

***BLUEPRINT***  
***for the eradication of poverty***  
***in South Australia***



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***Blueprint for the Eradication of Poverty in South Australia***

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This document draws on and significantly expands SACOSS's *Extending Opportunity to All: a blueprint for the elimination of poverty in South Australia* (2005).

We gratefully acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the SACOSS membership and all those who assisted us in its development.

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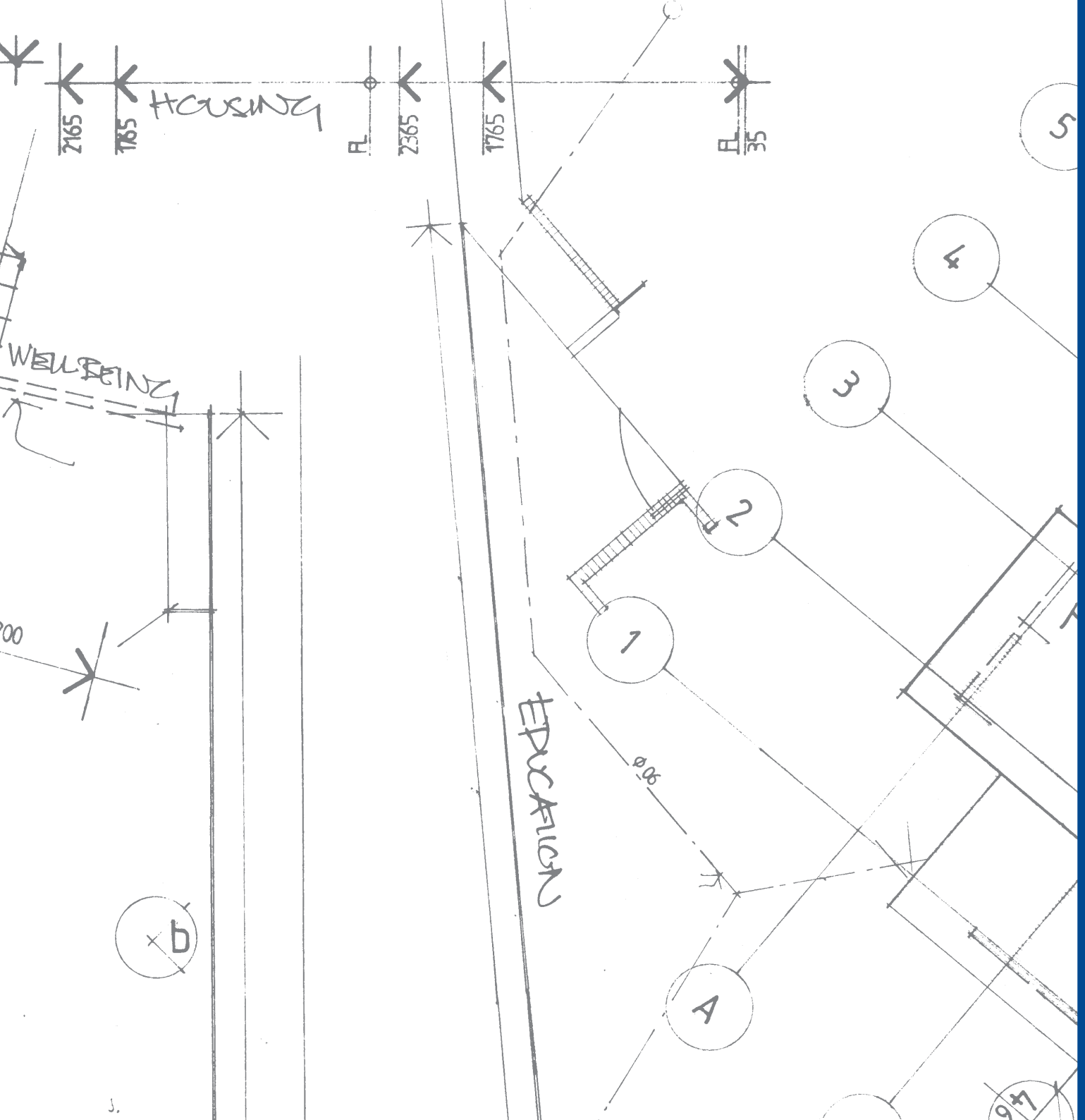
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# OUR VISION FOR THE BLUEPRINT





