

SHOCK STUDY REVEALS CRISIS OUR KIDS FACE

MILES KEMP

WELFARE groups have called for action after an official report card revealed more than half of all South Australian children are living in disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances.

The state government report reveals 53.6 per cent of people aged under 18 live in disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances, compared with a national average of 38.9 per cent.

The report, titled *How are they faring? South Australia's 2022 Report Card for children and young people*, also reveals 16 measures in which SA children have gone backwards.

Helen Connolly, one of the report authors and Commissioner for Children and Young People, said the findings were the outcome of poor funding over “many years”. “When we go backwards on a measure, what we are seeing is the impact of the lack of investment over many years in the social and physical wellbeing infrastructure needed for children to thrive,” Ms Connolly said.

“Issues like poverty, disability, family breakdown, violence, or racism, point to a lack of action in our human services, child protection and health systems to provide children with what they need.

“We must do more to address the growing inequality of outcomes between those children who have and those who have not.”

South Australian Council of Social Service director Ross Womersley said he was encouraged by a relatively high proportion of children doing well but said figures on disadvantage were “alarming”.

“We are alarmed by the reality that more than half of all children in South Australia are living in disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances. With the huge increases in the cost of living, these families will be really struggling,” he said.

“A good place to start fixing this would be by raising the rate of JobSeeker and other income support payments; by ensuring that all children have a secure home to live in; and by reducing the number of children who currently live in out-of-home care – that’s more than 4000 children under 18 in SA.”

The annual report card, which is required by law, measures everything from eating the required amount of vegetables (down from 7.7 per cent to 3.7 per cent in 2022) to infant mortality, which dropped from 3.1 per 1000 to 2.5 per 1000 last year.

Using the latest 2021 figures for “disadvantage” the report found that for SA children:

- 104,000, or 26 per cent, lived in the most disadvantaged households that earn less than \$25,000 per year. This figure was up from 25.2 per cent in 2021 and more than the national average of 19.3 per cent.
- 43,000, or 10.8 per cent, were living in the least disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances, up from 10.5 per cent in 2021 and compared to 21.1 per cent nationally.

The measure of disadvantage is based on a complicated scoring of household income, employment, education levels, work skill level, access to internet, home rental amounts, single parent families, car ownership, and English language skills.

Uniting Communities chief executive Simon Schrapel said the report was deeply concerning.

“Unless we can develop a whole-of-state strategy to reduce the drivers of these appalling statistics, we face a grim future,” he said. “This is a crisis we can’t afford to ignore.”

The 2022 report was critical that many figures it had to draw from were out of date.

Child Protection Minister Katrine Hildyard said the report findings would become part of a review of the state’s Children and Young People (Safety) Act.

Ms Connolly is also recruiting SA students from years 10, 11, 12 to apply for the 2023 Student Representative Council before 20 January.

One SRC member from 2022 Shreya Choudhary, 15 and in year 11, said young people were aware of the problems highlighted by the 2022 report card and through the council hoped the problems could be better tackled.

“Young people are aware of these statistics and the SRC work would help fill the gaps,” she said.

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