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Small number of Australian communities continue to experience entrenched and persistent disadvantage: Jesuit Social Services

A small number of communities across the country continue to bear the brunt of multilayered disadvantage and experience disproportionate levels of unemployment, housing stress and young people not engaged in education or employment, among other risk factors for disadvantage, according to a landmark report published today. This limits life opportunities for people in these communities, and also has a significant social and economic cost to the country.

Dropping off the Edge 2021, released by Jesuit Social Services, is a summary of disadvantage in every community across each Australian state and territory researched by experts from the University of Canberra. It builds on Jesuit Social Services' research into locational disadvantage conducted over more than 20 years including previous *Dropping off the Edge* reports.

"This report paints a stark picture of the disproportionate distribution of disadvantage across Australia, showing us that a very small number of communities continue to experience a complex web of persistent and multi-layered disadvantage. For example, the 10 most disadvantaged communities in Victoria, and nine of the 10 most disadvantaged communities in New South Wales, also ranked as highly disadvantaged in 2015," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"When we expanded our lens to look at indicators like teenage pregnancy, heat stress and poor air quality for the first time, generally we found that their inclusion didn't change the locations that presented as highly disadvantaged – it just broadened our understanding of the multiple forms of disadvantage they are grappling with. This intergenerational and persistent disadvantage is a serious barrier to people living in these communities across Australia being able to reach their potential.

"Each of these communities has inherent strengths and resilience which we want to see fostered and supported so that people can flourish. For nearly 45 years, Jesuit Social Services has worked in a strengths-based way with people and communities to help them reach their potential."

Ms Edwards says that *Dropping off the Edge* is a roadmap for Federal, State and local Governments to identify the communities most in need of support and the challenges each one experiences.

"There can be no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing locations with multiple disadvantage. Each community has its own specific strengths and challenges, and what may improve outcomes for an urban community in Victoria will be different to what helps a regional community in Queensland.

"It will take tailored, targeted and enduring work to truly create better outcomes for future generations in these locations. Priority investments and well-chosen interventions in some of the most disadvantaged communities across Australia can make a significant impact. We recognise that some initiatives are already underway that work in this way. Our research underlines the need for these to be given long term support in order to ensure that the effects of decades of poor policy and inadequate support services can be turned around in a way that is sustained."

"We want a future where all Australians, regardless of where they live, have the same opportunity to live healthy, positive and productive lives."

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au