



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities

Deputy Secretary

PDR ID: EC18-000483

Senator Chris Ketter
Chair
Senate Economics References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Ketter

Subject: Inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia

The Department welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Economics Inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring all Australians, in both regional and metropolitan locations, have access to economic opportunities and high-quality public services.

The Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities has an important role to deliver this outcome through the design and implementation of the Australian Government's infrastructure, transport, regional development and cities policies, programs and regulation.

This submission provides an overview of the indicators of regional disadvantage and the role of Australian Government's policies and programs in promoting economic growth and opportunity in the regions. Capturing and analysing reliable data to support efficient and effective policies and programs is critical to realising these opportunities.

Yours sincerely



Judith Zielke
Deputy Secretary

22 June 2018

cc: Mr Mark Fitt, Committee Secretary, Senate Standing Committees on Economics



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities

Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities Submission

Inquiry into the indicators of, and impact of, regional
inequality in Australia

Senate Standing Committees on Economics

Executive Summary

Regional inequality exists across many geographic scales. This submission compares regions at several different scales to emphasise the range of different types of inequality experienced across Australia. Differences in socio-economic disadvantage are used to highlight how inequality can occur between regions, but also within regions.

Throughout this submission the level and distribution of income is used as the simplest and most well-accepted measure of inequality and disadvantage. These measures reveal that regional areas tend to have lower median incomes and higher numbers of low income residents compared to Australia's largest cities. However, there are also locations within cities with low median incomes and a large share of low income residents.

In order to address regional inequalities the Australian Government supports people experiencing disadvantage in the regions and across Australia, through the social welfare safety net and the provision of high-quality services. The Australian Government is also committed to driving jobs, economic growth and opportunity across Australia.

The range of programs managed by the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities is presented in this submission to demonstrate how the Australian Government is addressing inequality between the regions. The Department leads the Australian Government's regional development agenda including infrastructure and transport investment, policies and programs to better connect regions, and support for local governments to provide the services people expect. These programs are underpinned by accurate and reliable information that assists Government to identify opportunities and challenges in our regions.

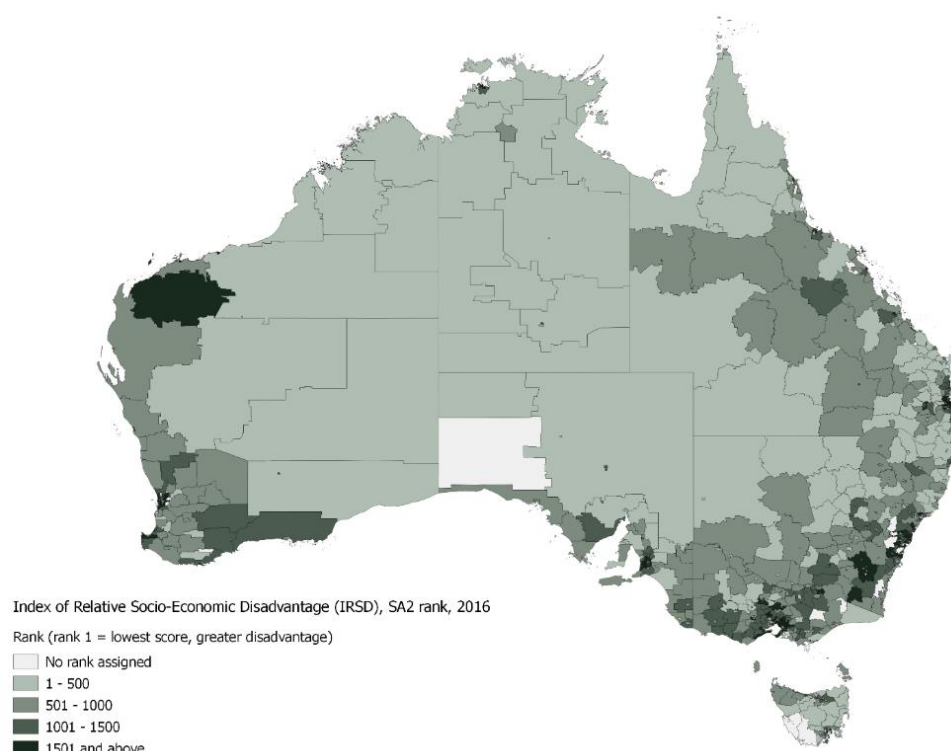
The Department also leads a range of policies and programs that target outcomes in specific geographic places through investments and cooperative arrangements with other levels of government, business and communities. This submission presents the examples of City Deals; providing services to the Indian Ocean territories, and Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay; and supporting regions undergoing economic transition.

Indicators of Inequality and Disadvantage

Inequality exists across many geographic scales. This submission compares regions at several different scales to highlight the range of different types of inequality. In some cases, comparisons are made between Regional Australia and the Major Cities of Australia, based on the ABS remoteness classification.¹ In other cases, this submission compares Australia's largest cities (population greater than 2,000,000); with its medium-sized cities (population 80,000-2,000,000); and with the rest of Australia. These geographic comparisons reflect the different measures of regional inequality.

