



Catholic Social  
Services Australia



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## Media Release

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### **Tailoring innovation and investment to tackle persistent disadvantage**

People across Australia are experiencing persistent disadvantage but are being forgotten because of the fallacy of average levels of advantage, a new Catholic Social Services Australia report has revealed.

*Mapping the Potential*, a partnership between CSSA, 21 of its members and the Australian National University's Centre for Social Research Methods, goes beyond the usual analysis of advantage and disadvantage.

"Countless studies have been carried out that look at the important issue of economic disadvantage, but that only tells part of the story," said CSSA chief executive officer Ursula Stephens.

"*Mapping the Potential* goes further, investigating economic realities alongside educational, health and social advantage or disadvantage. What we found is that persistent disadvantage is present in almost all federal electorates."

Dr Stephens said the research, guided by the practical experience of social service agencies as well as research experts and academics, revealed that "behind the average we find that persistent disadvantage is everywhere – in our cities, towns and regional areas".

Dr Stephens said the decision to report disadvantage at the electorate level reduced the potential for suburbs to be singled out for negative stereotyping, but also to demonstrate that perceptions about the relative wealth of electorates were often wrong.

"Even in what we consider to be the most affluent of electorates, we find people whose daily life is one of dealing with persistent disadvantage," she said.

"Averages – in the community, in government policy, in our schools and elsewhere – can be used to paper over the realities and allow governments and civil society to misunderstand the support that communities need. That misunderstanding can turn disadvantage into persistent disadvantage."

The research examines disadvantage that communities are currently facing, but importantly adds a persistence element to disadvantage by including factors like long-term rent stress, poverty and disability, as well as longer-term measures of health and education.

Peter Selwood, CEO of one of the country's largest Catholic providers of social services in Centacare Brisbane, said *Mapping the Potential* offers insights that will transform the way he and his colleagues around the country undertake their work to support their local communities.

"These rich research findings about persistent disadvantage, its make-up and its location give service providers the capacity to better innovate and invest to tackle the challenge of persistent disadvantage in a much more tailored way – opening up opportunities so that all Australian communities might reach their potential," he said.

Said Dr Stephens: "*Mapping the Potential* is about potential more than it is about poverty, and about modelling as much as it about measuring. Our research addresses the underlying drivers of disadvantage, providing rich information about the diversity and locality of that disadvantage and assessing if and how it has persisted in communities.

"Mapping the Potential is nation-building, increasing the capacity of service providers to drive Australia's effort to impact the prosperity and potential of individuals and their communities.

"As a nation, we must do this – to drive towards a society that reflects and supports the dignity, equality and participation of all people."

The Report can be found at: <https://mappingthepotential.cssa.org.au/>

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**Media Contact – Gavin Abraham p: 02 6201 9859 M: 0408 825 788 e:media@catholic.org.au**