

MEDIA RELEASE

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ALMOST ONE MILLION AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN MISS OUT ON A FAIR START IN LIFE

MORE than 880,000 Australian children under the age of 15 are being socially and economically isolated from multiple dimensions, new research has found.

Almost 40 years after Prime Minister Bob Hawke famously announced that “by 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty”¹, the injustice has deepened in the last 20 years.

The 3rd Child Social Exclusion Index, a collaboration between the UnitingCare network and the University of Canberra, has found that children in almost 400 Australian communities are the most socially excluded in the nation.²

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little said the report highlighted the great divide in Australia between areas where children are given a fair go and those where they are not.

“Australia is raising a generation of children where one in six of them persistently feel excluded, are excluded, and they deserve better,” Ms Little said.

“Children are our future, and we must do better to make them financially and socially included in the fabric of Australia.

“On a state-by-state basis, NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania are over-represented in child social exclusion, highlighting the continuing need for implementation of evidence and placed based initiatives aimed at enhancing child wellbeing.

“We welcome initiatives from state and national governments, along with the private sector, that seek to provide a fair go for these 880,000 Australian children who are missing out.”

The report assessed social exclusion against six criteria: socio-economic, education, connectedness (such as a parent who can speak English, family access to a motor vehicle), housing, health, and community & environment (facilities such as public parks, museums, tree cover and swimming pools).

It found that 884,569 children under 15 years old, in 391 communities across the nation, are in the bottom 20%, which means they are most excluded.

¹ <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1987-bob-hawke>

² A community refers to a small area or Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2)

Professor Riyana Miranti from the University of Canberra’s School of Economics, Politics and Society and lead author of the report said the indicators of disadvantage extended beyond income measures to show the issue is widespread in society.

“Child disadvantage is not necessarily captured by child income poverty only,” Professor Miranti said.

“While nearly 15 per cent of children live in areas with the highest rates of child poverty and the most exclusion risks, there are children who are not income-poor but who are still at risk of social exclusion or experiencing other types of disadvantages.

“Further, the comparison between 2016 and 2021 has found areas that are persistently at a higher risk of social exclusion.”

The report found that:

- Social exclusion is highest in Tasmania, where 35% of children live in the most excluded areas, followed by South Australia and Queensland.
- Social exclusion overall is worst in the bush. Almost half of children living in regional areas are in the bottom two quintiles of social exclusion, compared to 36% of those living in our capital cities³.
- An estimated 391 communities across Australia are identified as most disadvantaged⁴.
- Of the 10 most socially excluded areas, six are located in Queensland (Riverview, Logan Central, Wacol, Kingston, Leichhardt - One Mile, Mount Morgan), two in South Australia (Elizabeth and Smithfield - Elizabeth North), two in Tasmania (Ravenswood and Bridgewater – Gagebrook) and one in Victoria (Norlane)⁵.
- On the positive side, between 2016 and 2021, the proportion of children living in housing stress declined along with the proportion of families where no family members completed year 12. For the former, it is worth noting that the Census data was collected in August 2021, when there were low-interest rates. The income support payments during the COVID-19 period may also potentially have an impact.
- On the negative side, there was a decline in the ratio of GPs and dentists in some communities, along with a decline in volunteering, possibly exacerbated by COVID lockdowns.
- More than 4.7 million Australians are aged under 15. Of these, one in six, or 793,543 children, live in poverty⁶.
- Tasmania and the Northern Territory have the highest poverty rates at 24% and 23% respectively, which are higher than the national average of 17%⁷.
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³ Report page 5

⁴ Report page 22

⁵ Report page 22

⁶ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population-age-and-sex/latest-release#data-downloads> Population estimates by age and sex 2022 excel Table 3 number of Australians aged 0-14 years 4,761,257. One-sixth of that is 793,543 children.

⁷ Report page 26

- The communities with the highest child poverty rates include Kowanyama – Pormpuraaw, Palm Island and Southern Moreton Bay Island (QLD); Ravenswood and Risdon Vale (TAS); and Karama, Moulden, Tennant Creek (NT)⁸.

To be socially included, Australian children must be able to have working parents, have social support through family and friends, and access high-quality health and education services.

Table 1: Criteria for Child Social Exclusion Index 2021, final indicators⁹.