**S**ACOSS has a vision that all South Australians can live a life free from poverty, in a genuinely inclusive society where there is equity of opportunity and outcomes for all.

Poverty has many faces, and for many people it represents the ongoing and daily struggle to navigate through everyday life. For some people, poverty means going without nutritious and affordable food, for others it induces depression and stigma from the lack of decent employment, and for others it means that they are unable to participate in some of the staples in life that others take for granted.

Every person should have somewhere to live, food and clothing, access to employment, justice, education and health. In order to provide these, we must pay attention to the fundamental causes of poverty in our community and the resources that should be deployed to address them.

For the past 15 years or so the Australian economy has grown significantly. During 2001-2006, economic growth averaged 3.0% per year, well above the average rate of economic growth in the OECD during this period (2.3%)<sup>1</sup>. The Australian economy has posted a surplus of 0.9% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared with an average deficit of 2.8% across the OECD<sup>2</sup>. So the current economic boom actually provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to eradicate poverty across Australia, and specifically in South Australia.

Governments cannot legislate to eradicate poverty but they do have control over many of the conditions that affect our vulnerability to poverty. Governments have a key leadership role to play in tackling poverty, and enabling the private and community sectors to support this ongoing struggle. There is increasing international evidence that when governments adopt anti-poverty plans, they can make meaningful steps to reduce overall levels of poverty<sup>3</sup>.

The United Nations regards poverty as a violation of human rights yet, on the basis of a range of data, we identify that poverty is steadily increasing in South Australia. A successful society is one that enables all its members to enjoy its benefits, not just some. Poverty excludes and SACOSS believes that we must develop a specific anti-poverty focus to provide justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all in our community.

The current market focus on financial profit at the expense of opportunity and sustainability needs to change. Economic growth does not automatically lead to a reduction in poverty so there needs to be concerted action and intervention to ensure that all groups have an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of periods of economic prosperity. Societal values must shift to embrace the community and common good, above individual wealth and ambition. Civil society has a significant role to play in leading this shift and spreading a vision of a fair community that extends opportunity to all.

Being poor means a daily financial struggle to meet the most basic of living costs, living on the margins, constant risk of homelessness, lack of opportunity in employment and education, being at risk of poor health, and limited or no opportunity to participate as a member of your wider community. The situation of generational and entrenched poverty should never be accepted and we must fight to deliver a better society for our children and our future generations.

South Australians want prosperity, more and better job opportunities, a better education for their children, and health and wellbeing. More than these, they seek to live in an embracing and genuinely inclusive community where the same opportunities are extended to all. The greatest barrier to this for South Australians is poverty.

The eradication of poverty is a long-term vision and one that must be pursued by all parties. SACOSS identifies five thematic areas in which action can be taken to tackle the fundamental causes of poverty in the state:

- Income
- Employment, Education and Training
- Health and Wellbeing
- Housing; and
- Social Participation

Against each of these five themes, SACOSS has identified targets and strategies for achievement by 2015. If achieved, these measures will mean real progress in the eradication of poverty in South Australia.

Our targets are ambitious and constitute an exciting agenda in which we hope to engage government, business and the broader community, with a view to making our state a leader in the eradication of poverty.

