

What does DOTE2015 tell us?

Dropping off the Edge 2015 shows clearly that complex and entrenched disadvantage is experienced by a small number of communities in each state and territory across Australia and that such disadvantage is persistent over time.

What does it mean?

The **Dropping Off The Edge** research does not exist in isolation – the report builds on a foundation of national and international research about the entrenched, concentrated and interconnected nature of disadvantage and should be read in that context.

Previous reports in the series have been undertaken in Victoria and NSW in 1999 and 2004 by Jesuit Social Services, and nationally in 2007 in partnership with Catholic Social Services Australia. It is clear from the analysis of these previous reports that many of the same communities continue to experience entrenched disadvantage and that the current approach – though it may largely work for the majority of the population – is not working for the communities at the edge.

High levels of unemployment, low levels of income and education, housing stress, high incidence of family violence and criminal offending are consistently present in these communities. These factors coalesce to form a web of disadvantage severely limiting life opportunities over generations and accruing significant social and economic costs to the broader community.

A new approach is needed, particularly in the 3% of communities that bear the greatest burden of disadvantage within each state and territory.

Our position

We believe this persistent and entrenched disadvantage must be turned around. A sustained long term commitment across the community to resolving this complex problem is desperately needed. This is not the responsibility of individuals alone to solve but for governments to work with the community to provide real opportunities for economic and social participation, and a cohesive community life.

A new approach targeted at reducing the most severe deep-seated disadvantage is needed.

We need a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community. It must involve all layers of government and the business and community sectors, reflecting shared responsibility and joint commitment to resolve this entrenched problem.

The strategy must take account of the unique characteristics and circumstances of local communities and must be sustained over the long term.

Targeted

The response must be targeted or concentrated to specific areas that meet the most severe criteria for disadvantage – in the DOTE2015 report the communities experiencing the most severe disadvantage represent approximately 3% of localities nationwide.

Tailored

The policies, programs and approach to dealing with disadvantage in a community must be unique to that community's needs, tailored to their particular circumstances, based on the unique linkages between indicators in that area and supplemented by informed audits of the existing programs in that locality.

Integrated and cooperative

The response needs to acknowledge that disadvantage in one dimension of life (eg unemployment) reinforces disadvantage in other areas (eg household income).

Effective responses to reducing disadvantage must address the multiple and interrelated causes and exacerbating factors that underpin the entrenched nature of disadvantage experienced by communities. Effective responses therefore involve cooperation between government and departmental portfolios, integrated community initiatives and coordination between different levels of government.

A long term horizon

DOTE2015 demonstrates that not only is entrenched disadvantage persistent across time but that short-term policies do not work in addressing the experience of disadvantage among communities. A long-term, bipartisan commitment is vital to prevent communities from dropping off the edge.

Community owned & driven

Community leaders must be engaged to drive sustained change. A new approach must recognize the strength within communities and work with them to build capacity, generate action, attract external resources and maintain direction and energy. There is a well-documented history of the benefit of 'aid', disconnected from the strengthening of specific community capacities, tapering off and disappearing once external inputs cease.

Call to government and the community

Experiences of disadvantage in Australia are not evenly distributed across the community: they are geographically concentrated, complex and persistent. A new approach is needed, particularly in the 3% of communities that bear the greatest burden of disadvantage within each state and territory.

The DOTE2015 report calls for a **Centre for Community Strengthening and Program Evaluation** within the Commonwealth Government and matched state and territory units to coordinate and evaluate community strengthening strategies.

Governments must also immediately commence a conversation with the community about how to turn this around and take concerted action to provide equal and fair opportunities in life for residents of these communities.

In order to do this, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia calls on national and state governments in partnership with the community to act immediately and put in place appropriate structures, plans and resources targeted to the communities and finally begin to break the web of disadvantage.

Without such action there is a significant risk that some of the country's most severely disadvantaged communities will continue to 'drop off the edge'.