

MEDIA RELEASE

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Illawarra residents overrepresented in poverty statistics

In recognition of Anti-Poverty Week 2014 (12th – 18th October), the Illawarra Forum has reviewed poverty statistics for the region, and found that an alarming percentage of people in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven are living on incomes which put them below the poverty line (50% of median income).

“Across the region, more than 51,000 people are struggling to survive on incomes which put them below the poverty line” stated Nicky Sloan, CEO of the Illawarra Forum, “The figures are particularly disturbing in the Shoalhaven where more than 17% of the population are affected by poverty, and even more distressing, 21% of children are living in poverty. These figures put the region significantly above the national average (13.9%) and NSW average (14.6%)”

The impact of living in poverty is much wider than the ability to participate economically. Poverty also impacts on individuals’ health, social life, mental health, and self-esteem.

“We are concerned that the widening gap between rich and poor in Australian society will broaden to become a gap between healthy and sick, educated and uneducated, housed or homeless” Ms Sloan said “People living on low incomes are spending most, if not all of their incomes on essentials, and disposable incomes or discretionary spending is the stuff of dreams.”

The recently released ACOSS report *Poverty in Australia* reveals that people living on income support are at the highest risk of living in poverty, with 61.2% of people who are unemployed living below the poverty line. In addition to inadequate income, the lack of affordable housing is putting enormous stress on families and individuals.

“Many people on low incomes are spending up to 50% of their income on rent alone.” Ms Sloan said “More than 32% of households in the Wollongong LGA are in rental stress, and that rate shoots up to more than 38% in the Shoalhaven.”

The Illawarra Forum encourages all of the community in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven to support Anti-Poverty Week by holding or attending an awareness-raising event, or by supporting the organisations in the region who are working to improve the lives of those living in poverty.

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Refs: *Poverty in Australia*, ACOSS, available [here](#)
Poverty, Social Exclusion and Disadvantage in Australia, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) available [here](#)

About the Illawarra Forum

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice. The Illawarra Forum is an independent organisation governed by a committee of management elected annually by the membership.

The Forum represents the non-government community services industry in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, which consists of approximately 300 organisations. The Illawarra Forum works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- Social housing providers;
- Homelessness services;
- Home and community care services;
- People with disability;
- Individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage;
- Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault ;
- Youth work programs;
- Community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services;
- Community legal centre services; and
- Community development and community capacity building.