



Policy Submission – Place-based social change

Recommendations for action during the 46th Parliament of Australia

Key points: 4 actions to support place-based social change

The Australian Government has already embarked on initiatives to support long-term, place-based social change. We welcome and support these efforts and offer advice as to how these may be integrated and extended for greater reach, impact and efficiency during the term of the next parliament.

1. Enact the recommendations from the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*
2. Progress local joint decision making and social investment reforms, building on existing initiatives
3. Resource the design and development of a national alliance of opt-in communities, with supporting infrastructure - \$5 million over 2 years
4. Resource and enable place-based approaches and community governance in priority opt-in communities - \$187 million over 4 years

The Policy Challenge

The Australian economic miracle has not delivered for all Australian communities. Despite the general progress in wealth and wellbeing our country has made, some communities continue to face adversity.

Whilst such inequalities persist, all Australians lose. We are diminished as a society and bear the enormous intergenerational costs of an over-burdened and often ineffective social services and welfare system. It is one of the great productivity challenges for our nation.

But there is hope. The *ChangeFest Network* is a growing alliance of leaders who live in or work to support communities across every Australian context: Indigenous and non-Indigenous; rural, remote and urban; large and small. We are working to a common set of principles and can describe an enabling policy framework that the Commonwealth Government can enact to support on-the-ground community-led change.

Through initiatives such as *Stronger Places, Stronger People* and *Empowered Communities*, work has already started inside Government to progress place-based social change. We welcome and support these efforts and offer advice as to how these may be extended for greater reach and impact during the term of the next parliament.

Enabling a national network of communities leading place-based social change

The plan for transformative place-based change is inextricably linked with the wellbeing of First Nations People and is rooted in an understanding of human development, intergenerational processes and the importance of the early years of life.

Progress requires a significant devolution of power, resources and decision making to local communities so that integrated, long-term change plans can be supported that are right for each community. Community-led planning, design, implementation and evaluation are integral. Through such devolved processes, and more integrated and strategic funding arrangements, resources can be better shared and directed to community-led plans for long term growth and community wellbeing.

A national and local supporting infrastructure is also required so communities can share in capabilities such as advanced data and analytics; leadership, learning and practice development; and evaluation.

The scale of the opportunity for Australia

Apart from the moral imperative to act, there is a compelling economic rationale to work to improve the life opportunities for all Australians:

- *According to the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, Australia spends \$42 billion per annum on social services.*
- *ROI studies show a \$7 return can be generated for every \$1 spent on early childhood education and care*
- *Boston Consulting modelling estimates a national place-based, early childhood social change agenda unlocks a potential \$15bn by 2050 as child vulnerability reduces and these benefits are carried forward into productivity gains in adulthood.*

4 key actions to support place-based social change

ChangeFest Network members have identified four priorities for action to better support the work we are already leading to make lasting change in our communities.

There is much to build on, with several dozen community initiatives already underway. Within Government, seed funding for eight *Empowered Communities* and for 10 *Stronger Places, Stronger People* communities has been committed. These are positive developments but need further integration, strengthening and resourcing to be sustainable and to have the support infrastructure developed to succeed.

Our recommendations for action in the next term of parliament are:

1. Enact the recommendations from the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*

- When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do well, Australian communities everywhere will do well.
- Healing and wellbeing for Australia's First Nations People cannot be achieved without a durable platform for reconciliation, economic development and social growth.
- The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* provides a foundation upon which Indigenous cultural health and vitality can be sustained.
- Giving life to the *Statement* represents a cost-effective investment in Indigenous health, justice, employment and welfare reform - a view supported by decades of research and practice in international development linking community-led empowerment and accountability processes with positive outcomes across a spectrum of domains.

An Aboriginal perspective on place

Australian Aboriginal communities have sustained intricate social, economic and political relationships over thousands of generations in this most ancient of global people-scapes.

Aboriginal nations have creation stories that explain the terra-forming of this Great Southern Land, many of which are exemplified by the continuing closely bound human relationships with the diverse environments we each call home.

Bunda-mootagutta, the Rainbow Serpent, was one of the first spirits to shape this continent laying its law and lore in every fold of its earth and waters. Everywhere Bunda-mootagutta moved and continuously transformed the landscape, local people were given skin, language, customs and practices that belonged to place. Place-based knowledge, custom, lore and practice is needed now - at a time as challenging as the last Australian ice age, which Aboriginal Peoples also weathered and survived.

John D Anderson, Nywaigi Elder (2018)

2. Progress local joint decision making and social investment reforms, building on existing initiatives

- Progress existing early work within Commonwealth Government agencies on aggregating current investment into local opt-in communities and devolving resourcing decisions to local

decision-making bodies. This work must occur in close association with local backbone teams and leaders of opt-in communities.