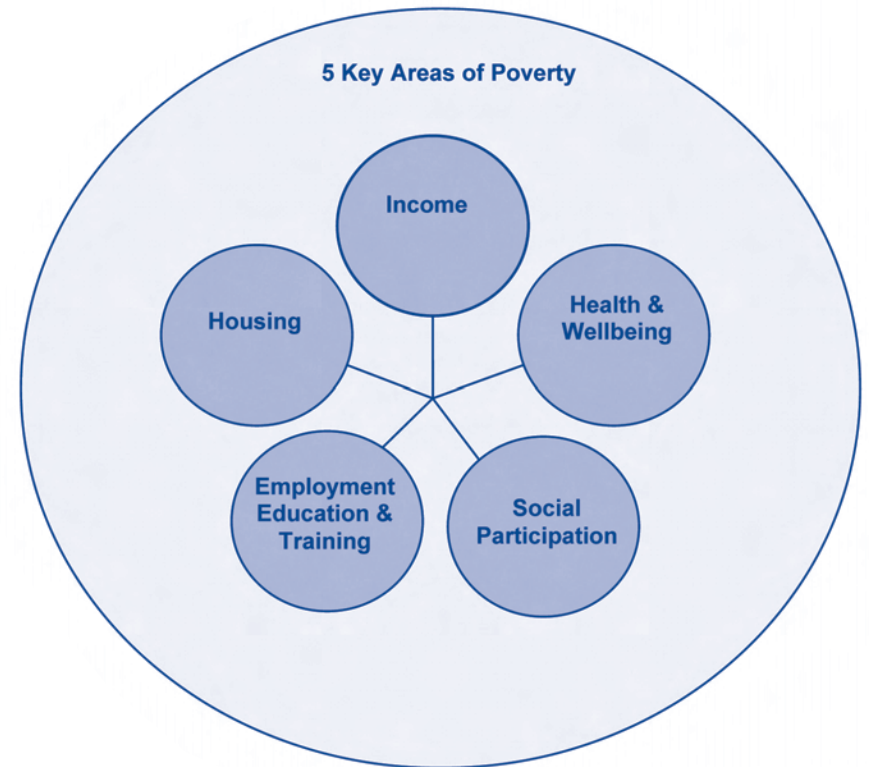


Figure 1

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Australia Fair (2007) *A fair go for all Australians: International Comparisons, 2007 10 essentials* ACOSS, Canberra (p.11)
- 2 Ibid
- 3 [www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/ireland-can-teach-us-a-thing-or-two-about-compassion/2007/08/31/1188067365979.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/ireland-can-teach-us-a-thing-or-two-about-compassion/2007/08/31/1188067365979.html)





# INTRODUCTION



**P**overty is a persistent and enduring feature of South Australian society. Recent data suggests that poverty and income inequality are increasing in South Australia with the proportion of people living in poverty rising from 6.7% of South Australians in 1993-94 to 12.3% in 2005-06, using the 50% of median income poverty line<sup>1</sup>.

While poverty has increased over this time frame, economic growth in Australia has also increased. From 2001 to 2006, annual growth in real GDP was 3% in Australia compared with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 2.3%. Over this same period Australia averaged an annual 2.2% growth in employment compared with 0.9% across the OECD, and the annual Australian government Budget balance was +0.9% in surplus compared with -2.8% across the OECD<sup>2</sup>.

It is evident in South Australia that economic growth does not automatically lead to a reduction in poverty. There needs to be concerted action and intervention to ensure that all groups have an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of periods of economic prosperity. Government has a key leadership role in tackling poverty, and enabling the private and community sectors to support this ongoing struggle. There is international evidence that when governments adopt anti-poverty plans, they can make meaningful steps to reduce overall levels of poverty<sup>3</sup>.

For these reasons, in 2005 SACOSS developed a ten year *Blueprint for the eradication of poverty in South Australia*. The *Blueprint* is a statewide anti-poverty plan that sets out a range of targets under five key themes where action needs to be taken to eradicate poverty.

