to increase the involvement of, and control by, communities and locally-based organisations in the planning, coordination and provision of services.

The social fabric of communities can play an influential role in buffering the worst effects of disadvantage¹¹, with community factors being shown to influence mental health levels in children,¹² education, and levels of safety and crime.¹³ Jesuit Social Services' community capacity building approach provides a framework whereby cultural and cross-sector partnerships are fostered. Through these partnerships, the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be harnessed to increase protective factors and prevent the impacts of disadvantage – in turn improving the mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing, of these communities.

We appreciate the committee taking our views into account.

Yours sincerely



Julie Edwards – CEO, Jesuit Social Services

¹⁰ ABS, *Causes of Death, Australia, 2017*, released 26 September 2018

¹¹ Vinson, T. & Rawsthorne, M. (2013) *Lifting Our Gaze: The Community Appraisal and Strengthening Framework*, Champaign, Illinois, Common Ground.

¹² Xue, Leventhal, Brooks-Gunn & Earls (2005) Neighbourhood residence and mental health problems of 5 to 11-year-olds, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, May, 62 (5), pp. 554-63.

¹³ Vinson & Rawsthorne (2013).