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## **STUDENT FINANCIAL PRESSURES DRIVE DOWN PARTICIPATION: RUN**

The Regional Universities Network is concerned that newly released data showing increasing financial pressures on university students across Australia points to a major factor driving down participation rates, with the worst impacts on those from low socio-economic backgrounds and Indigenous students.

Universities Australia's newly published University Student Finances in 2012 report found that about two-thirds of students reported incomes below the poverty line as student debt soared by almost 30 per cent in just six years.

RUN Chair Professor David Battersby said, "More than three-quarters of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and four out of five Indigenous students reported being in financial distress."

"This latest data adds weight to worrying evidence that financial issues are among the main causes of regional school-leavers not applying for university," Professor Battersby said.

"For example, a study published earlier this month by the University of Ballarat's Professor John McDonald found year 9 and 12 students at Benalla, Mansfield and Wangaratta in north-eastern Victoria revealed strong aspirations to study at university. Despite these aspirations, costs forced many students to defer their university studies and a third of them never took up their place, despite being backed by supportive parents and teachers.

"Students at regional universities are twice as likely to be caring for dependents than their urban peers. They are also more likely to be female, Indigenous or from a low SES background. The Universities Australia study shows that more needs to be done to retain these groups in higher education to capitalise on their untapped potential and prevent the risk of entrenching generations of economic disadvantage."

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