This introductory section sets the context for why we have updated and revised the *Blueprint*, and sets out:

1. The reasons for updating the *Blueprint*
2. The SACOSS approach to understanding poverty and disadvantage
3. The five main themes of the *Blueprint*: Income; Employment, Education and Training; Health and Wellbeing; Housing; and Social Participation
4. Some of the key 'cross-cutting' issues
5. The case for government action and social investment
6. Outline of the structure of the *Blueprint*.

## 1. WHY ARE WE UPDATING THE BLUEPRINT?

As part of SACOSS's ongoing remit to tackle economic disadvantage and inequality we have updated and revised our anti-poverty strategy to:

- renew focus and action on the anti-poverty agenda
- reflect new research and government policies;
- enrich the evidence base; and
- develop and refine strategies to support our targets.

The increase in poverty in South Australia is of great concern to SACOSS, and in the current economic climate there is a risk of complacency in tackling disadvantage.

By updating our *Blueprint*, we firstly aim to help shift Government policy onto a more concerted and direct anti-poverty path.

Secondly, there is a changing policy context for our anti-poverty work with the State government updating *South Australia's Strategic Plan (SASP)* in 2007. While there are a number of welcome and improved 'generic' targets in the plan, SACOSS remains concerned that it and other State government policies lack an explicit anti-poverty focus.

Thirdly, a key aim in updating the *Blueprint* was to improve the evidence base, and also reflect new and innovative research. To this end we have expanded each of the five main themes, and devoted a chapter to each one identifying the key statistics, issues and research. This information is both a resource and a spur to action for our members, the community sector and the government.

Finally, updating the *Blueprint* has helped refine our own thinking on the anti-poverty agenda. We have systematically reviewed and refined our targets, and developed new sets of strategies to help work towards the eradication of poverty.

## 2. THE SACOSS APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

The first chapter of this revised *Blueprint* sets out some of the different ways of measuring poverty. Poverty is ‘multi-dimensional’ in that it affects different groups of people in different ways. We set out the context for understanding poverty in South Australia, and highlight some of the different approaches for measuring poverty.

The range of factors and determinants that underpin poverty means that a holistic and detailed approach is needed to understand the extent of social and economic disadvantage. SACOSS’s framework for understanding the extent of poverty in South Australia focuses on two broad areas:

- the five main thematic areas where poverty and deprivation are evident:
  - Income
  - Employment, Education and Training
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Housing; and
  - Social Participation
- the main population and social groups who tend to experience poverty – for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women, and new and emerging communities.

In revising the *Blueprint*, we look at each of these five themes in detail, and highlight the extent of poverty and deprivation as experienced by many of these key disadvantaged population groups. This approach is outlined in Figure 2.

