THE REAL STORY

What Australians think about poverty
and how we shape the debate

STATE OF THE FAMILY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2018

Anglicare Australia
in every Community

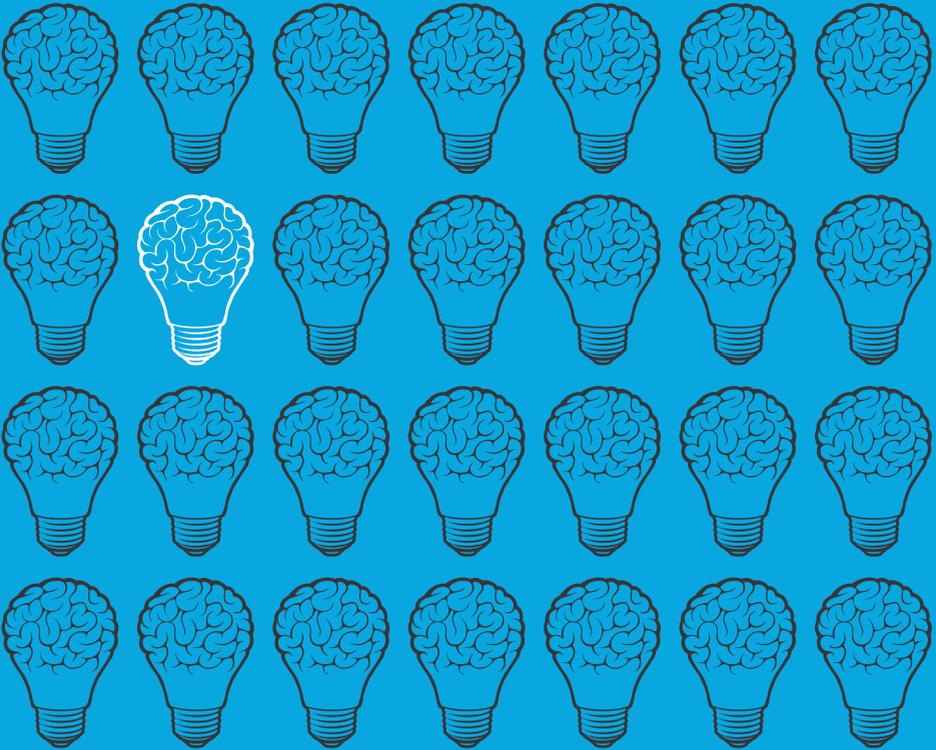# THE REAL STORY

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Contents

About this report

This year's State of the Family report explores attitudes towards people experiencing poverty. It also reflects on what these attitudes mean for how we as advocates communicate and persuade.

The real story: What Australians think about poverty and how we shape the debate features a literature review on poverty in Australia at Chapter 1, the results of a nationally representative survey of attitudes at Chapter 2, and a language analysis drawn from the Anglicare Australia Network at Chapter 3.

We have also included a series of stories or 'portraits' where people who use our network's services describe, in their own words, their experiences of poverty. These are featured throughout Chapter 3.

Any study is confined by its methodology. The method used in this study was a representative survey, and an analysis of communication samples from the Anglicare Australia Network. This method cannot answer every question, and in some cases this research has generated important questions that this project cannot directly answer. We are contributing this study to a growing body of research in the hope of working with others to more fully answer these questions.

Unlike previous reports, the audience for this year's State of the Family is not Government or decision-makers, but rather the Anglicare Australia Network itself, the community sector, and other advocates. We hope we can use the findings to change the conversation about poverty and improve people's lives.

Changing the conversation

Anglicare Australia's first strategic goal is to influence social and economic policy across Australia with a strong prophetic voice; and to speak with, and for, those most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Usually we take the meaning of our prophetic voice to be about the stories we tell, the truth we share and the society we hope for. In this report we are looking deeper into the voice itself, looking at how it speaks and how that affects the way we are able to influence.

Language colours the way we understand things. We can superficially give the same information in several different ways. But the words we use, the ideas we invoke, and the way they are arranged transmits different understandings to the listener. Psychology is full of experiments showing how people understand stories differently due to the different ways they were told the story. For Anglicare Australia this obligates us to ensure that we tell the story in a way which is the most truthful, which best paints the situation, and which is most likely to inspire support. People entering our services are taking the courageous step of asking for help, of exposing that most human of characteristics – vulnerability. We are in the privileged position of having audiences for our voice. We owe those listeners and readers a truthful, engaged, and informed voice that they can trust.

After years of advocacy we felt a lingering sense that things weren't changing; that there was a growing distance between community views and the narrative told by government and media. The people we see in our services, and how they are portrayed in the government's narrative, are streets apart. We see people struggling to make ends meet on low wages or government benefits. They are striving for better for themselves and their families. They are strident in their desire for a better society for all.

Reading some of the media reports or government proposals we could be forgiven for seeing people who want only the easiest way out – benefits at a rate that allow for luxuries and a whole group of people content to defraud the hard working public.

This narrative tells of a tale of two polarised communities. Two separate groups of people: Taxpayers and those in recept of benefits. This is a totally false polarity. We have pointed out many times that most people will be both in their lives. Many are both simultaneously – paying taxes into a shared trust while reaping the direct and indirect benefits through roads, defence, Medicare, the aged pension, and education.

At first it may seem a large leap to go from this shared trust to talking about democracy. Writing about the failure of democracy is popular at the moment. Political thought bubbles, poor behaviour in individual politicians and leaders, loss of trust in institutions here and overseas has many commentators and writers examining the issue.

However as we worked on this it seemed it wasn't a bridge too far. Democracy after all is about people. People create a government system to meet their needs, to simultaneously lead and serve them. We have got it wrong if we think that democracy is about the institutions, and that loss of faith in those institutions should drive us to walk away from democracy itself. Democracy is about the individuals, the collective, the civil society, and the standards we collectively wish and strive for.

At Anglicare Australia we are optimistic about our democracy. And we are optimistic about human nature. We believe that the community understands what a good society looks like and feels despair, as we do, that we seem to be drifting away from it rather than toward it.

Politicians and commentators on the other hand seem to think that there are points to be scored, votes to be won, and circulation to be gained by invoking a narrative that blames the individual and denies the existence of society.

In looking at our voice, how it tells the stories, and how it influences behaviour we commissioned some research on society's attitudes to poverty and inequality. We have bravely examined the Anglicare Australia Network's own writings to critique how our own voice shapes community opinion and behaviour.

Chapter 2 of this report examines the results from that research and finds that indeed most Australians are empathetic to the situation of others. They understand that poverty can happen to anyone and that helping each other is a fundamental part of society. We found in our research that our optimism about what people think and their level of empathy for those living in poverty was well founded. People knew that those in poverty were just like them.

To tap into this empathy we need to grasp back the power of the narrative. We need to stop only responding to arguments made and shape the debate in the way the community wants us to.

"We found in our research that our optimism about people was well founded. People knew that those in poverty were just like them"

Civil society organisations like Anglicare Australia can steer this. Governments can choose whether to follow. We can speak directly to the community by choosing not to only engage with policy-government speak but by choosing our own language that honours the people in the stories we are telling, engages the community to listen, and points to a hopeful society where any level of inherent, entrenched inequality is rejected.

"We will need to make sure that our language is dynamic and in touch with community attitudes. And we should use our voice clearly and confidently"

To do this we will need to make sure that our language is dynamic and is in touch with community attitudes. Whilst we sometimes do need to partake in negatively formed debate we should always seek to engage our leadership and reframe it in language that honours those it describes. And we should use this voice confidently and clearly so that our meaning cannot be lost or misinterpreted.

Of course while looking at tone we still engage with our key themes of inequality and poverty in this report. However rather than statistics and graphs there is an optimism that the Australian public shares our view that any level of inequality is too much for the Australian psyche.

In looking at how we could best use our voice to uncover and promote this empathy, we have looked at pieces of communication from our network and considered how we should better shape them to access the best in all of us.

You will see a change in how we communicate as we take on the lessons from our own critique. We will not be drawn into the reactive name calling responses. We hope that you will join us in exercising this leadership through this voice. This is true democracy – people leading the way, and media and governments following.

Kasy Chambers
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia
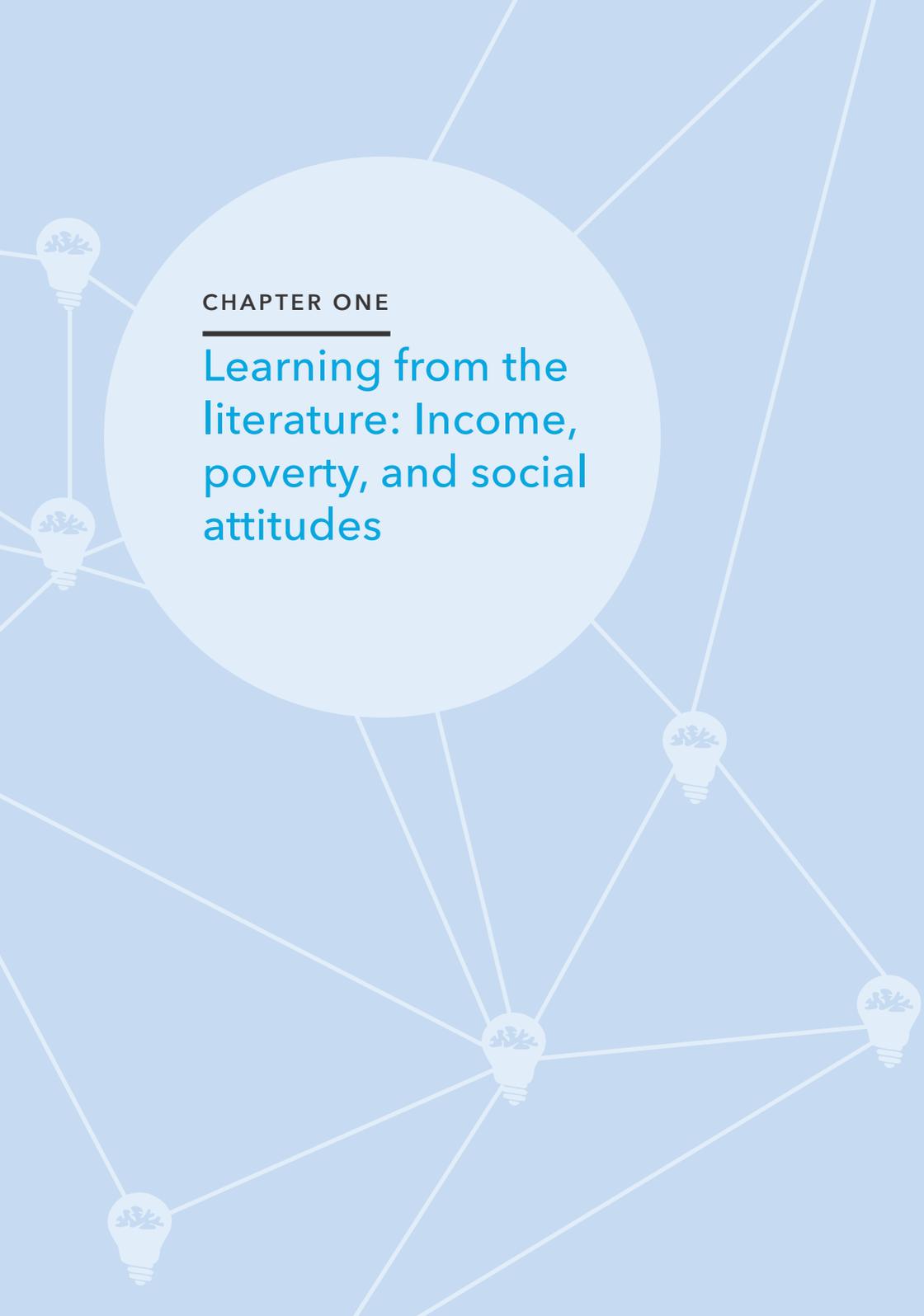
Learning from the literature: Income, poverty, and social attitudes

What do we as Australians know about our shared views of inequality? How seriously do we take it, and is it a problem we believe we can solve?