There is a range of available measures of inequality.² Socio-economic disadvantage varies based on people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society.³ The ABS's Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) calculates socio-economic disadvantage using a range of indicators including economic resources, human capital, and access to transport and infrastructure of households in a region. The regions of Australia are characterised by variation in socio-economic disadvantage. Map 1 shows the ranking of areas in terms of their relative socio-economic disadvantage.

Map 1 Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD), SA2 rank, 2016



Source: ABS 2018, Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2016, Cat. No. 2033.0.55.001.

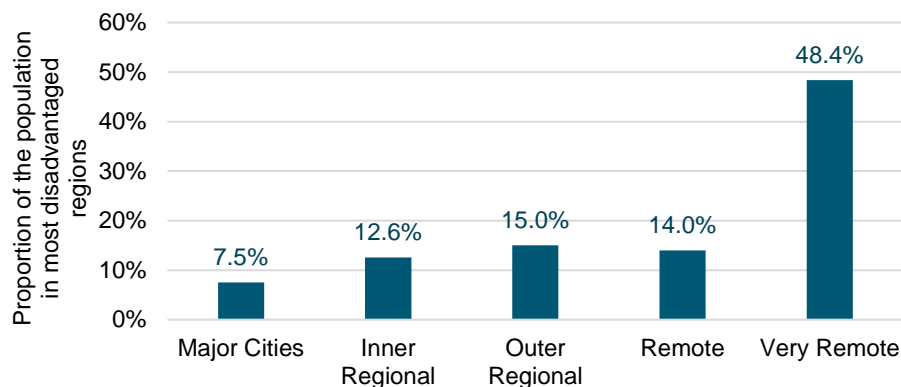
¹ ABS, Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Volume 5 - Remoteness Structure, July 2016, cat. no. 1270.0.55.005

² Committee for Economic Development of Australia (2018). How unequal? Insights on inequality, available online at http://ceda.com.au/CEDA/media/General/Publication/PDFs/CEDA-How-unequal-Insights-on-inequality-April-2018-FINAL_WEB.pdf

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016). *Census of Population and Housing*, Canberra

The geographic distribution of socio-economic disadvantage in Australia across remoteness areas is further illustrated in Chart 1 below. This chart highlights the disparity between individuals in the lowest socio-economic class in regional and remote areas, with those in major cities.

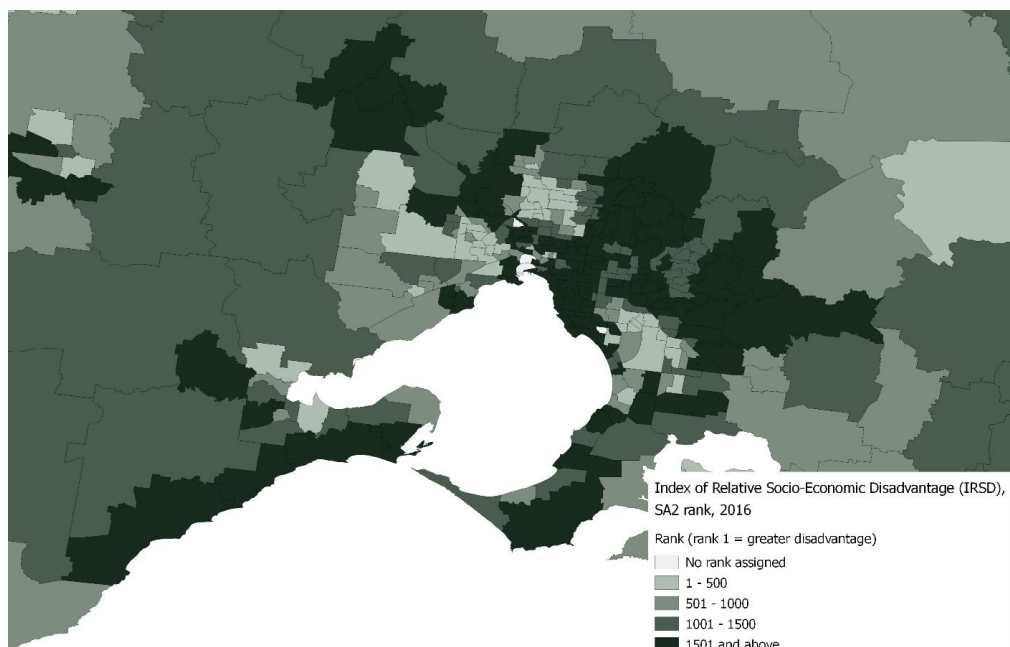
Chart 1 Population in the 10 per cent most disadvantaged regions across remoteness areas 2016 ⁴



Source: ABS, 2016, Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Cat. No. 2033.0.55.001

Note the major cities, while having some areas of low disadvantage, also have a mix of higher and lower levels of disadvantage. This can be observed in Map 2, which shows a wide range of levels of disadvantage across the regions within Melbourne.