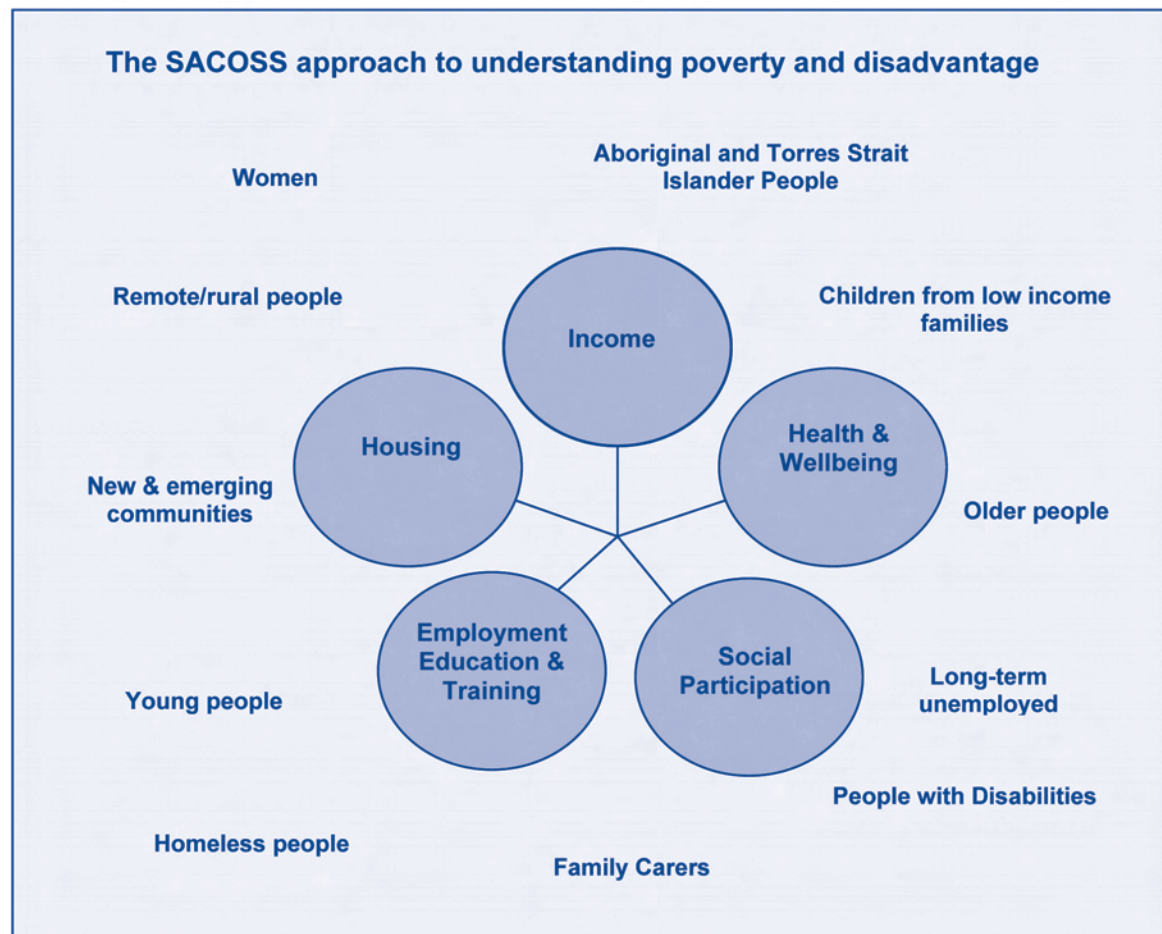


Figure 2

### 3. THE FIVE MAIN THEMES OF THE BLUEPRINT

In this section, we introduce the five themes and highlight some of the key issues.

The following presents a short overview of each of the five themed chapters.

#### *INCOME*

One of the most common approaches to understanding poverty is to focus on income poverty. The Income chapter focuses on two key dimensions of income poverty:

- Income inequality
- Access to jobs

We identify that income inequality is increasing in Australia, and the gap between the richest and poorest groups is growing. We also focus on the differences in the amount of disposable income for different households in South Australia.

Income inequality is particularly stark when incomes for some of the poorest groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people and people with disabilities, are compared with the rest of the South Australian community.

Income is closely linked with labour force participation, and the prevalence of South Australians whose sole source of income is government benefits is particularly high when compared with the rest of Australia.

As Chapter 2 — Income highlights, South Australia has much higher levels of certain household types who are more likely to live in poverty than most other states and territories.

#### *EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING*

Employment and education are two of the most important pathways out of poverty for the most disadvantaged groups. The Employment, Education and Training chapter examines these issues in greater detail, and is organised under the following headings:

- Access to jobs
- Quantity and quality of jobs
- Skills, education, and training

In South Australia there is a marked ‘social gradient’ in both labour force participation and educational attainment. In other words, the poorest population groups have much worse outcomes than the wealthiest people in these different spheres of social life. The lowest socio-economic groups are far less likely to be employed; are more likely to be ‘marginally attached’ to the labour force; and when they are employed the jobs are concentrated in the poorest paying sectors. This is particularly the case for women. In this section we outline some of the main barriers to employment for some of the most disadvantaged groups.

