

Why it's important

Across our world, the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped by more than half – from 1.9 billion in 1990, to 836 million in 2015 – but too many are still struggling for the most basic human needs (United Nations).

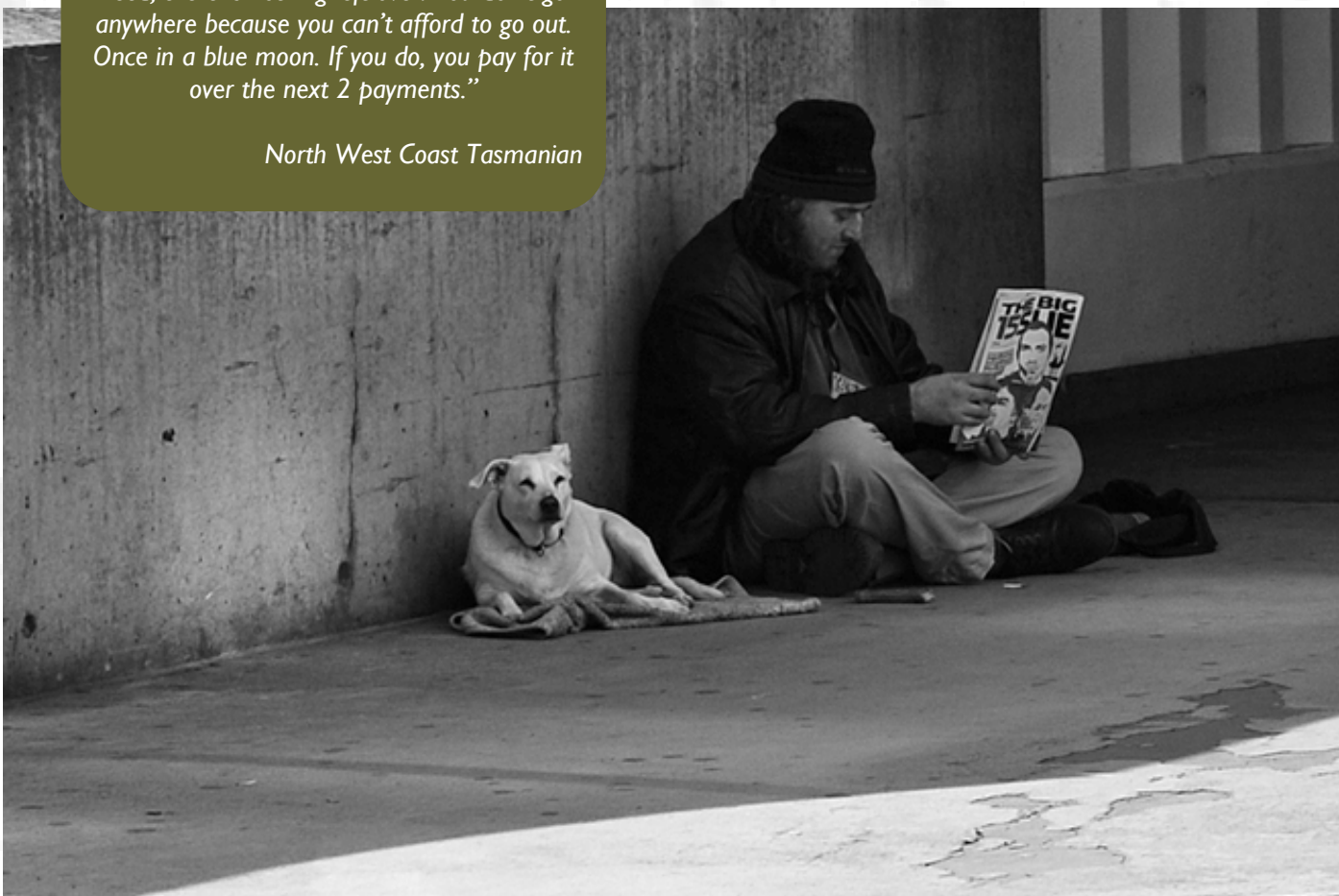
Poverty is defined in either relative or absolute terms. **Absolute poverty** measures poverty in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. The concept of absolute poverty is not concerned with broader **quality of life** issues or with the overall level of inequality in society. **Relative poverty** defines poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context (UNESCO). This wider view of poverty is closely linked to **social exclusion**.

More equal income distribution has proven to be one of the best predictors of better overall health of a society. People living on low incomes:

- die earlier than those who are wealthier - they run at least twice the risk of serious illness and premature death as those with more income and resources
- have poorer access to health services
- have less capacity to develop healthy behaviours like eating well, exercising regularly or stopping smoking
- are more likely to experience social exclusion, stress and anxiety
- are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions such as mental illness, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, injury and respiratory diseases such as asthma.