There is no shortage of research on income, welfare, and inequality. For example, *Who is Being Left Behind*, one of Anglicare Australia's recent State of the Family reports (Anglicare Australia, 2015) offers national analysis and network insights into Australia's changing economic landscape. There is also a growing proliferation of research on correlated issues such as retirement incomes and living wages.

However, very little research has been done on social attitudes towards these issues, the values that underlie them, and how best to engage with them. This seems to be an obvious gap given the scale and persistence of the problem. After almost 25 years of sustained economic growth and prosperity, inequality in Australia is at a 75 year high (Sheil and Stilwell, 2016). Over 2.6 million Australians live below the poverty line, and almost one-quarter of these are children and young people (Phillips et al, 2013, p8).

This chapter will examine the literature on income and poverty in Australia,[1] and Australian attitudes to these issues. The first part of this chapter will explore the literature on income, poverty and disadvantage in Australia. The second part will focus on research into attitudes on income, poverty and the welfare state.

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1 It is important to note that concepts explored in this chapter operate at an explanatory and normative level. Many of these the terms themselves contain implicit theories and ideological presumptions. These issues will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.1 Income, poverty and disadvantage in Australia

The concept of disadvantage is hard to measure, with no universally preferred definition (McLachlan et al, 2013). Many well-established examples highlight the difficulties in measuring persistent disadvantage, and more detailed discussions on the different concepts and measures can be found in McLachlan et al. 2013; and Saunders, 2011. Consequently, poverty is often used as a proxy for the measurement of disadvantage.

Most Australian studies of social disadvantage have used income as the basis for identifying whether or not disadvantage exists at the household level. Income-based approaches to exploring disadvantage have many limitations. Disadvantage is not a synonym for poverty, which is explored in greater detail below in the section on social exclusion. While income-based measures cannot capture the range of non-financial factors that may contribute to disadvantage, such as poor health, low education or limited community participation (Förster and d'Ercole, 2009; McLachlan et al, 2013), the range of approaches to measurement can help inform the picture of poverty and disadvantage in Australia.

Income-based measures of poverty

In Australia, poverty has been measured in absolute or relative terms (McLachlan et al, 2013). Absolute poverty is defined as not having enough income to cover the basic cost of living. Based on absolute poverty rates in the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, the proportion of people in absolute income poverty in Australia has been estimated to have dropped from 13 per cent in 2001 to 3.9 per cent in 2014 (Wilkins, 2016).

The picture is different when considering relative poverty. This measure usually looks at the proportion of households earning less than 50 per cent of the national median household income (McLachlan et al, 2013). Looking at the Australian rates of relative income poverty from 2003–04 to 2013–14, 'the overall picture on a ten-year trend basis is one of a persistent and entrenched poverty rate around 12 per cent' (ACOSS, 2016, p17). A similar analysis by the Melbourne Institute showed that from 2001 to 2014 relative poverty has remained between 10.3 per cent and 13.0 per cent (Wilkins, 2016). Further, there has been an increase in the proportion of children living in relative poverty (2004 to 2014), with an estimated 17 per cent of children aged under 15 living in households below the poverty line (ACOSS, 2016).

The distinction between relative and absolute poverty gave rise to the poverty wars of the early 2000s, which arose following the release of a report prepared by National Centre For Social And Economic Modelling for The Smith Family in 2001. The Centre for Independent Studies, a think tank, argued that the report exaggerated the level of poverty in Australia. The debate that followed centred on whether poverty should be measured in relative or absolute terms (Harrigan, 2005, pp120-21).

In spite of attempts to discredit this approach, measures of relative income poverty have been used for international comparisons (Förster and d'Ercole, 2009; McLachlan et al, 2013). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that the proportion of people in relative income poverty in Australia in 2014 was 12.8 per cent (ACOSS, 2016). This placed Australia among the middle third of countries, despite its prosperity compared with other nations. While the characteristics of the compared nations differ, the fact that six countries had relative income poverty proportions of eight per cent or less suggests that reductions in relative income poverty are possible.

The above measures of income poverty, whether absolute or relative, are cross sectional snapshots. They do not show how many people are embedded in poverty since individuals can, and do, move in and out of poverty. An alternative is to measure the duration of poverty. The Melbourne Institute analysed Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) data from 2002 to 2013 for persons aged over 18 who entered poverty, reporting the number of years before they exited it (Wilkins, 2016). While the majority of people entering poverty (61 per cent) had exited poverty within a year, others remained in poverty for two years (17 per cent), three years (7.4 per cent), four years (4.4 per cent), five years (2.5 per cent) or six or more years (8.2 per cent). Wilkins (2016) also provides a second, similar analysis, looking at the amount of time people receive income support payments. This suggests there is a cohort shifting in and out of poverty, and another that is embedded in poverty. These issues are explored in the emerging research on social exclusion.

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A growing body of research has been exploring the concept of social exclusion

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Social exclusion

To move beyond the limitations of income based poverty measures and gain a deeper understanding of disadvantage, a growing body of research has been exploring the concept of social exclusion. The goal of much of the social exclusion literature has been to develop a broader framework which explores the role of non-economic factors, focusing more attention on the underlying barriers that prevent people from participating in the opportunities available in society.

A group of British researchers has proposed the following definition of social exclusion based on a range of definitions found in the literature:

> '… a complex and multi-dimensional process [that] involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole' (Levitas et al., 2007, p9).

This not only defines social exclusion, but also touches on its consequences for individuals and for society. The emphasis on process reflects both embeddedness in poverty and the precarious movement in and out of disadvantage suggested by the HILDA data. This broadens the focus beyond income measures.

The Productivity Commission, for example, reported on yearly shifts between levels of social exclusion from 2001 to 2009. They found that the largest proportion of people facing deep or very deep social exclusion in any given year experienced less exclusion the year after (McLachlan et al, 2013). These findings were consistent with the Melbourne Institute's analysis of durations of poverty (Wilkins, 2016) and analyses of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics in the United States (for example, Duncan and Vandel, 2012; Gottschalk et al, 1994). However, the Productivity Commission also found that, of people who were 'very deeply socially excluded' in any given year, 31 per cent remained so the following year. Of people who were 'deeply socially excluded', 37 per cent remained so the following year and 8 per cent moved on to being 'very deeply socially excluded' (see McLachlan et al, 2013, Table 3.7).

Although promoting social inclusion has become a policy priority in many countries, concern has been expressed in the academic literature about the ambiguities that surround the concept. Saraceno (2002, p49) argues that:

> ' … social exclusion has been more developed as a discourse than as a concept: that is, the idea has been most used and articulated in the service of the language of politics … it constitutes a relatively loose set of ideas that represent particular settings, rather than a concept with theoretical substance and coherence that transcends national and political contexts'.

These concerns have been highlighted by critics from across the political spectrum to argue that social exclusion as a concept serves little purpose other than to divert attention away from more fundamental issues like inequality. Others believe that it allows groups to be categorised as disadvantaged and thus become eligible to receive state support (Saunders and Wong, 2014, p136). In spite of the criticisms, it remains a useful concept in exploring the factors that underlie poverty and deeper causes of disadvantage.

The changing demographics of poverty

The above discussion of social exclusion raises issues related to employment, earnings, and demographic factors. The focus on income poverty has intensified as Australia continues to see a decline in wage growth, meaning that more and more Australians in poverty are working (Rajadurai, 2018, p16). Of these, a growing proportion are working full-time (ACOSS, 2016, p25). Income inequality between higher and lower income earners has also increased (Whiteford, 2015). The most important source of income inequality is linked to wages (Whiteford, 2013). Labour force data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2017 showed that the unemployment rate for people aged

15-24 was 12.4 per cent which was double the national average for unemployment. It also showed that over 18 per cent of young people who are not in school are unemployed (ABS, 2017, p21).

Other factors such as changes in family structure, shifting demographics, and economic changes have played a role in income inequality. The income share of Australia's highest income earners began to rise in the late 1970s and has followed a pattern similar to other English-speaking advanced economies (Whiteford, 2013, p19). For around 61 per cent of the population, the largest portion of household income comes from wages and salaries. Government pensions and allowances come in second, forming the largest income source for close to 25 per cent of Australian households (Whiteford, 2013, p19).

These trends are coupled with rising living costs. Compared with 1997, today's average hourly wage affords two per cent less food, eight per cent less housing, 26 per cent less water, electricity and gas, eighteen per cent less petrol, five per cent less healthcare and 21 per cent less education (ABS, 2011). Over the last few decades, household incomes have risen in terms of the overall consumer price index (38.1 per cent for the median household), but food and other essential costs (including housing, energy, transport, health, education and childcare) take up the same proportion of the average household budget as they did in 1985, almost three-fifths (Rafferty and Yu, 2010, pp. 56-7). This underscores the need to factor living costs into analyses of incomes. It also highlights the limitations of income-based measures of inequality.

Just as the poverty wars of the early 2000s centred on the distinction between relative and absolute poverty, a new debate is emerging that focuses on the difference between income inequality and wealth inequality. While most Australian research has focused on income

inequality, the focus on wealth inequality has been growing. Some researchers argue that income (an economic flow) is a simplistic measure, while wealth (an economic stock of assets) is a more fundamental indicator of peoples' social position and opportunities (Sheil and Stilwell, 2016). This is because measures based solely on income do not account for financial resources other than income, such as savings or home equity (Hayes and Hacker, 2017, p3). Interest in wealth inequality is likely to grow because Australia's social security and retirement system is designed around the assumption that most people will own their own home (Agnew, 2013, p8), but record-high house prices are now driving home ownership out of reach for more and more people (Wang et al, 2018, p34).

The centrality of home ownership to Australia's social security system, coupled with rising living costs and more insecure work patterns, mean that work is becoming less important financially than owning a home or inheriting wealth. This is an important trend that could have a major impact on social attitudes towards welfare, work and poverty.

1.2 Australian attitudes to income, poverty and the welfare state

There is a perception within Australian civil society that people experiencing poverty are poorly regarded by the community, that the welfare state is unpopular, and that the succession of welfare-crackdowns is a response to Australian public opinion (Whiteford, 2017). This section attempts to interrogate those assumptions by exploring the literature on social attitudes and the values that underlie them, noting that research in this area is scarce.

Attitudes to the welfare system

People can have disparate, or even contradictory, attitudes toward the welfare system and the people who depend on it. For example, people can be supportive of the safety net but are often unhappy with how policies are implemented (Roosma et al, 2013). There is some cross-national variation in both attitudes toward welfare systems (Roosma et al, 2013) and the people who access these systems (McKay, 2014). As these perceptions may change over time (Petersen et al, 2011; Petersen et al, 2012), data on changes in attitudes to welfare form an important part of the empirical backdrop. In Britain, where public attitudes to welfare have been monitored over decades, data show a substantial decline in support for increased spending on welfare benefits for the poor; that an increasing majority consider benefits for the unemployed are too generous; and that there are growing levels of distrust and concern about the integrity of the welfare system (McKay, 2014; Baumberg, 2012; Pearce and Taylor, 2013). Recent European data shows Britain to have the most negative attitudes toward people receiving benefits, as evident from strong endorsement of the view that they are 'lazy and dependent' (McKay, 2014).

> "People can have disparate, or even contradictory, attitudes toward the welfare system and the people who depend on it"

In spite of media assertions, little is known about the attitudes of Australians to welfare. The work that has been done has focussed on the structure of the welfare system, demonstrating broad support for the safety net (Saunders, 2002). While there is little research on the attitudes of Australians toward people receiving welfare, Schofield and Butterworth (2015) attempted to study Australian attitudes through a weighted survey. They found that support for the safety net is high, but the people who use that safety net were often viewed as lazy and not doing enough to find work. The Australian findings are consistent with findings in other English speaking countries (Schofield and Butterworth, 2015). Over 60 per cent of those in the UK view welfare as making people lazy and dependent (McKay, 2014), and a similar proportion of those surveyed in the Australian population also endorsed this negative attitude (Schofield and Butterworth, 2015). This view was accompanied by the belief that recipients of welfare payments should be under more obligation to find work and were not genuinely trying to find a job. The study also found a perception that it's too easy to qualify for welfare payments in Australia (Schofield and Butterworth, 2015). In other words Australians support the safety net, but can still hold negative attitudes to those who use it.