- Establish an **investment reform working group** of senior public servants – led from a central agency such as Finance or Treasury - to work with community leaders. The working group would report to a national leadership group to establish, within 12 months, a long-term roadmap for social investment integration, devolution and reform that includes the design of new institutional infrastructure to support local decision making and funding integration. The roadmap could be announced as a significant measure in the 2020 Budget and include return on investment modelling and a benefits harvesting strategy to show, over time, how the approach can be self-funding.

3. Resource the design and development of a national alliance of opt-in communities, with supporting infrastructure

- Invest \$5 million over an initial 2 year period to support community leadership to consult, design and develop a durable alliance of partner communities and the national supporting infrastructure required.
- Build on and learn from the work of Empowered Communities and of currently active intermediary organisations.
- Specifically explore:
 - **The co-design of collaboration arrangements** a) between participating communities and b) between the network of participating communities and governments, philanthropic and industry partners and other identified stakeholders. Establish interim shared leadership processes with a view to transitioning to mature arrangements when co-designed and agreed.
 - A **national centre** that emulates the ‘What Works’ centres established in the UK. This approach would ensure a more symbiotic and empathetic relationship between Universities and each opt-in community in directing research and creating the evidence to support place-based practice. The Centre will be intrinsically accountable to its local community constituents and inform policy development and the systemic change required for longer term social and economic gain.
 - Build on current initiatives, such as the *Regional Innovation Data Lab*, to create national **Place-based Data Infrastructure Platforms**: supporting place-based initiatives with access to and analysis of effective data that can highlight both issues and changes over time. Many place-based initiatives do not have access to effective data labs or even data sources, and where they do, often the analysis and interpretation of this data is lacking or absent. Access to a data-lab, development of data-literacy among community users and other stakeholders, access to quality data interpretation and visualization is going to be critical for this area to grow over coming years. A national data and evaluation platform ensures consistency in data gathering, interpretation and evaluation whilst allowing micro-services which are community specific, to be built on top.
 - A **national approach to evaluation**, nuanced to local circumstances, using the data platforms above. Place-based change has the advantage of enabling the network to

capture success as defined by each community whilst also allowing aggregation to illustrate population level impact.

4. Resource and enable place-based approaches and community governance in priority opt-in communities

- Place-based resourcing for priority communities that are focussed on long-term locally-led change strategies should be increased. Very often, these strategies will have an intergenerational focus at their heart, with actions centred around children and young people. Ensure resourcing is available across both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community contexts.
- The investment in priority communities should increase to up to \$2 million per community, or cluster of communities within a region, to establish backbone infrastructure, including well supported leadership, local governance and data-informed planning and decision-making led by local people.
- Begin with an opt-in group of about 20 communities, building on the existing investments in *Empowered Communities* and *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiatives. These communities may stand alone or be part of a regional cluster. Invest also in building a pipeline of early stage communities that grow their capacities over time to work in this way.
- Existing initiatives such as *Empowered Communities, Stronger Places, Stronger People* and communities supported by intermediaries such as Opportunity Child, Dusseldorp Forum and Collaboration for Impact should be supported first before bringing on greenfield sites.
- Investment should be staged so that resources increase as local initiatives mature. Local leadership will work with national funding and support teams to match resources to community determined priorities, building methodically and iteratively, learning from experience across the network and within regional clusters.
- Resourcing levels should take account of scale, remoteness, skills availability and other factors such as community readiness, cultural differences and local capability.
- Government should increase its investment in building shared supporting infrastructure, building on existing initiatives but responding to the design process in point 3 above.
- Investment should be for the long term – a 10 year-plus timeframe, with a provision of about \$187 M over the next four years of the forward estimates. This will provide opt-in communities and a national support infrastructure the resources to make progress in achieving population level outcomes, with spending skewed towards the out years as maturity and scale build over time. It will also allow for growth in the number of participating communities.
- Substantial co-investment from philanthropic organisations is already in place and can grow.
- Over the long term, savings that arise from superior investment decisions may replace the need for special purpose funding for backbone infrastructure.
- Funding may be applied as per the scenario set out in the table below:

Scenario for scaling up investment over 4 years

	Year 1 10-20 communities / regions Build on existing shared national infrastructure and respond to co-design process.	Year 2 20 communities / regions + start to build readiness in new communities. Further developed shared national infrastructure based on co-design process	Year 3 20-30 communities / regions + continue readiness pipeline. Maturing shared national infrastructure	Year 4 + 30 + communities / regions + developing pipeline of others Scaled up national infrastructure	Totals
Backbone and collaboration infrastructure in local communities	\$25 M	\$30 M	\$40 M	\$55 M	\$150 M
Shared national infrastructure: data, "What Works" centres, evaluation etc.	\$6 M	\$7 M	\$12 M	\$12 M	\$37 M
Totals	\$31 M	\$37 M	\$52 M	\$67 M	\$187 M

Authors of this submission from the ChangeFest Network

The ChangeFest Network is a fast-growing group of leaders and organisations who are implementing long-term change strategies in their communities. Drawn from the network, a policy committee of about 20 people and organisations have authored this submission, including the following:



Contact details

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