

MEDIA RELEASE

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Reports highlight hardship for regional families

Two recently released reports have highlighted the issues facing regional families and individuals on low incomes.

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) launched its [Cost of Living Report 2015](#) yesterday. The report reveals high levels of distress among the state's low to middle income earners. Particularly relevant for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven is the level of impact on families in regional and rural areas, where families are impacted by issues such as high electricity, internet and cost of living expenses.

Late last week, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) released its report [Inequality in Australia: A nation divided](#). The report has some disturbing revelations, including that, when it comes to income inequality, Australia's is higher than average for the OECD, (although still not as bad as in the US or the UK). The report also showed that people the highest 20% income group have around **five times** as much income as those in the lowest 20%. Or looking at average wealth, people in the highest 20% have around **seventy times** as much wealth those in the lowest 20% wealth group.

As the peak body for community services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, the Illawarra Forum has welcomed the release of these two reports. Although the facts are distressing, it is very important that awareness is raised about the impact of inequality and rising prices on vulnerable people.

"These two reports demonstrate the level of need and disadvantage in our community." CEO of the Illawarra Forum, Nicky Sloan, said "We have known for some time that people aged over 65, single parents, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, and people on government benefits are most likely to be in the bottom 20% - and by definition doing it tough. But what's worrying for our region is that the reports also showed that people living outside the capital cities are also most likely to be in the bottom 20%."

"Our members work with some of the region's most disadvantaged residents" Ms Sloan said "and we are regularly hearing about the drastic efforts people going to to make ends meet. Stories about older people who are sitting in the dark, wrapped in blankets to save electricity; parents who are choosing to forego meals so their children can eat; and people who are sleeping in their cars near their workplace because they don't have the petrol to drive home."

We hope that the NSW and Federal Governments take note of these reports and work to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for disadvantaged people.

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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.