Map 2 Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD), SA2 rank, Melbourne, 2016



Source: ABS 2018, Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2016, Cat. No. 2033.0.55.001.

⁴ Very Remote Australia represents 0.8 per cent of Australia's population, and is the smallest remoteness class category by population

Progress in Australian Regions Yearbook

The Department also publishes the *Progress in Australian Regions Yearbook* (the Yearbook), an annual resource that measures progress in a region against social, economic, environmental and governance indicators.

Overall, the 2017 Yearbook illustrates that Australia's performance across social, economic, environmental and governance measures is mixed, with some indicators demonstrating positive growth and others deteriorating over the same period. Key trends include:

- a reduction in household income inequality across most regions in Australia – increases in income inequality were mostly observed in remote areas of the Northern Territory;
- a decline in some labour market measures and housing indicators such as home ownership; and
- an improvement in life expectancy across most cities and sub-state areas.

This publication can be used to assess inequality between and within regions across a range of indicators. This publication can be accessed on the Department's website:

www.infrastructure.gov.au/regional-yearbook.

Inequality in Income, Cost of Living and Amenity Across Australia

As indicated, this submission focuses on the level and distribution of income as the simplest and most well-accepted measures of inequality and disadvantage. These reveal that regional areas tend to have lower median incomes and higher numbers of low income residents.⁵

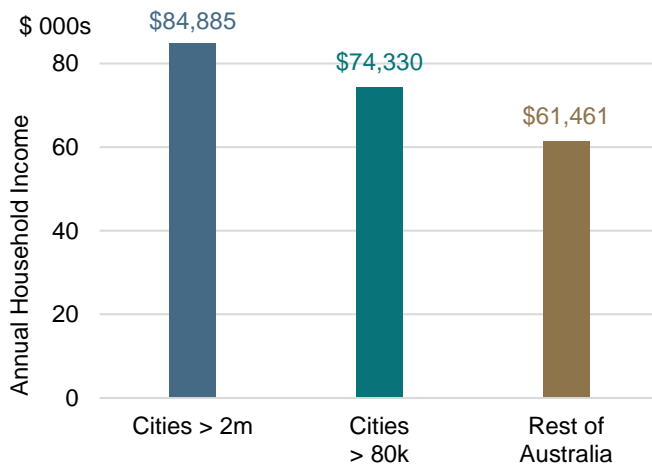
The median household income in the big four cities is around 40 per cent higher than the median household income in locations with populations smaller than 80,000. Further, the share of low income households in the smaller locations is around 40 per cent higher than the big four cities. However, it should be noted there is significant variance in the extent of disadvantage across Australia and there are pockets of disadvantage in cities as well as regions.

Interpreting these results is not straightforward as some of this difference reflects the older age profile of regional locations as well as differences in the education and skill levels of residents. When comparing the median incomes of prime age residents, the income gap narrows to around 15 per cent between the big four cities and areas with populations smaller than 80,000. However, even this figure may overstate differences in quality of life since it does not account for the generally lower cost of housing in the regions. Other factors not considered include amenity, access to services and broader cost of living measures which differ between cities and regions.

⁵ For the purposes of this submission we have adopted the ABS's approach of defining low-income households as those in the bottom income quintile

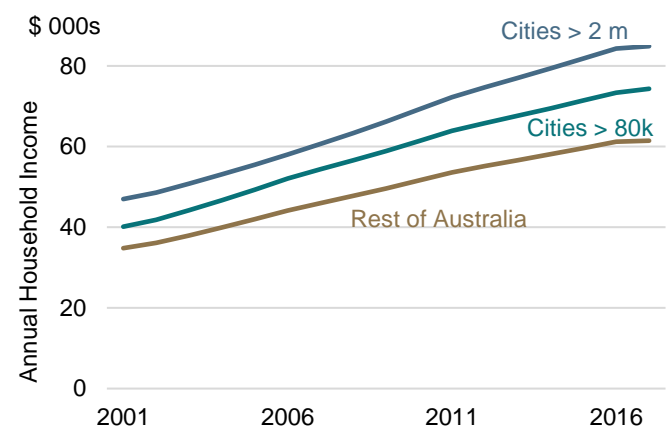
Median household incomes are higher in Australia's largest cities (population greater than 2,000,000) than in its medium-sized cities (population 80,000-2,000,000) and areas in the rest of Australia (Chart 2). In proportional terms, the differences in income levels between these areas have been relatively constant since 2001 (Chart 3).