" 61 per cent of Australians favour setting welfare payments through an independent body "

Anglicare Australia commissioned its own survey on welfare levels in 2013. In a weighted survey of 1,377 respondents, 61 per cent favoured setting welfare payments through an independent body rather than

through a political process. This included a majority of Coalition, Labor, Greens, and One Nation Voters. A strong majority of respondents (67 per cent) believed that welfare payments should be designed to meet the cost of living. A small minority (12 per cent) believed that welfare payments should reflect a bare minimum. This reinforced the notion that Australians support the existence of a strong safety net, although unlike the Schofield and Butterworth study, the survey did not explore attitudes towards the people who use that safety net.

The political impacts of attitudes to welfare

Australia has one of the most targeted and compliance-heavy social security systems in the world (Whiteford, 2016, p12). The value of income support payments has eroded over time, as they have failed to keep up with wage growth and cost-of-living increases. The base rates of several income support payments, including the Newstart Allowance, have not been increased in almost 25 years (Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee, 2012, p38). Australia is one of the lowest spending countries on income support in the OECD (Whiteford, 2016, p9), and the OECD itself has reported that Australia's income support payments are far too low (OECD, 2008, p2).

While the conditions attached to social payments are justified as providing incentives to work, or challenging a culture of poverty, the evidence is often lacking. Past research suggests Work for the Dole reduces the chances that recipients will find work (Bordland and Tseng, 2011). There is little evidence that quarantining payments helps either. But both measures also increase administrative costs. Despite this, governments have continued to move in this direction, shifting more people onto lower and highly conditional payments (Whiteford, 2016).

These trends reflect the politics of a very targeted welfare payment system. As the group of people reliant on payments reduces to those at the margins, the recipient group becomes less politically influential and more vulnerable to cuts (Jacques and Noël, 2018). It is already well-established that targeting benefits reduces redistributive impact by shrinking the overall size of the state (Korpi and Palme, 1998). But there is an emerging view that universalism is also a tool to build support for the welfare state, reducing poverty and inequality by generating political support (Jacques and Noël, 2018).

The support for universalism is demonstrated by the widespread popularity of Medicare subsidies and payments, family payments, and the age pension (Deeming, 2013; Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2010). In each of these cases most of the potential population – those with children, those over 65, those accessing healthcare – receive a benefit. Payments that are not too targeted are less likely to create poverty traps caused by taking away benefits at the same time that people pay more income tax. Universalism also guards against stigmatising recipients. Because most people receive a benefit it is seen as normal, and the larger constituency is more politically powerful. Notably, family payments increased throughout the 2000s (Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2010, p588), and the age pension was raised in 2009. This is in contrast to more targeted payments, which continue to stagnate.

It is also important to note that the negative attitudes towards people receiving welfare payments, such as those identified by Schofield and Butterworth, may not be fixed. Some popular commentary posits that welfare crackdowns are a response to community sentiment, but emerging research from the United Kingdom suggests that the political discourse shapes public attitudes, not the other way around (see, for example, Curtice, 2010). A recent study analysing longitudinal data on

British social attitudes from 1983-2011 contradicts popular perceptions that welfare crackdowns beginning in the eighties and nineties were a response to community sentiments (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2014). Instead, it suggests that the move toward mutual obligation and punitive approaches to welfare in the eighties began long before the hardening of attitudes towards people receiving benefits. The critical period in shaping these attitudes seems to have happened in the late nineties (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2014, p20). As the political consensus on benefits cemented, it has influenced attitudes.

These findings are reinforced by O'Grady's (2017) analysis of House of Commons speeches on welfare from the late 1980s to 2015. O'Grady compared political rhetoric to data from the British Social Attitudes Survey and found that declining support for the benefits system was a top-down phenomenon. He concludes that shifts in political rhetoric, especially from Labour, occurred before public opinion changed, not after:

> 'In the 1980s and early 1990s, benefits recipients were depicted [by Labour] mostly as deserving, and the system itself was talked about as a highly legitimate means of poverty alleviation. That began to change from the mid-1990s. Users of the system became stigmatised, and benefits were depicted as ineffectual or even wasteful… from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s – in a very sharp break from the 1980s – Labour devoted substantially less time to talking about the benefits system and its users in positive terms than it did to problems with the system and the need for reforms. Positive mentions of welfare plummeted, and were drowned out by more negative discourse.'

Comparable studies have not been conducted in Australia, but it is worth noting that the expansion of Australia's mutual obligation framework since the late nineties has coincided with that of the United Kingdom, and both populations appear to hold similar attitudes to people receiving welfare payments (see for example Schofield and Butterworth, 2015).

These findings are significant, and there are many ways to interpret what they mean. It could imply that labour parties and other 'progressive' actors are more influential in debates on income and welfare. It could also suggest that governments and parties cannot shape attitudes on their own without the existence of a political consensus. More research is needed, but these findings show that negative attitudes towards people receiving welfare payments are not fixed and are influenced by public debate.

> **" The findings show that attutides to welfare are not fixed and can be changed "**

The relationship between attitudes and values

In exploring attitudes towards poverty and income, it is important to consider how these attitudes are shaped by the values that underlie them. For much of the past century, the application of the values construct in the social sciences suffered from the absence of agreement about what basic values are, of the content and structure of relations among these values, and of reliable empirical methods to measure them (Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000). Theoretical and methodological developments pioneered by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992; Smith and Schwartz, 1997) have brought about a resurgence of research on values.

The Schwartz theory concerns the basic values that people in all cultures recognise. It identifies ten distinct types of values and specifies the dynamic relations among them. It posits that some values conflict with one another (for example, benevolence and power) whereas others are compatible (for example, conformity and security) (Smith and Schwartz, 1997). Under this theory, the structure of values refers to these relations of conflict and congruence. Values are structured in similar ways across culturally diverse groups. The Schwartz research suggests that there is a universal organisation of human motivations (Schwartz, 2006). Although the nature of values and their structure may be universal, individuals and groups differ in the relative importance they attribute to the values. That is, individuals and groups have different value priorities or hierarchies. This theory has been well researched and tested over many years, leading it to become widely accepted as a foundation for values-based communication.

Building on Schwartz' work, Kasser and Ryan (1996) used this framework to define intrinsic and extrinsic values. *Intrinsic values* include values of social justice, equality, unity with nature, and self-acceptance. Engaging these values – any of them, it seems – leads to increased support for social and environmental causes (Crompton et al, 2015, p9). Intrinsic values stand in opposition to *extrinsic values*. These include concern about wealth, social status, or public image. These values have been shown to be associated with lower levels of concern about environmental problems, and lower motivation to address them (Crompton et al, 2015, p9).

More recent research building on this work suggests that drawing a person's attention, even subtly, to an extrinsic value leaves them less likely to offer help to another person (Maio et al, 2009; Vohs et al, 2006) and less likely to express positive attitudes towards people experiencing

poverty or the environment (Crompton et al, 2015, p9). While further research is necessary to explain the processes involved, it seems likely when extrinsic values are activated people become more concerned about aims consistent with those values (such as power, status, money, and competition) and less concerned about aims that are inconsistent with extrinsic values, namely the intrinsic values that promote greater care, empathy, and environmental concern (Crompton et al, 2015, p9).

The implementation of the biennial European Social Survey in 2002, conducted every two years, further developed the Schwartz values framework by providing data for assessing this model. The survey included responses from 71 representative national samples from 32 countries to a 21-item version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire, based on the Schwartz framework (Bilsky et al, 2011). The results of an analysis from three rounds of the survey supported the finding that intrinsic values are widely held among respondents (Bilsky et al, 2011, p764). It also found that intrinsic values are closely associated with one another – for example, people who value universalism are also likely to value benevolence, another intrinsic value (Bilsky et al, 2011, p773). This further bolsters the evidence base for the Schwartz framework.

Building on this work, Crompton et al (2016) for the Common Cause Foundation conducted a survey of values in the United Kingdom to explore intrinsic values like helpfulness and equality and extrinsic values such as wealth, public image and success. The survey found that 74 per cent of respondents place greater importance on intrinsic values than extrinsic values (Crompton et al, 2016, p17). However, 77 per cent believed that their fellow citizens held extrinsic values to be more important. The study also found that people who hold this inaccurate belief about other people's values are much less likely to express or act on their own intrinsic values (Crompton et al, 2016, pp21-22).

"The gulf between people's own values and their perceptions of others could explain some of the inconsistencies in social attitudes "

In exploring the research, it seems that the gulf between people's own values, and their perceptions of other people's attitudes, could explain some of the inconsistencies in social attitudes towards poverty and welfare. For example, strong cross-cultural support for a safety net and the concept of welfare could be informed by values of universalism and benevolence. On the other hand, perceptions of people who rely on the safety net could be shaped by the perceptions that people hold about the values of others. In light of O'Grady's findings on the importance of public discourse and political consensus, this is an area in need of more research.

1.3 Findings from the literature

The following findings have emerged from the literature:

1   A growing proportion of people who are in poverty are employed, and some of them are working full-time. This underscores the need for Anglicare Australia and other similar organisations to use language that captures the experiences of people who are working alongside their public advocacy for those who rely only on income support.

2   Work is becoming less important financially than inheriting money or owning a home. This has implications not only for the measurement of poverty and inequality, but has the potential to reshape community attitudes towards income adequacy. The coming years are likely to be critical to reshaping attitudes.

3   Universal payments and benefits are much more popular than those that are targeted. This has implications for how Anglicare Australia and similar organisations conduct advocacy. It is critical to emphasise how Anglicare Australia's priorities benefit society as a whole.

4   Australians show a high level of support for the existence of the safety net, although they can hold contradictory attitudes towards the people who use that safety net.

5   Attitudes are not fixed. They are shaped and re-shaped by the political consensus and tone of public debate. In turn, values inform attitudes, and international research suggests that people's values are more likely to be compassionate than selfish. This highlights the need for Anglicare Australia and other similar organisations to be cautious in accepting foregone political truths.

