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**Financial hardship impacts health and wellbeing for families experiencing disadvantage, study shows**

Personal loans including pay-day loans, debts arising from household and personal bills, overdue rent and student loan debts are severely impacting on Perth’s most vulnerable and severely affecting their health and wellbeing, according to the findings of a study into entrenched disadvantage in Perth.

Professor Paul Flatau, Director of the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia said the findings from the 100 Families WA report show a significant number of people in a low income position in Perth are facing substantial debt, utility bill and personal debt issues, as well as struggling to maintain rental payments.

The 100 Families WA study found among the 400 low income people surveyed 54% had a debt arising from overdue household bills and 39% had a debt arising from overdue personal bills.

“Around a quarter of people surveyed face compounding debt issues and are taking out loans from payday lenders. This puts people in very adverse positions and, it’s clear people are facing high levels of financial stress – including stress-related illnesses – because of their financial circumstances and debt,” said Professor Flatau.

Two-thirds of people with debt reported experiencing inability to sleep as a result of having debt, 60.3% had experienced stress-related illness, and 47.5% reported physical ill health. More than 40% of families reported experiencing a relationship breakdown attributed to debt.

Anglicare WA CEO Mark Glasson said the 100 Families WA study substantiates what we know anecdotally that being in financial stress takes a toll on peoples mental and physical wellbeing, which often will impact on their personal relationships, exacerbating their experience of hardship and disadvantage.

“This often has a snowball effect; as it’s not unusual for clients accessing financial counselling to be referred for additional support services for family breakdown, domestic violence, mental health support as well as meeting basic needs such as food packages and utility grants,” said Mr Glasson.

Demand for financial counselling continues to grow. Anglicare WA together with Uniting Care West jointly leads the Financial Counselling Network, a collaboration of 14 not-for-profit organisations and local government providing these services in 25 locations across Perth, assisting around 8,000 people annually.

“It’s positive to see 69.5% of families sought assistance from welfare or community organisations, and more than half felt comfortable asking for help from family or friends. Having someone to turn to during times of stress is important,” said Mr Glasson.

 “When asked what would make the biggest difference in their life, one in five families said getting a job, but discrimination and the lack of suitable job options were a barrier to accessing employment.

“Overall this study shines a spotlight on the key areas of concern for achieving social, health and economic wellbeing; the next step is to capture families’ experience accessing services so we can better understand the obstacles for those experiencing disadvantage, and better meet their needs.”

The quantitative baseline report will be released on Thursday 22 August 2019.

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**About 100 Families WA**

The baseline report surveyed 400 families based in Perth, examining the domains of social, health and economic wellbeing, including demographics, family and household composition, income, material deprivation, employment, health, mental health, substance use, wellbeing and quality of life, and adverse life experiences.

100 Families WA is a collaborative research project, and the baseline report will form part of a wider report to understand entrenched disadvantage and social exclusion in Perth and will continue through until 2022, with a baseline study involving 400 families, and in-depth interview with 100 families.

WACOSS, Anglicare WA, Ruah Community Services, Wanslea, Jacaranda, Centrecare, UnitingCare West, Mercycare, the UWA Social Policy Practice and Research Consortium and the Centre for Social Impact UWA are collaborative partners on the project.