Chart 2 Median Household Income, 2016



Source: Australian National University (2018). Subscription Income Data Set from Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods

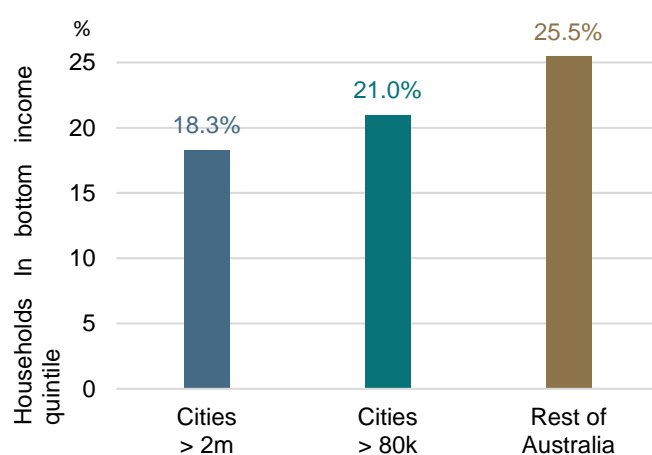
Chart 3 Median Household Income, 2001-2017



Source: Australian National University (2018). Subscription Income Data Set from Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods

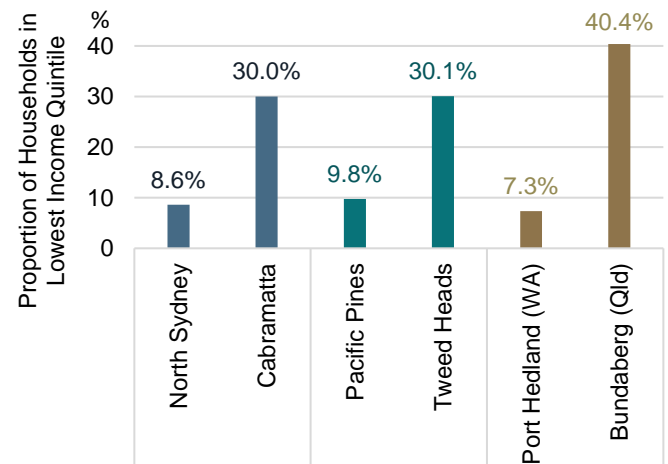
Regional areas have a higher proportion of low-income households than cities (Chart 4). However, these broad aggregations do not reflect the significant variance in disadvantage across regions (see Map 1), or the extent of income inequality within regions. That is, large cities, medium sized cities and regional areas all contain places that have high and low proportions of low-income households (see examples in Chart 5).

Chart 4 Proportion of households in bottom income quintile, 2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). 2016 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra

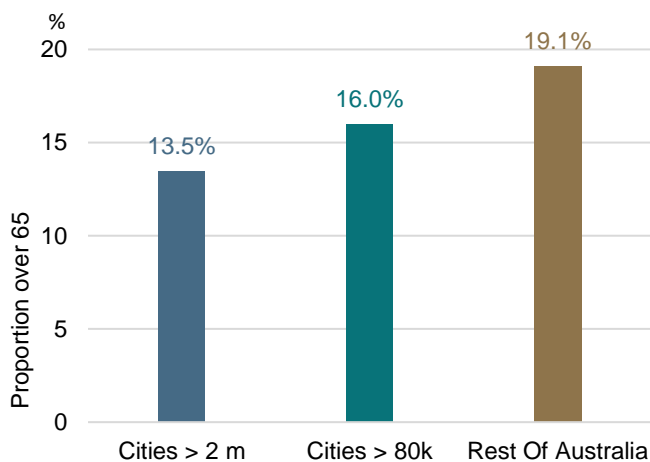
Chart 5 Households in bottom income quintile – examples, 2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). 2016 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra

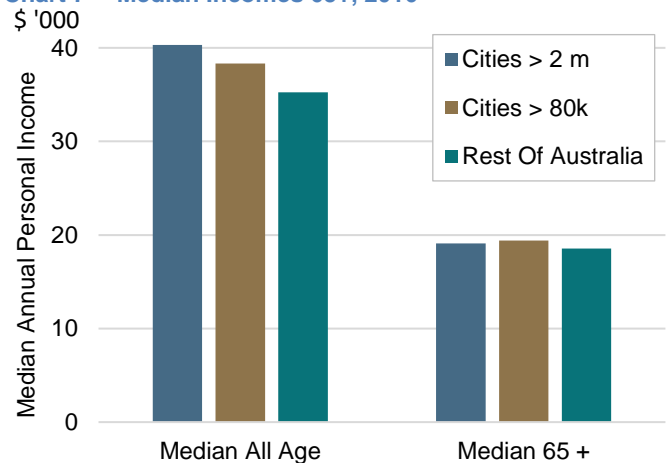
A range of factors contribute to lower income levels in regional areas, and policy interventions are not appropriate for many of these factors. For example, a higher proportion of retirement age residents live in regions and income levels decline significantly once people reach retirement age (Charts 6 and 7). Although, the relationship of wealth to age is different than that of income to age due to the accumulation of wealth over a person's lifetime.