Findings 1, 2, and 3 will be explored in greater detail through a survey at Chapter 2. All of these findings will be considered in conducting the language analysis, at Chapter 3.
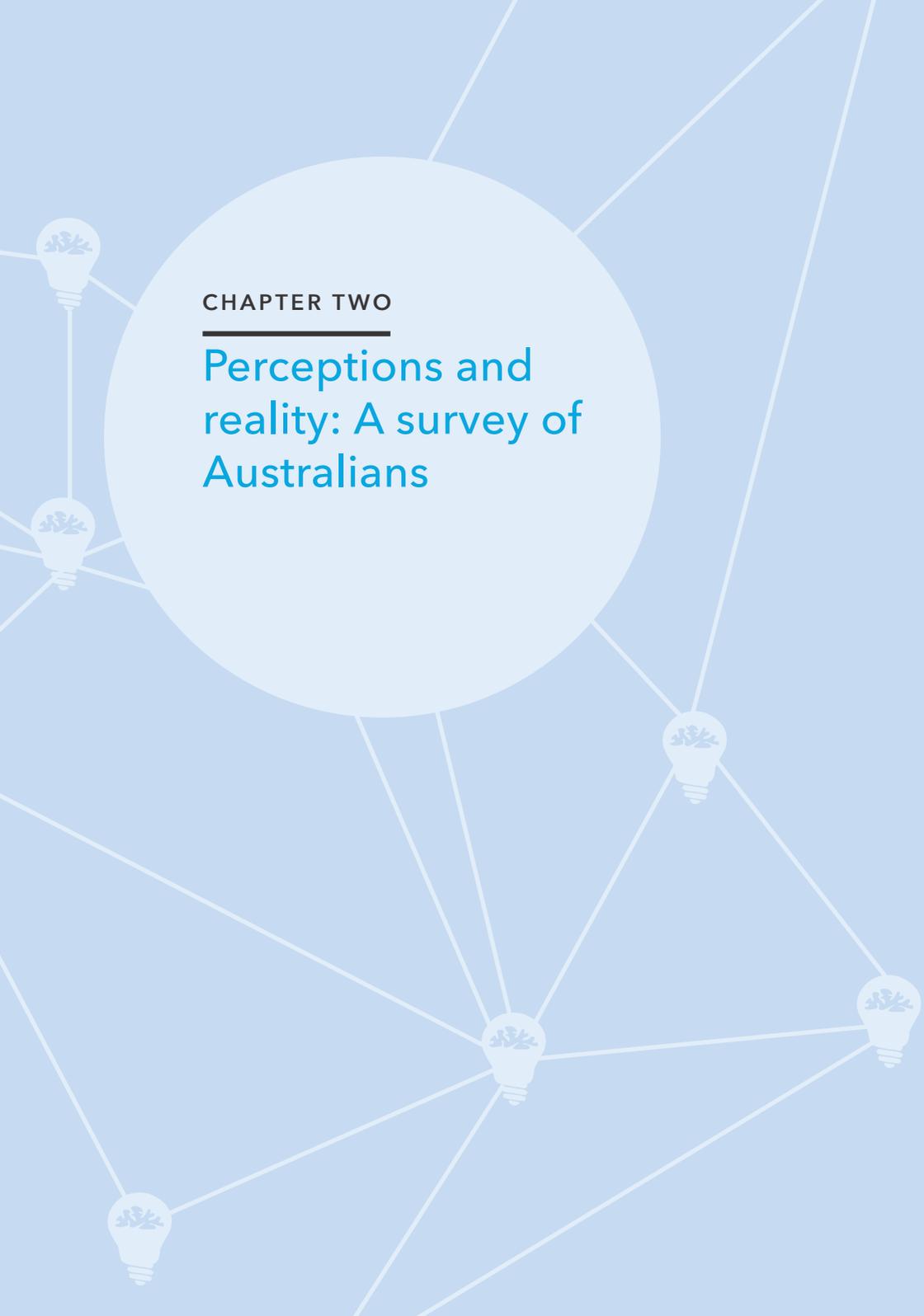
Perceptions and reality: A survey of Australians

Australians are perceived as apathetic or even hostile to people experiencing poverty (Whiteford, 2017), but where does this perception come from? Little evidence supports the notion that the welfare state is unpopular, or that the succession of welfare-crackdowns is a response to Australian public opinion. Yet this perception has shaped public debate and influenced policy.

Attitudes about poverty and income can't be changed if they are not understood. This chapter aims to create an evidence base for organisations and advocates seeking to reinvigorate debate on these issues. Anglicare Australia commissioned a national survey to explore public perceptions and attitudes towards poverty and income. The survey tested the level of sympathy of Australians towards people experiencing poverty, their attitudes towards welfare and income support, and their perceptions about the attitudes of others.

This chapter explores the findings of that survey, its consistency with the findings of the literature review at Chapter 1, and its implications for the language analysis at Chapter 3.

Methodology

To conduct this research, Ipsos was commissioned by Anglicare Australia to develop a quantitative survey with a representative national sample. The data collection for the Anglicare Australia-Ipsos survey was conducted from 20 to 24 June 2018, with a total sample of 1,236 respondents. The sample has been weighted to be representative of the Australian population by age, gender and location. The breakdown of the number of participants in each State and Territory, as well as age, gender and regional demographics are outlined below in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of participants by region, state, gender and age

		Number of participants
Region	Metro	813
	Rural	423
State	NSW	439
	VIC	215
	SA	104
	ACT	23
	WA	140
	TAS	32
	NT	13
	QLD	271
Gender	Male	595
	Female	641
Age	18 to 29	262
	30 to 49	449
	50 +	525
Total	1236	

The key aim of the survey was to gauge attitudes towards poverty and income, given the scarcity of existing research in this area. Survey respondents were asked to rate their agreement with particular statements on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Except where there are significant trends, results are reported according a net 'agree' (combined 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) and net 'disagree' (combined 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' responses).

The statements tested by the survey were as follows:

» People experiencing poverty are fundamentally the same as I am
» Any Australian could work their way out of poverty if they really tried
» Most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty
» People can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own
» Nobody who works full-time should live in poverty
» Nobody deserves to live in poverty
» Australia should be a country that looks after those in need
» Those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty.

These statements appeared in a randomised order for each respondent to ensure there was no priming effect,[2] and respondents were also given the option to answer 'I don't know.'

In addition to these statements, survey participants were also asked about their own experiences of poverty and hardship (see Part 2.1). This was to test whether individuals' own experiences would influence their views about others.

Results for all the statements are presented in Table 2.

[2] The order in which questions appear can impact the responses people give (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). This phenomenon is called priming, where respondents can be intentionally or unintentionally 'primed' to think about one issue while answering the subsequent questions.

Table 2. Perceptions about poverty

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
People experiencing poverty are fundamentally the same as I am	19%	39%	21%	14%	3%	5%
Any Australian could work their way out of poverty if they really tried	8%	30%	23%	25%	9%	4%
Most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty	8%	44%	21%	20%	3%	4%
People can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own	34%	45%	12%	6%	2%	2%
Nobody who works full-time should live in poverty	48%	37%	9%	4%	1%	2%
Nobody deserves to live in poverty	49%	37%	9%	4%	1%	1%
Australia should be a country that looks after those in need	40%	45%	12%	2%	1%	1%
Those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty	3%	8%	17%	33%	37%	2%

Base n = 1236

For simplicity, throughout this chapter, the term 'significant' will be used only when describing a statistically significant finding. The term 'significant difference' means that there is a 95 per cent certainty that the difference observed between two groups of respondents reflects a true difference in the wider population, and is not a result of chance.

2.1 Experiences of poverty across Australia

The first question in the survey presented to participants was 'In the last 12 months, have you personally experienced a situation where you could not afford to buy basic necessities such as food or shelter?' This question helps to gauge recent experiences of hardship among the respondents, and so explore whether these experiences influenced their responses in the rest of the survey.

The survey showed that in the last twelve months, 16 per cent of Australians have experienced a situation where they could not afford to buy basic necessities such as food or shelter. When looking at age differences, those aged 18 to 29 (20 per cent) and 30 to 49 (20 per cent) were significantly more likely to have experienced poverty in the last 12 months than those who were aged 50 years or older (10 per cent). Similar proportions of male (15 per cent) and female respondents (17 per cent) were unable to satisfy a basic need in the last year.

Responses to this question support the findings of the literature review regarding locational disadvantage, and confirm that hardship is not evenly felt across Australia (Table 3). Nearly one in five respondents from South Australia (21 per cent) reported to have experienced poverty in the last twelve months, followed by Western Australia (17 per cent) and Queensland (17 per cent), then Victoria (16 per cent) and Tasmania (16

per cent). Five per cent reported having experienced poverty in the last twelve months in the Australian Capital Territory. Reported experiences of hardship were consistent between rural and metropolitan locations.

Interestingly, those who reported having a recent experience of poverty were more likely to give unsympathetic answers to other questions in the survey. Throughout the survey, those who answered 'yes' to experiencing recent hardship tended to show higher levels of indifference to people experiencing poverty than those who answered 'no'. This phenomenon will be explored in greater detail in Part 2.5 of this chapter.

Table 3. Experiences of hardship by state

	NSW	VIC	SA	ACT	WA	TAS	NT	QLD
Yes	14%	16%	21%	5%	17%	16%	12%	17%
No	86%	84%	79%	95%	83%	84%	88%	83%

Question: In the last 12 months, have you personally experienced a situation where you could not afford to buy basic necessities such as food or shelter?

2.2 Perceptions about people experiencing poverty

When asked whether they believed that people experiencing poverty were fundamentally the same as them, the majority of respondents agreed with this statement. In total, 58 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement while 17 per cent disagreed. Equal proportions of participants aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 (56 per cent), and over half of participants aged 50 years and above (60 per cent) agreed that people experiencing poverty were the same as them. There were no significant differences between age groups.

Agreement with this statement did not differ significantly across states and territories, with the exception of Tasmania. When compared to other respondents, people in Tasmania were significantly more likely to believe that people experiencing poverty were the same as them (73 per cent total agreement in Tasmania, compared with 58 per cent across Australia).

Compared to those in metropolitan locations, a significantly higher proportion of people in rural areas (64 per cent) said that there are no differences between them and those experiencing poverty. Metropolitan respondents were more likely to disagree (15 per cent) or to be neutral (23 per cent) than those in rural areas (Table 4). This is a recurring trend in the survey, with respondents from rural and regional areas consistently giving more sympathetic responses than their metropolitan counterparts.

Table 4. Agreement that: 'People experiencing poverty are fundamentally the same as I am' by region

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Metro	18%	37%	23%	15%	3%	4%
Rural	21%	43%	17%	10%	3%	5%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: People experiencing poverty are fundamentally the same as I am.

Participants were also asked whether they believed any Australian could work their way out of poverty if they really tried. Similar proportions agreed and disagreed with this statement (38 per cent agreement and 35 per cent disagreement overall).

Again, regional and rural respondents were significantly more likely to oppose this statement (39 per cent disagreement) than those in metropolitan areas. Women were more likely than men to disagree with the idea that any Australian could work their way out of poverty (38 per cent disagreement among women compared to 30 per cent among men).

As shown below in Table 5, younger participants, aged between 18 to 29 and 30 to 49, were significantly more inclined to agree with the statement than those aged 50 or older (43 per cent and 41 per cent agreement respectively, compared to 33 per cent agreement for older participants). Respondents under the age of 50 were also significantly more likely to strongly agree (11 per cent) than those aged 50 and above. Similarly, those over the age of 50 were significantly more likely to disagree with the statement than respondents aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 (41 per cent disagreement compared with 29 per cent and 30 per cent disagreement, respectively). This reflects a trend where the groups (in this case younger people) most likely to report experiencing poverty themselves tended to hold the least sympathetic attitudes towards others experiencing hardship.

Table 5. Agreement that: "Any Australian could work their way out of poverty if they really tried" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	10%	32%	21%	23%	7%	7%
30 - 49	11%	30%	26%	22%	8%	3%
50 +	6%	28%	22%	29%	12%	4%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Any Australian could work their way out of poverty if they really tried.

2.3 Perceptions about 'deserving' poverty

To explore perceptions of deservingness in relation to poverty and income, participants were asked whether they agreed with the statement that 'nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.' Almost nine in ten of all surveyed respondents (84 per cent) agreed that nobody who works full-time should live in poverty.

Compared to younger participants, those aged 50 and above were significantly more likely to say that people working full-time should not be living in poverty (89 per cent agreement). Equal portions of respondents aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 were significantly more likely to report a neutral response (11 per cent neither agree nor disagree) compared to those aged 50 and above.

Survey respondents were also asked whether they agreed with a less equivocal statement, that nobody deserves to live in poverty. Again, an overwhelming majority (86 per cent) of those surveyed agreed with this statement. This statement drew as much agreement, or slightly more, than the statement referencing people in full-time work.

Those aged 18 to 29 (88 per cent agreement) and 50 and above (89 per cent agreement) were significantly more likely to agree that nobody deserves to live in poverty than those aged 30 to 49. Accordingly, those aged 30 to 49 were significantly more likely to disagree (6 per cent disagreement) when compared with those aged 50 and above (Table 6).

Table 6. Agreement that: "Nobody deserves to live in poverty" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	55%	35%	5%	4%	1%	2%
30 - 49	44%	37%	12%	5%	1%	1%
50 +	50%	40%	8%	2%	1%	1%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Nobody deserves to live in poverty.

As shown in Table 7 below, a significantly higher proportion of women agreed that nobody deserves to live in poverty (88 per cent agreement) than men, whereas men were significantly more likely to neither agree nor disagree (11 per cent) than women.

Table 7. Agreement that: "Nobody deserves to live in poverty" by gender

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Male	44%	39%	11%	4%	1%	1%
Female	52%	36%	7%	3%	1%	2%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Nobody deserves to live in poverty.

