

MEDIA RELEASE

DISPARITY IS GREATEST IN AUSTRALIA'S MOST DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

The top three per cent of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia (68 in all) have double the rate of unemployment and two and a half times the rate of long term unemployment of other communities, according to a new report being launched in Canberra today.

Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, a joint project of Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services, also shows that these communities have almost double the rate of disability support and psychiatric admissions.

They have more than double the rate of criminal convictions and approaching three times the rate of imprisonment.

Their proportion on confirmed child maltreatment cases is more than 3.5 times that of the remaining localities.

"These are remarkable disparities. They should compel sustained remedial action," said Professor Tony Vinson, researcher and author of the report.

"Services including post natal outreach, parenting support programs, children's diagnostic services, and adolescent health services can and do make a huge difference to the well being of the most vulnerable communities. And accessible, affordable community transport is essential if people are to take advantage of available services," Professor Vinson said.

Frank Quinlan, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia said these complex and difficult circumstances are not beyond our control.

"The right policies, in the right places, with the right resources, for the right period of time can level the playing field for all Australians," he said.

Father Peter Norden, Associate Director of Jesuit Social Services, said the motivation for the research comes from 30 years experience working with young Australian families.

"We knew from our case work with young people and families that the path to lifelong disadvantage for many individuals came from early school leaving, no further training, low job skills, long term unemployment, and decades of involvement with mental health services and the criminal justice system," Fr Norden said.

"Mainstream government programs and services will not reach these communities any longer.

"Without specific programs focusing on locational intervention they will remain 'untouchable'," Fr Norden said.

Maps and more information are available at www.australiandisadvantage.org.au.

28 February 2007

CONTACT **JUDITH TOKLEY** 02 6285 1366 / 0408 824 306
 FATHER PETER NORDEN SJ AO
 PROFESSOR TONY VINSON