Chart 6 Percentage of Population 65+, 2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). 2016 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra

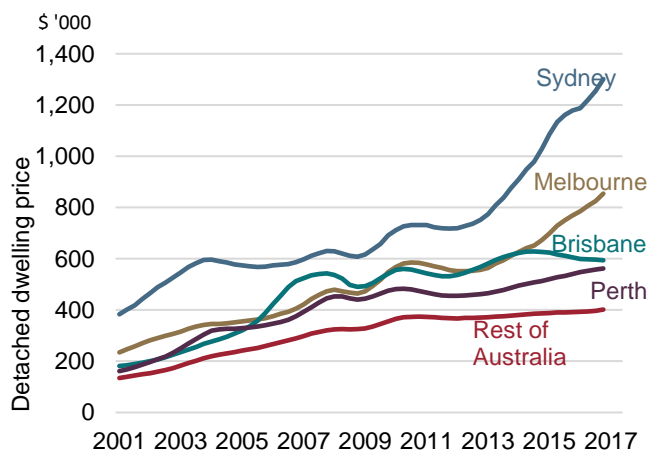
Chart 7 Median Incomes 65+, 2016



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). 2016 Census of Population and Housing, Canberra

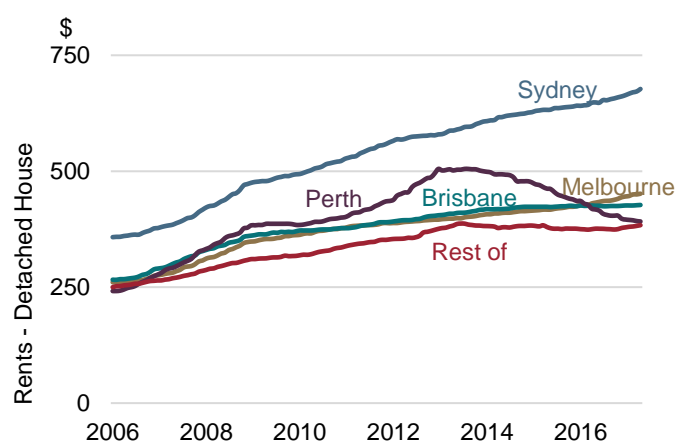
Higher income levels in larger cities may to some extent be offset by higher housing costs (Charts 8 and 9). That said, other elements of cost of living can be higher for people living in the regions⁶ and access to services can be poorer. Cost of living and access to services issues are particularly acute for people living in smaller, more remote areas without good access to transport.

Chart 8 Median Detached House Prices 2001 – 2017



Source: Core Logic (2018). Subscription House Price Data Service from Core Logic

Chart 9 Rents 2001 – 2017



Source: Core Logic (2018). Subscription House Price Data Service from Core Logic

The comparative quality of life that people experience in different areas is also affected by differences in amenity. For example, the quality of life for people in larger cities is adversely affected by longer commuting time and people in regional areas can have better access to natural assets such as lakes, beaches and nature reserves.⁷

⁶ For example, see Queensland Government Statisticians Office 2016, *Index of retail prices in Queensland regional centres, 2015*, <<http://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/products/tables/index-retail-prices-qld-reg-centres/index.php>>

⁷ Multiple indicators of amenity are set out in the National Cities Performance Framework <<https://smart-cities.dashboard.gov.au/all-cities/overview>>

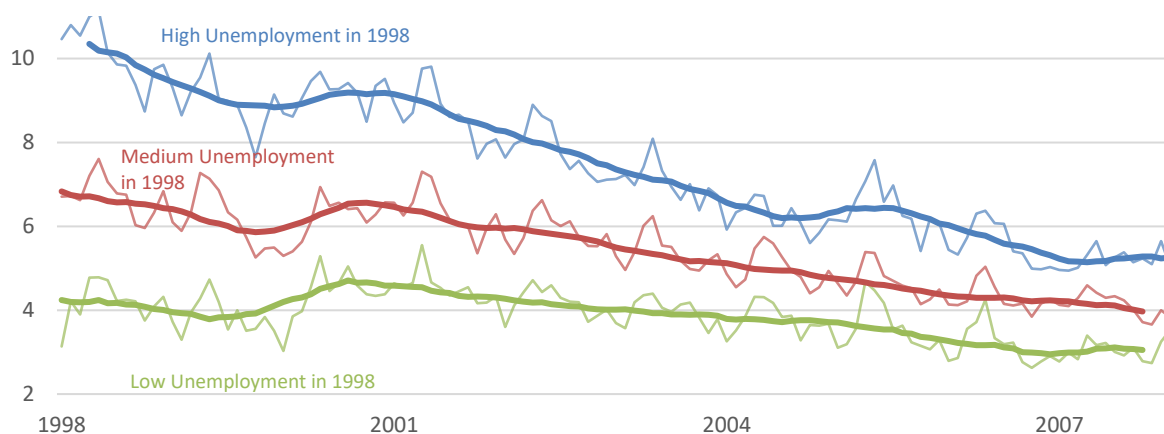
Australian Government Role in Addressing Disadvantage and Promoting Economic Growth

The Australian Government's social welfare safety net plays a critical role in supporting people experiencing disadvantage across Australia. At the national level, provision of transport and community infrastructure; and delivery of higher education and health care have spatial implications and impact on regional access to economic opportunities. All portfolios and levels of government also have a role in creating equitable access to economic and social opportunities.