Those in rural areas were again significantly more inclined to agree with this statement than those in metropolitan locations (89 per cent agreement) compared with 84 per cent agreement (see Table 8).

Table 8. Agreement that: "Nobody deserves to live in poverty" by region

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Rural	46%	38%	10%	4%	1%	2%
Metro	54%	36%	6%	3%	1%	1%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Nobody deserves to live in poverty.

Survey participants were asked whether they believed people can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own. This question tested attitudes towards deservingness, given the role that sheer luck and circumstance can play in poverty. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 78 per cent, agreed with this statement. Only 8 per cent disagreed.

Table 9 shows that those aged 50 and above were significantly more likely to believe that people can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own than younger participants, aged between 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 (88 per cent agreement compared with 72 per cent and 73 per cent agreement respectively). Similarly, those under the age of 50 were significantly more likely to disagree with this statement than those aged 50 and above (10 per cent and 12 per cent disagreement respectively, compared with 4 per cent disagreement).

Those in metropolitan areas were again more likely to provide a neutral response (neither agree nor disagree 14 per cent), while a significantly higher proportion of rural respondents (85 per cent) agreed that people can find themselves in poverty through no fault of their own.

Notably, those aged between 18 to 29 and 30 to 49 were significantly more likely to disagree (9 per cent and 8 per cent respectively) or report a neutral response (neither agree nor disagree 16 per cent and 14 per cent respectively) than those aged 50 years or older.

Table 9. Agreement that: "People can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	37%	35%	16%	9%	1%	2%
30 - 49	30%	43%	14%	8%	4%	1%
50 +	37%	51%	7%	3%	1%	2%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: People can find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own.

To gauge perceptions of the deservingness of people who rely on income support, respondents were also asked whether they agreed with the statement that those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty. An overwhelming number of respondents (71 per cent) rejected this statement. Just ten per cent of all surveyed respondents agreed that those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty.

When compared with men, a significantly higher proportion of women disagreed (73 per cent) with this statement. Table 10 shows that those aged 18 to 29 (13 per cent agreement) and 30 to 49 (16 per cent agreement) were significantly more likely to believe that those who depend on government support deserve to live in poverty than those aged 50 and above.

In the same vein, respondents aged 50 and above were significantly more likely to disagree with this statement (79 per cent disagreement) than younger participants, aged between 18 to 20 and 30 to 49 (69 per cent and 62 per cent disagreement, respectively).

Rural respondents were significantly more likely to disagree with the idea that people who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty (77 per cent disagreement) than those in metropolitan areas.

Table 10. Agreement that: "Those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	3%	9%	14%	34%	35%	5%
30 - 49	5%	11%	20%	29%	33%	2%
50 +	1%	3%	15%	36%	43%	2%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty.

The high level of agreement with this statement is interesting when compared with the less conclusive response to the statement that 'anyone could work their way out of poverty if they really tried.' This result seems to corroborate the findings of the literature review regarding the contradictory attitudes that people can hold towards poverty and welfare (Schofield and Butterworth, 2015; Roosma et al, 2013).

2.4 Perceptions about other Australians

The literature review found that people tend to hold compassionate values and attitudes themselves, but that they underestimate the compassion of others. This is borne out by the survey results, with over half of all participants (52 per cent) reporting a belief that most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty, and almost one in five disagreeing with this statement (23 per cent).

When comparing age groups, those aged 50 or older were significantly more likely to believe that Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty than younger participants, aged between 18 to 20 and 30 to 49 (57 per cent agreement compared with 44 per cent and 50 per cent disagreement, respectively). Female respondents were significantly more inclined to disagree with this statement (almost one in five or 23 per cent) than male respondents (17 per cent). As shown in Table 11, respondents 18 to 29 were also more likely to disagree with this than those aged 50 and older (29 per cent disagreement compared with 21 per cent disagreement).

Table 11. Agreement that: "Most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	8%	35%	22%	27%	3%	6%
30 - 49	7%	43%	24%	19%	4%	3%
50 +	8%	49%	19%	18%	3%	3%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty.

When asked whether they believed that Australia should be a country that looks after those in need, almost nine in ten participants (84 per cent) agreed. Although agreement was similar between men and women (83 per cent and 86 per cent agree, respectively), male participants were significantly more likely to neither agree nor disagree (14 per cent) with this statement than women.

Again, those aged 50 and above were significantly more likely to support this statement than those aged 30 to 49 (89 per cent agreement compared with 79 per cent agreement). Table 12 shows that those aged 30 to 49 were significantly more likely to think that Australia should not provide support to those in need than participants aged 50 and above (5 per cent disagreement compared with 1 per cent disagreement).

Table 12. Agreement that: "Australia should be a country that looks after those in need" by age

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
18 - 29	41%	43%	11%	2%	1%	2%
30 - 49	34%	45%	15%	3%	1%	1%
50 +	44%	45%	10%	1%	1%	1%

Question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Australia should be a country that looks after those in need.

Overall, the very high level of agreement (84 per cent) with this statement accords with the sympathetic attitudes shown by respondents throughout the survey. However, the statement that 'most Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty' attracted only 52 per cent agreement, suggesting that people underestimate the compassion of others.

2.5 Overarching trends in the survey

The survey results are consistent with the findings of the literature review at Chapter 1, while also offering some valuable new insights about social attitudes towards poverty and income.

Australians are much more sympathetic to people experiencing poverty than they think they are

All demographic groups showed high levels of compassion towards people experiencing poverty, and a belief that people should not experience poverty in Australia. Respondents across all demographic groups overwhelmingly agreed that working people should not experience poverty (84 per cent), that nobody deserves to live in poverty (86 per cent), and that Australia should be a country that looks after those in need (84 per cent). Only a small minority of respondents (17 per cent) disagreed with the statement that people experiencing poverty are fundamentally the same as them.

These findings suggest that Australians are deeply sympathetic to those in need. Yet only 52 per cent of respondents agreed that Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty, which clearly underestimates the level of sympathy and support found in the same survey. This result echoes the findings of research presented in the literature review which showed that most people hold compassionate values, but incorrectly perceive that their peers hold selfish values (Crompton et al, 2016, p17). This gulf between perceptions and reality can have major implications – the same study concluded that people who hold this inaccurate belief are much less likely to vote, express their values, or engage in prosocial activities (Crompton et al, 2016, pp21-22).

Attitudes towards people receiving welfare are sympathetic

The survey results suggest that attitudes towards people receiving welfare are sympathetic. Only a small minority of respondents (10 per cent) agreed with the notion that those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty. A strong majority (78 per cent) actively rejected the statement. This is unsurprising when compared with other responses in the survey. A similar proportion of respondents agreed that anybody could find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own, with 79 per cent agreeing with the statement and only 8 per cent disagreeing. This suggests a high level of understanding of the impact of circumstance, and an inferred acceptance that people in need of government assistance still deserve to live a dignified life.

"
These findings challenge the perception that Australians are apathetic or even hostile to people in need of income support **"**

These findings challenge the perception that Australians are apathetic or even hostile to people in need of income support. The language analysis at Chapter 3 shows how harmful it is to internalise this false perception, particularly when it comes to debates on welfare.

People with recent experiences of poverty hold less sympathetic attitudes

An unexpected finding of the survey related to respondents who reported their own recent experiences of hardship (16 per cent in total). This cohort was more likely to give unsympathetic answers to other questions in the survey. Given that young people are more likely to have a recent experience of hardship, this trend may be at the root of some of the age-related discrepancies in reported attitudes as part of the survey.

There is no clear explanation for this result. One possible explanation is methodological. This question appeared first in each survey to establish a benchmark, while all of the subsequent questions were randomised. It is possible that respondents who answered 'yes' to the first question were primed by a recent experience of hardship.

Other explanations are more complex. A recent study by the Oxford University and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that there is sometimes a 'negative self-stereotyping' effect among people experiencing poverty, which can lead them to absorb the prevalent media stereotypes of being 'low in warmth and low in competence' (Fell and Hewstone, 2015). It may also stem from a desire among people to distinguish themselves from a stigmatised group. This is an area in need of further research and investigation.

The exceptions to this trend were people from rural and regional areas. These respondents, even those who answered that they had recently experienced hardship, gave more sympathetic responses than their metropolitan counterparts across the board. Again, it is worth noting this strong trend, although the explanation is beyond the scope of this research.

Nobody deserves to live in poverty

Of all the statements in the survey, the one that elicited the most empathetic response was the statement that nobody deserves to live in poverty (86 per cent agreement, compared with 4 per cent disagreement). This might seem like a surprising result – conventional wisdom suggests that the statement that nobody who works full-time should live in poverty would elicit greater support. Instead the least equivocal statement in the survey – that nobody deserves to live in poverty – drew the highest level of support. This finding has major implications for the language analysis at Chapter 3.

2.6 Findings from the survey

The following findings have emerged from the survey results:

1   Australians are sympathetic to people experiencing poverty. All demographic groups showed high levels of compassion towards people experiencing poverty, and thought people should not experience poverty in Australia. When presented with statements about the deservingness of people living in poverty and whether they were fundamentally the same as them, only a small minority of respondents showed unsympathetic attitudes.

2   Perceptions do not match reality when it comes to attitudes towards poverty. Just 52 per cent of respondents agreed that Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty, which underestimates the strong level of sympathy and support found in the same survey. This gulf between perceptions and reality may have led to foregone political truths in the public debate about poverty and welfare.

3   The findings of the survey challenge the perception that Australians are apathetic or even hostile to people in need of income support. Survey respondents did not distinguish between the deservingness of different groups experiencing poverty, and accepted that people receiving income support deserve to live a dignified life.

4   The least equivocal statement in the survey drew the most empathetic response from participants. This suggests that there isn't a need to qualify statements about poverty, and has major implications for the language analysis at Chapter 3.

5   People who reported recent lived experiences of poverty showed less sympathetic attitudes than those who hadn't. This is an area in need of further research and investigation, but it seems that people are sensitive to stereotypes and may internalise them.

These findings will be considered further as part of the language analysis in the following chapter.

Saying what we mean: A language analysis from the Anglicare Australia Network

How we as advocates talk about issues – the words we use and the ideas we enlist – can shape and express people's views. Language analysis can help explore how public debates on these issues have evolved, and build understanding of how people form opinions. This chapter employs a variety of techniques from cognitive linguistics, a field dedicated to how people process information and communicate, to examine how people reason and come to conclusions about poverty and income in Australia.

To conduct this analysis, this chapter draws on communications developed and used by Anglicare Australia and Anglicare Australia Network members. It compares these communications with portraits submitted by clients. The client portraits are used to illustrate differences between the ways people describe their own experiences, and the way their experiences are described by those who advocate on their behalf. The findings show how Anglicare Australia and its members communicate goals to the public and what these communications convey about poverty and income inequality. This chapter also explores issues such as over-reliance on the passive voice, and the core metaphors at play in the broader discourse on poverty. This analysis rests on extensive research on how people make sense of issues and form judgements about them, some of which was outlined in Chapter 1. It is also informed by the findings of the results of the research project, outlined in Chapter 2.

A key tool in this process is *metaphor analysis*, which involves cataloguing common non-literal phrases used in discourse (Moser, 2000) and noting the patterns in these expressions that reveal how people make sense of complexity. Each metaphor brings with it entailments, or a set of notions unconsciously accepted as true about a concept (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). That is why priming people with

metaphors alters the ways they see an issue and decide what should be done about it. The effectiveness of a metaphor depends on how well it advances and amplifies what advocates wish to communicate.

Most people believe they are creatures of reason, swayed by the facts before them in any given argument. But the way the human mind processes information, and the ways it formulates judgements, lie beyond a person's conscious awareness (Kahneman, 2011). Studies have shown that the use of language, the ordering of an argument, or the delivery of a message can influence what people see as true (Kahneman, 2011). These elements of presentation can also influence attitudes and goals.