The current focus and drive for economic growth also overlooks a fundamental issue about the characteristics of the South Australian labour market. Research shows an increase in part-time and casual labour, and this has negative impacts for many low-income and disadvantaged groups. We also outline the specific concerns about the lack of training and employment opportunities for young people, and the barriers that can stop disadvantaged groups from accessing education.

#### *HEALTH AND WELLBEING*

The poorest people in our community are also the unhealthiest. On a range of health indicators, the most disadvantaged South Australians have poorer health outcomes than the more affluent. This chapter uses a ‘social determinants of health’ approach in linking poverty with health and wellbeing. The chapter focuses on two broad issues:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Access and equity of outcomes

In the first section, SACOSS makes the case for primary health care and the advantages of this approach in addressing health inequities. The benefits of diverting resources to preventative strategies are outlined, along with the case for developing targeted strategies at reducing inequality in early childhood. We also examine the range of barriers that affect the poorest groups from accessing appropriate health care services.

## HOUSING

The poorest South Australians live in the most substandard housing and are significantly more likely to experience 'housing stress', that is to say they pay over 30% of their income on housing costs. The housing chapter highlights the main issues under the following headings:

- Access and affordability
- Infrastructure

In the access and affordability section, the crisis in housing affordability in South Australia is outlined, with a specific focus on how it impacts on the poorest groups, particularly in the private rental market. This section also examines the prevalence of homelessness in South Australia and some of the related issues.

The infrastructure section shows how the housing affordability crisis is being driven, in part, by the declining levels of public housing stock in South Australia. This section also makes the case for ensuring that affordable housing is located in areas with adequate supporting infrastructure, such as accessible social services and employment.

## SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The 'social gradient' in areas such as health, education, and housing is also evident in the overall vitality of South Australian community and social life. This chapter explores issues around 'social participation',

and highlights the way that the poorest groups are in many cases the most socially isolated. The chapter is organised under the following headings:

- Access and opportunity
- Addictions
- Prevention, Restoration and Rehabilitation

The access and opportunity section examines research that shows the poorest South Australians are far less likely to be contented living in the community, and are less likely to be involved in community life. The addictions section examines the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse among disadvantaged communities, and also examines the related issue of gambling, and the incidence of problem gambling arising from electronic gaming machines. Finally, the section on prevention, restoration and rehabilitation examines criminal justice issues in the state, as they relate to the most vulnerable population groups.

## 4. 'CROSS-CUTTING' ISSUES IN THE BLUEPRINT

The five main themes of the *Blueprint* highlight the extent of poverty and disadvantage in the state. These thematic areas are distinct, but also closely related, and there are a number of significant 'cross-cutting' issues that intersect across all five areas.

One of the cross-cutting issues is the increased complexity of need. Put simply, this means that more of the poorest groups face a number of social problems and issues. Therefore to reduce overall poverty and social exclusion, support mechanisms need to be in place to reflect this growing complexity of social need. For example, a person seeking employment may also need help securing permanent and affordable housing in a place with sufficient transport to allow them to attend work. The high prevalence of mental ill-health among offenders is also illustrative.

Throughout the *Blueprint*, SACOSS advocates for a 'joined-up' and holistic response to tackling the complexity of need that many disadvantaged groups face.

## 5. THE CASE FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

One of the main messages SACOSS advocates in the *Blueprint* is that **poverty will not be eradicated without concerted action and investment**. In addition, SACOSS argues that it requires significant government action and social investment to tackle the key determinants and structural factors of poverty and disadvantage. There is a wide range of evidence, both large scale and small to support the value of targeted social investment.