The Australian Government is focused on economic growth so all Australians have the opportunity to contribute to their full potential. The Government's Economic Plan, as set out in the 2018-19 Budget Overview, aims to foster economic growth in order to create jobs, strengthen the budget and enable the Government to provide essential services. The Economic Plan also aims to support regional Australia and ensure the benefits of economic growth are spread across the nation.

National economic growth is particularly important for regions experiencing disadvantage and economic weakness. Weaker regions tend to benefit disproportionately from national economic growth. This can be seen in the unemployment rate, with areas of high unemployment experiencing the biggest improvements during periods of strong national economic growth. For example, over the ten year period from October 1998 the national unemployment rate fell from 7.3 per cent to 4.3 per cent⁸ and there was convergence in the unemployment rate between regions with high, medium and low unemployment rates (Chart 10).⁹

Chart 10 Moving 12 month average of unemployment rates in areas of high, medium and low unemployment October 1998 – September 2008



Source: ABS 2018. Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Feb 2018, Cat No, 6291.0.55.003

⁸ ABS Seasonally Adjusted Labour Force Series

⁹ For the purposes of this chart, high unemployment is defined to be regions with an unemployment of 9 per cent or greater in October 1998, medium unemployment is defined as regions with unemployment rates between 5 per cent and 9 per cent in October 1998 and low unemployment is defined as regions with unemployment rates lower than 5 per cent in October 1998.

Infrastructure Investment, Regional Development and Place-Based Initiatives

The Australian Government is committed to driving jobs, economic growth and opportunity in the regions. In this context, the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio is responsible for:

- the design and implementation of the Australian Government's regional development agenda including infrastructure and transport investment, policies and programs to better connect regions and support for local governments to provide the services people expect, and
- a range of policies and programs that target outcomes in specific geographic places through investments and cooperative arrangements with other levels of government, business and communities, such as City Deals; providing services to the Indian Ocean territories, Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay; and supporting regions undergoing economic transition.

These place-based policies promote economic opportunities, target disadvantage and improve access to services in a range of areas across Australia.

Australian Government place-based policies or programs are particularly beneficial where they:

- unlock underlying economic potential or value to enhance national prosperity, as well as benefitting specific areas;
- align with national policy goals and priorities; and
- engage willing and capable partners in local communities, business and different levels of government in their design and delivery.

Infrastructure Investment

The Australian Government has committed to a decade long \$75 billion Infrastructure Investment Pipeline for new and upgraded transport infrastructure projects, with the aim of increasing productivity, boosting local communities, connecting our regions and cities, and creating local jobs.

There are many benefits for regions from the Government's investment in land transport infrastructure including:

- construction of land transport projects which support job creation and economic development, including in regional Australia;
- improving connectivity across our regions providing better access to employment, health, education and training opportunities; and
- improving road safety, particularly for long distance travel between key regional centres and local communities.

Through the infrastructure Pipeline, the Australian Government has made major commitments to deliver a range of road and rail infrastructure projects which support the Government's Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP). The IIP provides significant grant funding to the states and local governments to deliver road, rail, bridges and heavy vehicle projects.

The role of infrastructure investment in connecting communities is evident through the Australian Government's investments in the Northern Territory. For example, through the 2018-19 Budget, the Australian Government has committed up to \$180 million towards the Central Arnhem Road Upgrade. The upgrade will include sealing, reconstruction, widening, and flood immunity improvements to priority sections of the route to a fit-for-purpose standard.

The project will support inter-regional connections to and from Nhulunbuy and Katherine, and will improve community access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities all year round. In addition, the project will support the growth of rural populations and the agricultural and tourism industries through improved route reliability.

The new \$3.5 billion Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) initiative will fund upgrades to our key regional freight routes to improve access for higher productivity vehicles and to regional communities. ROSI will open up corridors to provide a more reliable road network, improve access for higher capacity vehicles, better connect regional communities, and facilitate tourism opportunities. Improved access provided through ROSI will deliver substantial social and economic benefits, including opportunities for greater regional employment and business growth.

In addition to delivering major individual projects, the IIP includes a number of sub-programs that target minor, but high benefit works, often on local roads and inter-regional corridors. These include the Roads to Recovery Program, the Bridges Renewal Program, the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, and the Black Spot Program.