Even single words can make a detectable difference in responses. In one US study, investigators asked participants *whether they would vote* in an upcoming election and others *whether they would be a voter*. While just over half of those asked about if they would vote intended to do so, 87.5 per cent of those asked about being a voter intended to get to the polls. Voting records showed 96 per cent of those surveyed about being a voter went on to cast a vote (Bryan et al, 2011). A simple difference in phrasing, from will you vote to will you be a voter is also a conceptual shift from action to identity, from what you do to who you are. In this way, the words that are used shape perceptions of the truth.

"

It's always a focus on rent and food for me. I don't like to look like I'm struggling with money. You need to set aside money to buy a jacket for a job interview. That comes out of groceries.

You have to compromise a lot. It can make you feel quite isolated because you can't go out with your friends and you're always worried about money. I certainly struggled in college. I was very young and it was hard knowing I had to pass college and deal with the pressure of trying to be an adult all of a sudden.

Things like Christmas and Easter and people's birthdays, you feel bad not being able to give someone a present. But it's just the way you live.

This portrait was provided by Anglicare Tasmania

3.1 The language of metaphors

Language is about more than what is said explicitly. Issues are also framed by what is conveyed implicitly. As part of this language analysis, the use of *metaphors* has been reviewed to explore the messages they convey.

When used well, metaphors can be very effective in framing complex issues quickly. This type of framing often plays an important role in political discourse (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). As with any linguistic tool, they can also be counter-productive. For example likening national debt to household debt may evoke the idea of a 'united family', and promotes the need to make 'savings', which could involve a drastic cut in spending.

In exploring the broader public debate on poverty and income, much of civil society has positioned **poverty as an opponent** to be fought or defeated. Examples include:

» 'Poverty is a silent killer'
» 'Education is our greatest weapon against poverty'
» 'We need to fight poverty'

" Language is about more than what is said explicitly "

By turning poverty into the enemy, this metaphor suggests it alone is the actor causing harm. If poverty is the opponent, then the policies and social conditions that create poverty are left out of the narrative. Not only does this mask the actual experiences of people who are living in poverty, it fails to explore the real causes of the harms that come to them.

Without meaning to, this metaphor disempowers people who are experiencing poverty and strips them of agency. It suggests that *we* are fighting poverty on *their* behalf, and it does not capture the conditions of poverty that people live in. It does not touch on what it is like to live day to day without the essentials of life. Poverty as an opponent conveys messages of how to interact with poverty, without exploring what poverty is or where it comes from.

A second common civil society tool for construing poverty is to liken it to an ailment, to be diagnosed and treated. Examples of **poverty as a disease** include:
  » 'A policy that gets the prescription right'
  » 'Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it'

Taking this metaphor about disease and illness to a natural conclusion means accepting that:
  » Disease may be prevented by hygiene and healthy living. Therefore, individuals could take steps to not become poor. They may be to blame for their condition.
  » Most diseases can be treated or managed. Therefore, poverty can be managed or removed in individual cases with enough effort.
  » Diseases can be communicable through people who are unwell. Therefore, poverty can be spread through contact.
  » Diseases are not contracted nor spread on purpose. Therefore, people do not choose poverty.
  » Most diseases have not been created by humans. Therefore, people are not responsible for the existence of poverty.

While people may not consciously make these associations, they show how the metaphor of *poverty as a disease* is limiting. While the point about choice and treatment could be useful, assumptions about disease are likely to be individualised. It is also important to note that while the metaphors of opponent and disease feature in communications from civil society, clients who submitted portraits do not use this language.

Within the Anglicare Australia Network, **poverty as a pathway** is another common metaphorical trend. Examples of poverty as a pathway include:

» 'Newstart is designed as a bridge until people find paid work, we get that.'

» 'Our young people know all too well that the passport to a good life in Australia is to work so they can achieve their goals and ambitions.'

Using this metaphor, poverty is a place that people can end up. In some ways, this metaphor could be useful in communicating the role of luck and circumstance in material wealth. People may not choose their destination, and they may be seeking to get somewhere else.

This came through in some of the portraits, which evoked a sense of place and attempts to change direction:

'I've been offered more hours working at Samaritans which means I'll lose money from my pension. But I do want to get off Centrelink so it's **a step in the right direction** for me, but **it makes it hard to get ahead**.' (Client portrait courtesy of the Samaritans Foundation)

The main limitation of this metaphor is its implication that people have gone to the wrong place, and its tendency to mask the difficulties of moving from one place to another.

A more promising metaphor describes poverty as a place or a trap. Using this metaphor, poverty is a structure from which people cannot escape. Examples of **poverty as a trap** include:

» 'People living in the shadows'
» 'Back from the brink'
» 'Breaking away from poverty'

This metaphor is also echoed in words like 'marginalised'. Even something as simple as the preposition that people are *in* poverty evokes this metaphor. For example, it was common for clients who submitted portraits to describe being 'in a bad spot' or 'in a bad place':

'**I was in a really bad spot**... I had rent-to-buy debt and other small loans and I couldn't get on top of it all.' (Client portrait courtesy of the Samaritans Foundation)

The trap metaphor can also be used in the inverse, to describe how solutions can be structured to end poverty. It also offers expressions like 'deep poverty'. This metaphor offers a sense of the intractable nature of poverty. Perhaps more than any other metaphor, it illustrates how people can become 'restricted' and 'confined'. The client portraits revealed some powerful language using this frame:

'You raise children, work hard all your life and think **you'll have more freedom** when you're older but not when you're in my position. I struggle financially. I can't afford petrol and that **limits my independence** although I do my best to put a few bob away.' (Client portrait courtesy of Amana Living)

We see this trend continue, with language that explores isolation and a sense of feeling 'hidden':

'You have to compromise a lot. **It can make you feel quite isolated** because you can't go out with your friends and you're always worried

"

I was in a really bad spot, I'd been through years of domestic violence and my ex-partner was in jail but he'd destroyed a lot of my stuff. I had rent-to-buy debt and other small loans and I couldn't get on top of it all. I went to see Graham at Samaritans who referred me to Victim's Services where I could apply for money (compensation) as a victim of domestic violence. Graham not only helped me to get the money, but he spoke to Radio Rentals and the other companies to use it to get my debt paid down. He was really helpful, it was really positive meeting him.

I've been on the Disability Support Pension since I was 16. Eventually I'd like to work full-time and get off the disability pension. It would make me more independent and I think there are other people that could benefit from the pension other than me.

This portrait was provided by the Samaritans Foundation

about money. I certainly struggled in college. I was very young and it was hard knowing I had to pass college and deal with the pressure of trying to be an adult all of a sudden.' (Client portrait courtesy of Anglicare Tasmania)

Perhaps most importantly, the metaphor of poverty as a trap conveys that economic conditions are a deliberate construct. Structures and traps are manufactured, not natural. This presents people not as failures, but rather as navigating impossible circumstances. As one client put it:

'I experienced a lot of family violence which meant I couldn't live at home. **It was not a choice**. People don't end up in a situation where they're homeless or living on their own, for nothing. It's not a small, menial thing that gets them there.' (Client portrait courtesy of Anglicare Tasmania)

Each of these metaphors has implications for the way issues are presented to the public. While some are more persuasive than others, all have multiple layers. The subliminal messages in each of these metaphors highlight the need for advocates to think carefully about the language they use.

Poverty as a trap emerges as the most persuasive metaphor because it offers a sense of what life is like for real people. On the other hand, *poverty as opponent* is silent about the lived experience of poverty and its causes. It is less clear whether *poverty as disease* or *pathway* paints this picture.

3.2 The language of responsibility

The way events are described can influence how people assign blame and sympathy (Fausey and Boroditsky, 2010). It is tempting to think that events occur in a particular way regardless of how they are described and as such, people assign responsibility uniformly. But research shows that how situations are framed linguistically, in either active or passive language, influences who is blamed and held responsible. It is well established that language can shape thought, and that different languages incorporate different ways of speaking about the causes of events (Field, 2004). It follows that conceptions of responsibility can vary depending on language.

In one experiment, using the infamous 'wardrobe malfunction' during the Super Bowl Halftime Show in 2004, researchers found that respondents who read that a named agent *tore* another's clothing attributed blame and sought to levy at least 53 per cent more in indecency fines than those who read about the incident described as *the bodice was torn*. This is telling because all participants in the study watched the same video footage that showed the performer ripping his colleague's clothing (Fausey and Boroditsky, 2010).

This highlights a major challenge faced by anyone seeking to persuade and engage the community – defining the problem they seek to solve. Many of the materials reviewed for this chapter contain passive language:

> 'A section of our working community are now beginning to also fall off the peloton of prosperous mainstream Australia, and **find themselves in poverty** and increasingly reliant on welfare support to get through.'

"

I was living in Tasmania when I was widowed three years ago. My husband's family caused trouble so I moved back to WA. I lived with my daughter for a year before buying a caravan which I parked in my sister's garden for about nine months. It was hard and I became sick.

You raise children, work hard all your life and think you'll have more freedom when you're older but not when you're in my position. I struggle financially. I can't afford petrol and that limits my independence although I do my best to put a few bob away.

If I had more money, I could have more of a social life. I'd go to the cinema, put petrol into my car and visit people more. It would allow me to spread my wings. But I love living in Amana Living Parry Village and I appreciate what I've been given.

This portrait was provided by Amana Living

The language in these examples is attempting to convey the real harms caused to people in poverty. The excerpts also reveal a tendency to do this through abstraction:

> 'At other times the services, housing or educational investment just isn't there, and more or less the same people **find themselves excluded from** mainstream society, living in continuing hardship and deprivation.'

The reliance on passive language is a major obstacle in explaining why people face all the difficulties they do. In these examples and many others, there is not a single villain, or even actor, named. If needs are denied and people 'find themselves' facing exclusion and deprivation, this has no clear cause. It follows that it has no clear solution.

Studies of cognition show that people seek conceptual consistency. For people to accept that a problem can be solved through human action, they must view the problem as created by human action. This means that without establishing that people are making deliberate decisions to worsen poverty, it is much harder to make the case that other outcomes are possible. And without insisting that current problems have been caused by the actions of people, it is not possible to make the case that people can solve them. For example the excerpt above would be more persuasive if it said that 'Government cuts to services, housing, and education are excluding people.'

Without these distinctions, the existing language says that exclusion is experienced, conditions drive, and harm is inflicted. Things *happen to people*, they are not *done to people*. These constructions obscure recognition of what is happening and why. They make it more difficult to engage in a discussion about what needs to change.

3.3 Negating frames and equivocal language

Years of research on effective communication shows that clear and unqualified language is the most persuasive (Govier, 2010). But over time, negating frames and qualifications become embedded in discourse through repeated exposure. This is clear from qualifies statements about poverty with notions of deservingness, which turns a value statement into an equivocation. It also comes out in negating frames.

> **"Frames define the roles of actors and institutions, and they also reveal biases"**

Negating frames

Negative framing can distort how people think. Using a frame such as 'taxpayer money' instead of 'public funds' can provoke negative reactions to the idea of public spending. Frames define the roles of actors and institutions, and those that are deeply embedded also reveal biases and assumptions.

Loaded language was found in much of the material reviewed for this chapter, highlighting opposing arguments rather than supportive ones. This is illustrated by attempts to appeal to economic expediency. For example, some arguments for raising income support are justified on the basis that they will increase GDP. At other times, 'investments' in social security pay off by preventing greater expenditure down the road. Even simple statements can fall into this pattern:

'Australia is a **low-spending country** on social security.'

The aim of this language is to reach across the aisle and offer a reasoned argument to support spending on social security. But this language, drawn from Anglicare Australia, signals that the purpose for these actions is financial, and it reinforces the notion that the correct basis from which to make decisions is economic. In other words, it accepts that saving money or enlarging the economy is the best and perhaps only relevant goal. This statement also assumes that its audience does not support spending on social security – an assumption that is not supported by the research conducted for this report, or by the broader literature. Worse still, it draws its audience's attention to the costs of social security rather than the benefits.

Other attempts to highlight the gap in income and living standards could have a similar backfire effect. This excerpt provides a revealing example:

'The gap between what a **job seeker receives** and what the **average Australian earns** is growing bigger and bigger.'