Some examples include:

- Social investment in Scandinavia. Research has consistently shown that Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries have a much higher ratio of public spending on health and education and other services as a proportion of GDP than other comparable countries; and are much healthier, better educated, and cohesive societies.
- The vision of the South Australian government to set up the (then) South Australian Housing Trust to expand public housing as an inducement for social investment in the State<sup>4</sup>. Research has confirmed that the investment in public housing has helped buffer levels of poverty in the State by reducing housing costs.
- A survey of health inequities across South Australia found that when accounting for a range of factors,

residents in Onkaparinga experienced much higher levels of social cohesion than might be expected given the relatively higher levels of poverty in the area. The authors of the report attribute this to strong social planning undertaken in Seaford 20 years earlier<sup>5</sup>.

- The Irish national anti-poverty plan has been cited as a key factor in reducing poverty levels in Ireland<sup>6</sup>.
- Investment targeted at improving housing support services for people with mental health issues in Victoria has shown clear improved health (and other) outcomes<sup>7</sup>.

This is by no means a definitive list, but it reemphasises the central issue that sustained, well targeted action with sound

public investment, can be instrumental in reducing poverty and disadvantage.

SACOSS believes that in both national and state arenas, the overall level of social investment should be increased, and better targeted to focus on coordinated early intervention that will make huge social savings further down the line.

### NOTE ON THE CASE STUDIES

*The case studies identified throughout the Blueprint have been selected on that basis that, as far as can be shown, they have had some success in meeting some of the broad aims of tackling inequality, poverty and disadvantage. However, it should be noted that many of the programs have not been formally evaluated..*

*Useful information about some of the case studies, and on wider activity taking place in the state, is included in Towards a Fairer Society: Community Case Studies  
Adelaide, Department of Health (SA), 2006.*

## 6. STRUCTURE OF THE BLUEPRINT

In this revised version of the *Blueprint* a chapter is devoted to each of the five main themes in turn, and sets out:

- the **context** for the issue in South Australia
- key **research**, data and trends relevant to the theme
- SACOSS **targets** and **measurement indicators** for taking action<sup>8</sup>
- links between **government activities** which impact on these issues
- the main **strategies** for eradicating poverty in the state
- **'community case studies'** interspersed throughout showcasing good practice by the sector in tackling disadvantage.

Eradicating poverty is an ongoing challenge, and requires urgent and coordinated action. As we set out in this chapter, poverty in South Australia is on the increase and is taking place during an unprecedented period of economic growth. There is now a once-in-a-generation opportunity to meet the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Unpublished data provided by the Social Policy Research Centre commissioned by Australia Fair (2007). Further details in Chapter 1 — Poverty and Disadvantage in South Australia.
- 2 Australia Fair (2007) *A fair go for all Australians International Comparisons, 2007*, 10 Essentials. Available from: [www.australiafair.org.au](http://www.australiafair.org.au)
- 3 <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/ireland-can-teach-us-a-thing-or-two-about-compassion/2007/08/31/1188067365979.html>
- 4 Orchard, L. & Arthurson, K. (2005) 'Housing' Chapter 12 in Spoehr, J. (ed) *South Australia: Trends and Issues* DDF, Adelaide
- 5 Dept of Public Health/SA Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) (2007) *People and Places: Urban location Social Capital and Health Australian Health Inequities Program (AHIP)*.  
Details available from <http://som.flinders.edu.au/FUSA/PublicHealth/locationhealth.htm>
- 6 <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/ireland-can-teach-us-a-thing-or-two-about-compassion/2007/08/31/1188067365979.html>
- 7 SPRC (2007) *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative Evaluation - Report III* SPRC, University of NSW, Sydney
- 8 The measurement indicators linked to the *Blueprint* Targets are an attempt to identify the key ways that progress can be tracked in eradicating poverty and disadvantage in the state. Work by NCOSS has begun the development of a framework for social performance reporting indicators. There is scope for such a framework to be adopted in South Australia. Information on the NCOSS work can be found at: NCOSS (2005) *Measuring Up: A framework for Government social reporting in NSW* NCOSS discussion paper, Sydney.