Regional Development Programs

The Australian Government acknowledges the challenges faced in regional communities and is committed to creating jobs, driving economic growth and building stronger regional communities. The Government's regional grants programs assist regions to remain sustainable, by building communities that people want to live in, and return for work, business and lifestyle opportunities.

The Government is investing in programs to ensure regional Australians have the same level of economic opportunities and access to services compared to their urban counterparts.

The \$272.2 million Regional Growth Fund (RGF) provides grants of \$10 million or more towards regional infrastructure projects that will unlock economic opportunities across the regions. These projects will support long-term economic growth and create jobs in regions, including those undergoing structural adjustment.

Other regional programs include

- the \$222.3 million Regional Jobs and Investment Packages (RJIP); and

- the \$641.6 million Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF).

In the design of these regional programs, the Australian Government acknowledges there are a number of hurdles potential applicants might face that could limit their ability to be competitive in the grant assessment process. To address these issues:

- program guidelines for some regional programs allow applicants to demonstrate that they are experiencing exceptional circumstances and seek an exemption from the co-funding requirement;
- projects classified as remote or very remote can contribute less co-funding in recognition of the challenges in remote communities; and
- projects of similar size are compared against each by grouping applications in categories based on total eligible project cost to ensure like projects are compared with like.

Regional programs administered through the Department help address regional inequalities by diversifying their economies, driving long-term growth and deliver sustainable employment. The BBRF has been designed to achieve the following outcomes in regional and remote communities:

- create jobs;
- have a positive impact on economic activity, including Indigenous economic participation through employment and supplier-use outcomes;
- enhance community facilities;
- enhance leadership capacity; and
- encourage community cohesion and sense of identity.

Funding Municipal Services Across Australia's Regions

Access to services for regional areas is a key priority for the Australian Government. The Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio provides essential funding to local government organisations through the Financial Assistance Grants Program in order to deliver municipal services to communities.

This program addresses differences in the ability of local governments to provide essential services to their communities. Local Government Grants Commissions in each state and the Northern Territory allocate funding to local councils in accordance with the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* and its National Principles. The funding is untied and comprises two components; a general purpose component and a local road component.

The general purpose component is allocated to local governing bodies on a full horizontal equalisation basis as defined by the Act. It ensures that each local governing body in the State/Territory is able to function at a standard not lower than the average standard of other local governing bodies in the State. It takes account of differences in the expenditure required by those local governing bodies in the performance of their functions and in the capacity of those local governing bodies to raise revenue.

Decentralisation

The Decentralisation Agenda forms part of the Australian Government's commitment to promote economic activity in Australia's regions and ensure every part of Australia benefits from our growing economy. Decentralisation of government jobs, in the long term, can help improve government service delivery through closer proximity to citizens and stakeholders, and has the potential to provide long-term operational cost savings.

Decentralisation of government jobs outside of Canberra, central Sydney and Melbourne will benefit regional communities through the creation of local jobs, local economic diversification, and stimulation of regional economic growth in the long term.

The relocation of entities and positions will aim to provide new growth opportunities for the nominated region and surrounding area, through:

- improved service delivery including enhancing linkages with key stakeholders and clients thereby improving service access in regional areas;
- creating local jobs;
- stimulating economic growth in receiving regions;
- reducing socio-economic disparity between major cities and regional areas; and
- increasing employment opportunities, by creating diversified and expanded career pathways for regional Australians.

Place-Based Programs

City Deals

A City Deal is part of a new approach to urban policy internationally, which views cities as critical economic assets with great potential. City Deals are place-based policies designed to unlock the economic opportunities of a city, targeting issues of disadvantage and improving access to services. The City Deals concept has also been applied internationally, particularly in the United Kingdom. For example, the Greater Manchester City Deal completed in 2012 included a local transport infrastructure fund and transport expansion and improvement program.¹⁰

A City Deal involves the three levels of government founded on unlocking economic potential in a city. Governments need to work together to customise their approach to the unique opportunities of the city, drawing on innovative financing and funding arrangements to provide transformative investment. Institutional reforms and investments may also be needed to create the whole-of-city capacity and governance arrangements necessary to sustain and build on the improvements under the City Deal.

¹⁰ Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) (2012). *Greater Manchester City Deal*, Manchester, available online at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221014/Greater-Manchester-City-Deal-final_0.pdf.

The Government aims to deliver City Deals in cities across Australia over the coming years. The Government has committed to negotiating City Deals for all state and territory capital cities, where partner governments are willing. Three City Deals have been signed to date: Townsville, Launceston and Western Sydney. The Townsville City Deal is delivering a development corporation, urban renewal and the North Queensland Stadium. The Launceston Deal is relocating the University of Tasmania campus closer to the city centre. The Western Sydney Deal is establishing rail and the Aerotropolis around the upcoming Western Sydney Airport. Hobart, Geelong, Darwin and Perth all have City Deal negotiations underway, with the three levels of government working to produce bespoke deals for each city.