This statement has the effect of highlighting the differences between a job seeker and an 'average Australian'. It also highlights that a job seeker *receives* money, while an employee *earns* money.

As the findings of both Chapters 1 and 2 show, people are much more aware of and sensitive to poverty than perceptions might suggest. Indeed, the survey findings suggest that most Australians hold sympathetic attitudes. The examples of negative framing above could be more powerful and persuasive if they were re-worded to say that 'We can afford to look after everyone', or that 'It is impossible to look for paid work if you are homeless and hungry', respectively.

At other times, *negating frames* are used to make key points. These are statements that repeat harmful arguments. For example:

'Every teenager wants to work. I don't think I've talked to a single one that **just wants to sit at home and sit on the dole**.'

Although the above statement makes use of a client story and uses engaging language, it repeats and therefore entrenches harmful stereotypes. These negating frames are also advocacy to government as well as public communications:

'Income tax **is not the main pressure** on household budgets.'

These examples stem from a common misconception that mentioning a myth is necessary to refute it. However, research shows that this makes people more familiar with the myth, and more likely to accept it as true. In one study testing this notion, people were shown a flyer that debunked common myths about flu vaccines. Afterwards, they were asked to separate the myths from the facts. When asked immediately after reading the flyer, people successfully identified the myths. However, when queried 30 minutes after reading the flyer, several people actually scored worse after reading the flyer (Skurnik et al, 2005). The intended debunking reinforced the myths and promoted familiarity with them.

These negating frames do not need to be lengthy or complicated to strengthen an opposing argument. A well-known example of this is Richard Nixon's declaration that 'I am not a crook', which only drew more attention to perceptions of his corruption (Lakoff, 2005).

In each of the examples of negative framing above, it was not necessary to mention the myth while correcting it. It would be more effective to communicate that job seekers are hardworking, and that everyone

should pay their share of tax. In cases where it is not practical to avoid mentioning the myth, the goal should still be to increase familiarity with the key message or goal, rather than highlighting the opposing argument.

Ending equivocation – saying what we mean

Much of the material reviewed for this chapter assumes that people need to be persuaded about the existence of poverty and the need to take action. In many cases, this manifests itself in the use of qualified language:

'Let's not replay the same old inaccurate story – that Australia's young unemployed people **are lazy and don't want to work**.'

At other times, communications buy into idealised notions of the 'deserving poor' by equivocating about deservingness:

'Old age pensioners, people with disability and their carers these days, **are undoubtedly deserving**.'

Anglicare Australia and its members clearly believe in the right of everybody to live a dignified life, regardless of how they came to experience poverty. The literature and the results from the Anglicare Australia-Ipsos survey show that it is not necessary to invoke these myths. The evidence shows that Australians are already sympathetic to people experiencing poverty, and this type of communication primes people to think about deservingness and individual behaviour when they might not otherwise do so.

Equivocation is also ineffective. Qualified and equivocal language undermines the clarity of arguments, (Govier, 2010, pp 66-67) acting as a barrier to communicating beliefs and connecting with people's values. This is borne out by the findings of the Anglicare Australia-Ipsos

survey. When presented with a series of statements, respondents who were surveyed gave the most emphatic response to the statement that 'nobody deserves to live in poverty'. This statement drew more support than any other, including a statement that 'nobody who works full-time should live in poverty'. This was the least equivocal statement, and the one that most speaks to values of benevolence and universalism.

In light of this, it seems a strange contradiction that many people working for civil society organisations, including communications professionals, are taught to qualify statements to attract support instead of simply and clearly communicating their beliefs. While *nuance* is important in making arguments, *equivocation* of beliefs is harmful.

Offering a goal

Another weakness of these excerpts is that the communications offer no clear goal. They highlight problems, while goals are either secondary or not mentioned. This is a weakness, as a clear goal can help people focus on and engage with an issue. Without defined goals, public debates about poverty become battles about whether or not people are capable of lifting themselves or are kept from doing so.

The absence of a vision of a just life for all leaves much of the language as defensive against attacks that people are victims of their own behaviour. But the question of what life ought to be like is revealing, and client portraits offer some useful directions that could be explored:

> 'When I left gaol I was on the street with nothing, but that's not good enough. I had no transport and no accommodation; **I was on my own**. Samaritans helped me get temporary accommodation. **Having that security** makes a difference. I cherish the place I'm staying but I'd love to have a dog - man's best friend.

"

Cowen said it took a great deal of courage to climb out of the dark place he was in, and acknowledges the support he received from ac.care staff and in particular his case manager Jenn who went "far beyond" anything he could have hoped for. He is proud of how far he has come.

ac.care helped Cowen with basic living skills and assisted him to get his finances and health back on track, and after several months in ac.care's transitional housing, he moved into private rental property where he has successfully maintained the tenancy.

Although Cowen grew up in Queensland he remains in the local area to be close to his mother and father. One of the difficulties Cowen experienced living in a small rural area was the discrimination he felt while experiencing homelessness. Cowen says he felt that many people blamed him for the situation he found himself in, and that he somehow deserved it.

This portrait was provided by ac.care

Having a dog gives me some responsibility to feed and walk it. **It gives me some purpose** and I think that's the best therapy, but I need to have a roof above my head.' (Client portrait courtesy of the Samaritans Foundation)

In a portrait submitted on behalf of a client by a service, one client valued:

'the safety and the **opportunity** to enjoy the **simple daily pleasures** many of us take for granted, such as cooking and gardening. **He loves the independence** it brings him.' (Client portrait courtesy of ac.care)

These concepts of opportunity, security, independence, and purpose feature strongly in the client portraits but not always in public communications. This is an area worth exploring. If the public discourse were about a universal entitlement to secure housing, rather than housing affordability, it may be easier to move away from debates about deservingness.

3.4 Who are 'the poor'?

Just as critical as the language used to discuss poverty is the question of how to describe the people who are experiencing it. Colloquial expressions about the poor are about characteristics not belongings. In this way, being poor is depicted as a *trait*, as opposed to a *circumstance*.

The tendency to refer to 'the poor' as opposed to 'people who are poor' suggests an inherent characteristic. Much of the language studied for this chapter profiles helplessness among those who are poor. This stems from attempts to direct attention, support and resources to them.

Any number of common expressions from the economic justice field demonstrate this tendency. Examples from broader civil society include, 'people are sinking economically', 'predatory lending' and 'this is an unmitigated disaster for real people'. All of this language strips people of their agency and turns them into passive actors. In speaking about poverty in such dire and disempowering terms, it becomes harder to portray people as having the same agency in their own lives as anyone else.

Talking about people in a way that highlights what has and continues to impoverish them, while also asserting their drive and abilities as equal to anyone else, should be a priority. More needs to be said about the possibilities people present for enriching their own communities. As Chapter 1 showed, cost of living, insecure work, and housing costs exacerbate economic hardships. People navigating these issues show tenacity and perseverance. These positive achievements and potential lessons must form part of the narrative rather than reinforcing all too common, and toxic, stereotypes.

Putting people first

Many of the materials reviewed for this chapter reveal a silencing of people who experience poverty themselves. In spite of the move towards drawing on client stories and testimonials in recent years, much language continues to be about 'them':

'Such low incomes are linked to higher rates of **homelessness and rental stress**.'

This language strips the statement of the desperation associated with homelessness, and fails to capture the lived experience of homelessness and rental stress. A simple change to say that 'People are becoming homeless because of low income rates' would make this statement

much more powerful. Similarly, the use of phrases like 'rough sleepers' masks the human experience of homelessness:

> 'One study found 43 per cent of **rough sleepers** were on unemployment benefits.'

Emphasising that *people are sleeping rough*, rather than referring to 'rough sleepers', would make this statement more persuasive.

Universalism and broadening representations of poverty

The findings of the literature review at Chapter 1 showed that a large and growing proportion of Australians in poverty are working (Rajadurai, 2018). An increasing proportion are working full-time (ACOSS, 2016), and this is becoming a source of concern among Australians. Indeed, the findings of the survey outlined in Chapter 2 showed that a large proportion of respondents believe that nobody working full-time should live in poverty.

Yet this cohort is largely absent from Anglicare Australia's communications, and that of its members. While it is important to challenge the stigma surrounding income support, it is also crucial to highlight the breadth of the experience of poverty.

This relates to the findings of the literature review regarding the popularity of universalism. There is an emerging view in the literature that universalism is a persuasive tool in building support for the welfare state, and that universal benefits are much more popular than those that are targeted. This is at odds with much of the communication reviewed for this chapter, which focuses on solutions for those most in need. Advocates should instead emphasise how action on poverty is good for everybody and benefits society as a whole.

3.5 Findings from the language analysis

The following findings have emerged from the language analysis:

1   Language is about more than what is said explicitly. Issues are also framed by what is conveyed implicitly. Metaphors can be a strong and effective tool in framing complex issues quickly, but the effectiveness of a metaphor depends on how well it advances and amplifies what advocates wish to communicate. Of the metaphors explored in this chapter, *poverty as a trap* offers the strongest sense of what life is like for real people. *Poverty as an opponent* is silent about the lived experience of poverty and hunger. It is less clear whether poverty as *disease* or *pathway* paints this picture for audiences.

2   The way events are described can influence how audiences assign blame and sympathy. A major obstacle in explaining why people face all the difficulties they do is the frequent use of passive language. When communicating about poverty, it is important to not shy away from assigning responsibility or naming an actor. Sentences should also be reconstructed to convey that people make decisions, and because of this, things happen to people.

3   Frames define the roles of actors and institutions, but they can also reinforce biases and assumptions. It is important to avoid negating frames, to stop repeating myths when debunking them, and focus instead on the message we seek to convey.

4   Communications on poverty should offer a vision of just life for all, rather than relying on defensive language. For example, the concepts of opportunity, security, independence, and purpose feature strongly in client portraits. These are areas in need of development.

5   Sentences should be rephrased to put people first, and highlight their lived experiences. The focus of communication on poverty should also be broadened beyond people receiving income support, reflecting the changing demographics explored in Chapter 1.

What Australians think about poverty and how we shape the debate

Never before has Australia been so prosperous.

Never before have there been so many tools and resources available to reduce poverty.

And never before has there been so much research and thought dedicated to understanding the problems facing those in need.

Yet it is clear that many people have not enjoyed the benefits of prosperity. Debates continue to rage about the nature of inequality and how widespread it is, and even dedicated advocates lack a strategy to persuade and motivate the public about the need for change.

Anglicare Australia initiated this project because our own work with those at the margins of society has shown us that inequality is not a personal failure, but a structural failure. The experiences of Anglicare Australia's Network members have shown that there are not enough jobs for people who want to work, and for those who can't, the safety net has come to resemble a poverty trap. In spite of much thoughtful analysis about the deeper causes and conditions that create poverty and inequality, there is a dire lack of action.

The aim of this State of the Family report has been to better understand social attitudes towards people experiencing poverty and the circumstances that create it. Understanding these attitudes, and the values that underlie them, is critical to changing the conversation. The evidence from this study has shown that attitudes are not fixed. They are shaped and reshaped through persuasion and debate. It also shows that Australians are more sympathetic to those in poverty then even they realise.

By many measures, Australia is one of the most affluent countries in the world, yet inequality in Australia is at a 75 year high (Sheil and Stilwell, 2016). This is supported by the findings of the survey at Chapter 2, which showed that 16 per cent of Australians have personally experienced a situation where they could not afford to buy basic necessities such as food or shelter in the last 12 months. Over 2.6 million Australians live below the poverty line, and almost one-quarter of these are children (Phillips et al, 2013, p8).

In spite of this, the poverty wars explored in Chapter 1 have resurfaced. Some commentators have become scornful of the idea that many Australians, so much richer than previous generations, are doing it tough (for example, see Cowan, 2018). Recent coverage of reports dealing with inequality illustrate the differences in how inequality is perceived. Headlines such as 'Let's be fair — our problem is not about inequality' (Kelly, 2018) present a stark contrast with others, such as 'Poverty persists for young and old' (Morton, 2018), which both appeared on the same day in the same publication.