“Every week the money is spent on things we need, there is nothing left over. You don't go anywhere because you can't afford to go out. Once in a blue moon. If you do, you pay for it over the next 2 payments.”

North West Coast Tasmanian



Why is poverty an issue for the health of Tasmanians?

Poverty exists in Tasmania

In 2014, it was reported that 15% of Tasmanians lived below the poverty line (i.e. below 50% of median household income, which equates to a disposable income of less than \$400 per week for a single adult).¹

Tasmanians earn less than other Australians

On average, Tasmanians earn less per week than the average Australian weekly income.²

Many Tasmanians live on low incomes

About one third of households in Tasmania receive Government income support payments as their principal source of income, which is more than the national average.³

Tasmania has a high unemployment rate and long term unemployment is high

- Tasmania has a higher unemployment rate than the national average.⁴
- Tasmania recorded the second highest long-term unemployment rate as a percentage of the labour force (1.9%) of all jurisdictions in Australia in the year to April 2016, (just below South Australia at 2%). The national long-term unemployment rate was 1.4 per cent in the same period. The number of long-term unemployed and very long-term unemployed Tasmanians have increased significantly over recent years.⁵

Poverty is a growing problem

In October 2014, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) released a report revealing that poverty is growing in Australia. Among the key findings:

- **Child poverty** – 602,604 children (17.7% of all children) were living below the poverty line
- **Working poor** – 33.2% of people below the poverty line came from a household with wages as their main form of income
- **Overall growth in poverty** – Poverty increased between 2010 and 2012 by nearly one per cent (from 13% to 13.9%)
- Among the most **at risk** were women, children, older people, sole parents, those born overseas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people living with disability.¹

References & Resources

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Communities

- Promote services that are available for people who may be experiencing hardship.
- Use existing community resources to help address poverty in the community - e.g. schools, libraries, on-line access centres, Learning & Information Network Centres (LINCS) and community houses.
- Establish local enterprise, knowledge and skills development programs.
- Support local schools to retain students to Year 12.
- Speak out about poverty (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups or write to the media).
- Support the implementation of community-based programs that seek to enhance confidence and self-esteem.
- Establish local bartering and exchange programs.
- Identify community strengths and how these can be built on, rather than focusing on problems and weaknesses.
- Seek the support of local politicians in reducing poverty.
- Tap into sources of information such as *Our Community*. See: ourcommunity.com.au.

Individuals

- Be a role model, a mentor or a friend to a young person who is experiencing hardship.
- If you are able to do so, donate to charities or become a volunteer.
- Support young people to stay in school to Year 12 and beyond.
- Become a member of an organisation that works to alleviate poverty.
- Speak out (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups or write to the media) about poverty.



Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Provide outreach services and make people feel welcome when accessing services.
- Apply principles from *Asset Based Community Development*, which focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses within communities. Visit: abcdinstitute.org for more information.
- Recognise that not everyone is able to work and provide programs that ensure that individuals do not become socially isolated and suffer poor mental health.
- Recognise *transitional periods* in people's lives when planning prevention and early intervention programs e.g. when young people move from school to work, when women move from work to motherhood and back to work, and when older people move from work to retirement.
- Recognise that some people are at increased risk of poverty, including Aboriginal people, women who are sole parents, children, students and young people, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, older people, homeless people, and people in rural and remote areas, and respond accordingly to people's differing needs.
- Support emergency relief workers to be able to respond better to the long-term needs of clients.
- Work in partnership with other organisations to better respond to complex needs.
- Provide flexible work environments (e.g. to meet the needs of parents, carers, people with disabilities) and job security.
- Provide equal pay for work of equal value, even if the work is not the same.
- When employing people, do not discriminate based on family history, place of residence or other 'grapevine' information.

Politicians & Governments

- Ensure that all Tasmanians have access to the basics including education, housing, food and health care.
- Increase income support payments to a level sufficient to provide a basic acceptable standard of living and ensure that the minimum wage is sufficient to enable people to live with dignity.
- Undertake a review of the levels of all State Government concessions with specific reference to the degree to which they alleviate poverty and hardship among recipients.
- Reduce inequalities in income and wealth through progressive taxation.
- Improve access to good jobs and reduce long-term unemployment across the social gradient by improving job security.
- Make it easier for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market to obtain and keep work - e.g. by increasing the availability of jobs suitable for single parents, carers and people with mental and physical health problems.
- Recognise that economic growth is not the most important measure of a country's success. The fair distribution of health and wellbeing, and sustainability, are important social goals. Tackling social inequalities in health and addressing climate change must go together.
- Develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing poverty and increasing equity, with measurable outcomes.
- Develop an understanding of poverty and how to reduce this at the local government level.
- Increase investment in educating women, especially young mothers.
- Exercise sufficient control over pricing to ensure that healthy food options are accessible to people on low incomes.