The other elements of the Government's Smart Cities Agenda are:

- National Cities Performance Framework** - The National Cities Performance Framework is the first official framework of its kind in Australia. It contains 16 contextual indicators and 30 performance indicators for Australia's 21 largest cities plus Western Sydney. These include traditional economic and social indicators—such as the unemployment rate, homelessness rate and life expectancy—as well as indicators that shed light on the specific challenges associated with living in major cities – such as peak travel delay due to traffic congestion and access to green space. The Performance Framework will support the continual improvement of our cities by providing data to help all levels of government, industry and the community make the best policy and investment decisions for Australia's future. The Performance Framework data is available in an easily accessible online format.¹¹
- Smart Cities and Suburbs Program and Future Ready** – Smart Cities and Suburbs is a competitive grants program that is delivering public and private sector co-investment and collaboration in smart technology projects that improve the liveability, productivity and sustainability of Australian cities, suburbs and towns. Grants will fund up to 50 per cent of project costs, supporting small to large scale initiatives delivered in metropolitan and regional urban centres. On 17 November 2017, it was announced that there were 49 successful projects in Round One of the Program which will benefit from \$27.7 million in Australian Government funding. Around 40 per cent of these projects are in regional areas. Round 2 of the Program was announced on 2 May 2018 and there will be around \$22 million of funding available. The Future Ready incubation package was developed to complement the program, and it has been designed to help local government leaders and their communities prepare for smart city transformations through co-learning and collaboration with the public, private and civil sectors.

¹¹ See <https://smart-cities.dashboard.gov.au/all-cities/overview>

Services to Territories

The Australian Government's Services to Territories program aims to maintain and improve the quality of state-type services provided to residents of Norfolk Island, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and the Jervis Bay Territory. It provides targeted support to the ACT and NT through economic and social sustainability initiatives, while managing the Australian Government's interests.

This program seeks to deliver services to these remote communities that are comparable to services available to similar communities on the mainland. Australia's external territories are some of the most remote and vulnerable communities in Australia. The program is directly targeted at providing appropriate state-type services to these communities.

After 36 years of limited self-government, the Australian Government returned Norfolk Island to a non-self-governing territory in 2015. This change in governance will enable the Government to provide services and benefits previously unavailable to Norfolk Island residents.

As of September 2017, Norfolk Island residents can now access Commonwealth support payments and services, Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, and family relationship services. Moreover, the Government has provided significant funding to redevelop the island's health, education and maritime infrastructure. There have also been improvements to support services that assist Norfolk Island residents travelling to mainland Australia to access medical services.

As a result of these Government reforms, Norfolk Islanders now have enhanced access to essential services. The Department's evaluation shows that, overall, the Government's investment in Norfolk Island has had a significant impact including improvements to their health and social system. Access to Medicare has resulted in increases in visits to doctors and allied health practitioners. Additionally, over 400 residents now access Commonwealth support payments and services.

Dealing with Economic Transition in Regional Australia

For some time the Australian Government has provided assistance to regions experiencing difficulty adjusting to structural change, frequently as a result of firm closure or the decline of a major industry. Structural changes can often lead to increasing disadvantage, as workers become displaced from the labour market which limits their access to economic and social opportunities.

Assistance for regions undergoing structural change has generally comprised an innovation and investment fund and a package of job support measures to assist displaced workers in the region. The current phase of structural change and the increased focus on regional Australia provides the opportunity to redefine the Government's approach to dealing with structural change and reassess the effectiveness of regional assistance measures.

Throughout the 1990s, the Newcastle and the Hunter region have received substantial Commonwealth and State Government assistance to support it through economic transition. The Australian Government implemented structural adjustment initiatives that include general social safety net measures, job search assistance, education and training initiatives

and business advisory services. These initiatives provided support to displaced workers and impacted small businesses.

The \$10 million Newcastle Structural Adjustment Fund was also implemented to support economic diversification by providing funding for regional development projects that leveraged existing or emerging strengths outside the manufacturing sector. Projects funded include updates to Newcastle Airport and Newcastle Harbour Marina.

The measures implemented by the Australian Government played an important role in supporting displaced workers. Adjustment costs would have been substantially higher without various forms of targeted assistance. The structural adjustment initiatives were successful in leveraging emerging and existing strengths in the region including the tourism sector.

Investments in the education, defence and health sectors have supported the development of larger employers in the region including the University of Newcastle, the RAAF Base, Hunter TAFE and the John Hunter Hospital. While these expansions were about service delivery and Government operations rather than economic diversification, they provide significant employment opportunities.

The Australian Government's investment in the Newcastle and Hunter region have helped improve the region's social and economic outcomes. Between 2001 and 2016, the Newcastle region saw increases in the proportion of people participating in the labour force, an increase in those with jobs, as well as an increase in new business activity.

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