"
Some commentators have become scornful of the idea that many Australians, so much richer than previous generations, are doing it tough
"

This confused commentary reflects the fraught trends surrounding the changing demographics of poverty and rising living costs. Compared with twenty years ago, wages buy less food, less housing, less water, electricity and gas, less petrol, less healthcare and less education (ABS, 2011). Over the last few decades, household incomes have risen relative to the consumer price index. Yet at the same time, food and other essential costs, including housing, energy, transport, health, education and childcare, take up the same proportion of the average household budget as they did in 1985 (Rafferty and Yu, 2010, pp. 56-7).

Many people have had to work harder to stay in place with respect to housing, education, health and food. Housing has become a particularly important consideration because Australia's social security, pension, and retirement systems have been designed around the assumption that most people will own their own home (Agnew, 2013, p8). Record high house prices are now driving home ownership out of reach for more and more people (Wang et al, 2018, p34).

Many people have responded by working longer hours and for larger portions of their lives (Ong et al, 2017). The labour force participation rate has risen from 53 per cent in the early 1960s, to 61 per cent in the mid-1980s (Reserve Bank of Australia, 1997), to almost 66 per cent today (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In short, Australians have purchased more income with more labour in order to get by.

Changes to patterns of work could threaten this coping strategy. Work is becoming less secure and more casualised, with underemployment emerging as a major problem in Australia (Vandenbroek, 2017). Research released earlier this year shows that for the first time, less than half of all Australians are in full-time work (Carney, and Stanford, 2018, p1). Around one in four are thought to be in casual work (Carney,

and Stanford, 2018, p10). Coupled with stagnant wages, this helps explain why a large and growing proportion of Australians in poverty are working (Rajadurai, 2018). Indeed, an increasing number of people in poverty are working full-time (ACOSS, 2016), and this is becoming a source of concern among Australians. The findings of the survey outlined in Chapter 2 showed that a large proportion of respondents believe that nobody working full-time should live in poverty.

This cohort is largely absent from Anglicare Australia's communications, and that of its members. The need to highlight the breadth of the experience of poverty will only become more important as the demographics of poverty continue to change.

These phenomena are also important in considering how attitudes to poverty might change in the future. Rising living costs, declining rates of home ownership, and more insecure work patterns mean that work is becoming less important financially than owning a home or inheriting wealth. This is an important trend that could have a major impact on how Australians view welfare, work and poverty.

> A growing proportion of people who are in poverty are employed, and some of them are working full-time. In addition, more Australians will be affected by the changing demographics of poverty, driven by rising living costs and more insecure work patterns. This has the potential to upend attitudes towards poverty and income.
>
> Recommendation: The community sector and other advocates must work together to explore these changes, and their implications for persuasive communication.

> Recommendation: Anglicare Australia and other similar organisations should use language that captures the experiences of people who are working and experiencing poverty, alongside its advocacy for those who rely on income support.

The changing demographics of poverty highlight the importance of the findings on universalism, explored in Chapters 1 and 3. It is possible that more people will turn to the safety net as time goes on, yet these changes are occurring as welfare becomes more targeted.

The expansion of punitive approaches to welfare and social services has been of great concern to Anglicare Australia. In advocating against these shifts, it is important to recognise that they reflect the politics of a welfare payment system that is already targeted. As the group of people reliant on payments reduces to those at the extreme margins, the recipient group becomes less politically influential and more vulnerable to cuts. There is an emerging view that universalism is a persuasive tool to guard against these cuts by building support for the welfare state, and reducing poverty and inequality by generating political support.

The support for universalism can be seen in the popularity of Medicare subsidies and payments, family payments, and the age pension. Payments that are not too tightly targeted are less likely to create poverty traps caused by taking away benefits at the same time that people pay more income tax. Universalism also guards against stigmatising recipients. Because most people receive a benefit it is normalised, and the larger constituency is more politically powerful. Notably, family payments increased throughout the 2000s (Spies-Butcher and Stebbing, 2010, p588), and the age pension was raised in 2009. This is in contrast to more targeted payments, which continue to stagnate.

Despite the popularity of universal payments, this approach is at odds with many of the communication materials reviewed as part of Chapter 3. Much of the communication and advocacy from the Anglicare Australia Network focuses on solutions for those most in need. Action on poverty is good for everybody and benefits society as a whole, and this language should be embraced.

> Universal payments and benefits are much more popular than those that are highly targeted. This has implications for how Anglicare Australia and similar organisations communicate with the public, given the current focus on those most in need.
>
> Recommendation: Advocates should embrace language that emphasises how their priorities benefit society as a whole.

The reluctance to embrace universalism in language and advocacy may stem from a perception, explored in Chapters 1 and 2, that welfare crackdowns are a response to community sentiment.

Emerging research suggests that the political discourse shapes public attitudes, not the other way around. Studies explored in Chapter 1 contradict the popular perception that welfare crackdowns have been a response to community sentiments (Taylor-Gooby and Taylor, 2014). Instead, they suggest that the move toward mutual obligation and punitive approaches to welfare in the eighties began long before the hardening of attitudes towards people receiving benefits. The critical period in shaping these attitudes seems to have happened in the late nineties. These attitudes have now become more entrenched as the political consensus on benefits has cemented.

These findings are reinforced by O'Grady's (2017) analysis which found that declining support for the benefits system in Britain was a top-down phenomenon. He concludes that shifts in political rhetoric, especially from the Labour Party, occurred before public opinion changed, not after.

"Governments cannot shape attitudes on their own without the existence of a political consensus"

There are many ways to interpret what this means. It could imply that labour parties and other progressive actors are more influential in debates on income and welfare. It could also suggest that governments and parties cannot shape attitudes on their own without the existence of a political consensus. These findings show that negative attitudes towards people receiving welfare payments are not fixed and are influenced by public debate.

This is supported by the findings of the survey at Chapter 2. The survey found that attitudes towards people receiving welfare are sympathetic. Only a small minority of respondents (10 per cent) agreed with the notion that those who rely on government support deserve to live in poverty. A strong majority (78 per cent) rejected the statement. A similar proportion of respondents agreed that anybody could find themselves experiencing poverty through no fault of their own, with 79 per cent agreeing with the statement and only 8 per cent disagreeing.

The survey results suggest a high level of understanding of the impact of circumstance, and an inferred acceptance that people in need of government assistance still deserve to live a dignified life.

These findings challenge the perception that Australians are apathetic or even hostile to people in need of income support. The language analysis at Chapter 3 shows how harmful it is to internalise this false perception, particularly when it comes to debates on welfare. All of this highlights the need for Anglicare Australia and other similar organisations to be cautious in accepting foregone political truths.

> Attitudes towards people receiving welfare payments are not fixed, and research shows attitudes are much more sympathetic than previously thought – Australians are sympathetic to people experiencing poverty. All demographic groups show high levels of compassion towards people experiencing poverty, and believe people should not experience poverty in Australia.
>
> Recommendation: Sympathy should be assumed when developing communications about poverty.
>
> Recommendation: In developing communications, Anglicare Australia and other similar organisations must resist accepting foregone political truths simply because they are widely held.

In exploring attitudes towards poverty and income, it is important to consider how these attitudes are shaped by the values that underlie them. Chapter 1 explored a framework that defines intrinsic and extrinsic values. Intrinsic values include values of social justice, equality,

unity with nature and self-acceptance. Engaging these values leads to increased support for social and environmental causes (Crompton et al, 2015, p9). Intrinsic values stand in opposition to extrinsic values. These include concern about wealth, social status or public image. These values have been shown to be associated with lower levels of concern about environmental problems, and lower motivation to help address them (Crompton et al, 2015, p9).

Research based on this framework has shown that intrinsic values are widely held among most people. It also found that intrinsic values are associated with one another – for example, people who highly value universalism are also likely to value benevolence, another intrinsic value. The research also showed that most people incorrectly believed that their fellow citizens held selfish values as more important than universal values. The research concludes that people who hold this inaccurate belief about other people's values are much less likely to express or act on their own intrinsic values (Crompton et al, 2016, pp21-22).

In exploring the research, it seems that the gulf between people's own values, and their perceptions of others, could explain some of the inconsistencies in social attitudes towards poverty and welfare. For example, strong support for a safety net and the concept of welfare could be informed by values of universalism and benevolence. On the other hand, negative perceptions of the people who use that safety net could be shaped by their perceptions of the values of others.

This helps explain some of the survey findings at Chapter 2. All demographic groups showed high levels of compassion towards people experiencing poverty, and a belief that people should not experience poverty in Australia. Respondents across all demographic groups overwhelmingly agreed that people who are working should not

experience poverty, that nobody deserves to live in poverty, and that Australia should be a country that looks after those in need. In the same vein, only a small minority of respondents disagreed with the statement that people experiencing poverty are the same as them.

But it is clear that perceptions do not match reality. Only half of respondents agreed that Australians are sympathetic to those experiencing poverty, which underestimates the strong level of sympathy and support found in the same survey. This result echoes a study showing that most people hold compassionate values, but incorrectly perceive that their peers hold selfish values.

This gulf between perceptions and reality can have major implications – the same study concluded that people who hold this inaccurate belief are much less likely to express their values or engage in prosocial activities (Crompton et al, 2016, pp17-22).

People's attitudes and actions are informed by their values, and these values are more likely to be compassionate. However, perceptions do not match reality. These incorrect perceptions may stop people from acting on their own compassionate values.

Recommendation: Anglicare Australia, its members, and other advocates should move towards story-based communications grounded in values of compassion.

Recommendation: Anglicare Australia, its members, and the sector more broadly should avoid communicating in a way that feeds false perceptions about the values and beliefs of Australians.

This discord between perceptions and reality is highlighted in the language analysis conducted as part of this report. Much of the material reviewed for Chapter 3 rests on the assumption that people need to be persuaded about the existence of poverty and the need to take action. In many cases, this manifests itself in the use of qualified language among Anglicare Australia Network members. At other times, Anglicare Australia communications buy into idealised notions of the deserving poor by equivocating about the deservingness of people in need.

> "Australians are already sympathetic to people experiencing poverty. Suggesting otherwise simply primes people to think about deservingness and individual behaviour when they might not otherwise do so"

Muddying this belief about deservingness isn't necessary. The evidence shows that Australians are already sympathetic to people experiencing poverty. Suggesting otherwise simply primes people to think about deservingness and individual behaviour when they might not otherwise do so.

Equivocation, another characteristic of the materials that were reviewed, is also ineffective. This is borne out by the findings of the survey at Chapter 2. Of all the statements in the survey, the one that elicited the most empathetic response was the statement that nobody

deserves to live in poverty (86 per cent agreement, compared with 4 per cent disagreement). This might seem like a surprising result – conventional wisdom suggests that the statement that nobody who works full-time should live in poverty would elicit greater support. Instead the least equivocal statement in the survey – that nobody deserves to live in poverty – drew the highest level of support and sympathy. This was the least equivocal statement, and the one that most speaks to values of benevolence and universalism.

> While nuance is important in making arguments, equivocation of beliefs is harmful.
>
> Recommendation: Civil society organisations should resist the trend of qualifying statements to attract support. This is a harmful trend that undermines clear and simple communication.

Studies and surveys of social attitudes can be daunting to undertake. It is easy to be fearful of what they might find. But in the final analysis, this study shows that there is much to be optimistic about. Australians are sympathetic towards those who are living in poverty, and are receptive to messages for change grounded in values.

Anglicare Australia and its members believe in the right of everybody to live a dignified life, regardless of how they came to experience poverty. Australians share this view. These findings show that we as advocates should not shy away from simply and clearly communicating our beliefs, and invoking our shared values.

For too long advocates have viewed the public as a problem to solve. But the public, and public opinion, should not be treated as an obstacle. Instead they must be treated as allies. The challenge now is to develop a language that embraces and engages them.

This engagement with the public is a continuation of the work initiated by Anglicare Australia in a previous State of the Family report, *Who is Being Left Behind*. That report ended by saying the 'State of the Family is a call to recognise where we are heading and to make a decision to stop drifting there.'

It seems that the community is willing to answer that call.

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