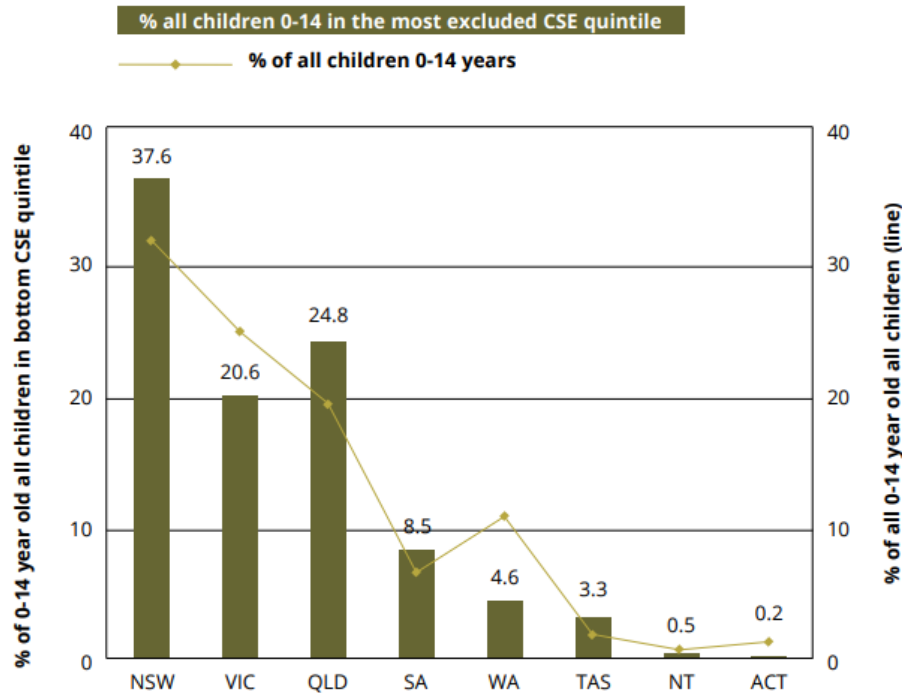
Domain	Indicators/variables
Socioeconomic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sole parent family 2. Bottom income quintile (after housing costs) 3. No parent in paid work 4. Financial hardship indicators owing to a shortage of money. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Went without meals. ○ Could not pay registration/insurance on time.
Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. No family member completed Year 12 6. NAPLAN Year 5 reading and numeracy scores 7. AECD vulnerability 8. Preschool enrolment
Connectedness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. No parent doing voluntary work 10. No motor vehicle 11. Has a parent who does not speak English well
Housing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Spends more than 30% of income on rent or mortgage and in the bottom 40% of income distribution 13. Overcrowding (not enough bedrooms)
Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Number of GPs per 1,000 persons 15. Number of dentists per 1,000 persons 16. Children who need assistance with core activities (self-care, mobility, and communication) 17. Have family members over the age of 15 who need assistance. 18. Children who have a long-term physical or mental health condition
Community & Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Proportion of area used for recreation and culture – parks, sportsgrounds, camping grounds, swimming pools, museums, places of worship, zoos 20. Proportion of area with considerable tree cover

⁸ Report page 26

⁹ Report page 16

On a state-by-state basis, NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania are over-represented in child social exclusion, highlighting the continuing need for implementation of evidence and placed based initiatives aimed at enhancing child wellbeing¹⁰.

Figure 2. The Distribution of Children in the Most Excluded CSE Index Quintile and all Children by State



Parliamentary representation

Of Australia’s 151 electorates, 110 have at least one community that falls into the bottom fifth of social exclusion or child poverty. Those electorates are:

- NSW (32) – Banks, Barton, Blaxland, Calare, Chifley, Cowper, Cunningham, Dobell, Eden-Monaro, Farrer, Fowler, Gilmore, Hughes, Hume, Hunter, Kingsford Smith, Lindsay, Lyne, Macarthur, McMahon, New England, Newcastle, Page, Parkes, Parramatta, Paterson, Reid, Shortland, Sydney, Watson, Werriwa, Whitlam.
- Victoria (27) –Ballarat, Bendigo, Bruce, Calwell, Cooper, Corangamite, Corio, Dunkley, Fraser, Gellibrand, Gippsland, Gorton, Hawke, Holt, Hotham, Isaacs, La Trobe, Lalor, Mallee, Maribyrnong, McEwen, Melbourne, Monash, Nicholls, Scullin, Wannon, Wills.
- Queensland (24) – Blair, Bowman, Capricornia, Dawson, Dickson, Fadden, Fisher, Flynn, Forde, Groom, Herbert, Hinkler, Kennedy, Leichhardt, Lilley, Longman, Maranoa, Moncrieff, Moreton, Oxley, Petrie, Rankin, Wide Bay, Wright.

¹⁰ Report page 23

- Western Australia (10) – Brand, Burt, Canning, Cowan, Durack, Forrest, Hasluck, Pearce, Perth, Swan.
- South Australia (8) – Adelaide, Barker, Grey, Hindmarsh, Kingston, Makin, Mayo, Spence.
- Tasmania (5) – Bass, Braddon, Clark, Franklin, Lyons.
- Northern Territory (2) – Lingiari, Solomon.
- Australian Capital Territory (2) Bean, Fenner.

Trends between 2016 and 2021

Sixteen per cent of children living in 302 areas across Australia are in the most excluded quintiles in both 2016 and 2021¹¹.

In contrast, 73 small areas have improved. For these areas, the indicators that did not improve nationally were:

- the proportion of parents who did not volunteer increased by 9 percentage points
- the disability variables where children need assistance or other family needs assistance
- the ratios of GPs and dentist that have declined between these two Census years.

In contrast, the indicators that did improve nationally were:

- NAPLAN results
- Housing stress, noting the earlier information that the data was collected in August 2021 when the interest rate was low and the potential implication of income support payments during COVID-19.

Children are deemed to be living in poverty if their household falls below the poverty line, which is set at half the median equivalised household disposable income of \$504 per week in 2021¹².

About the Child Social Exclusion Index (CSE Index)

The CSE Index captures the degree to which Australian children experience multiple factors of disadvantage in multiple domains. In the 2021 version, six domains were used: socio-economic, education, connectedness, access to housing, health & community, and environment.

In 2013 and 2018, UnitingCare Australia, the national body for the Uniting Church's community services across Australia, collaborated with the University of Canberra to produce the Child Social Exclusion Index Report.

This latest Report is the product of a collaborative research consortium involving the University of Canberra, UnitingCare Australia and six UnitingCare service organisations: Uniting NSW.ACT,

¹¹ Report page 31

¹² Report page 4



Uniting Vic.Tas, Uniting Communities, UnitingSA, UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission NSW.

About The UnitingCare network

The UnitingCare network is the largest social service provider in Australia with 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers, delivering services from more than 1,600 locations across the country. The network supports people at all stages of life through a range of services, including many that are targeted at children and young people.



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