



IAN HICKIE

Hello and welcome to this Sydney Ideas conversation. I'm Ian Hickie. I'm a Professor of Psychiatry and the Co-director of Health and Policy at the Brain and Mind Centre of the University of Sydney.

This is a most important aspect of Australian society that we want to discuss today: the road to recovery. How in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, we understand vulnerability at societal level, and how do we together build an inclusive, productive and better future?

I'd like to start by paying my acknowledgements, to the traditional owners of the land on which the Brain and Mind Centre of the University of Sydney is based in Camperdown in Sydney, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

At one stage in my life with the National Mental Health Commission, which I'll go on discuss with Professor Allan Fels shortly, we had the chance to try and understand what Indigenous people meant by the social and emotional wellbeing of our country.

I don't think we ever actually lived up to that expectation, and perhaps it didn't translate well as to what was meant. But if ever there was a time that we needed to behave cohesively – for what Allan and I've come to understand as the mental wealth of the nation, that is, it's collective emotional and cognitive and social resources that enrich all our lives – that's the case.

And so what I've tried to do here, although I'm a mental health specialist, I do not intend to discuss mental health services at all today.

I am associated with very alarming predictive modelling that if we fail in our attempts to respond to this challenge, there will be very significant effects on many of our fellow Australians, particularly those who are marginalised, those who are young, those who are already in difficulties.

Recessions are not like wars. In recessions, unemployment rates go up, suicide rates go up, the social fabric is torn. Unless, pre-emptive actions are taken collectively.

Resilience in this situation is not an individual characteristic. It's a social characteristic. It's essentially about our capacity to participate. In all the work I'm associated with, participation – in education, in employment, in the society in which you live as part of the group, of which you're part – is critical to that future.

What I've done is learnt a lot. I've gone and asked people who know about these things. So I'm very pleased today that we have a collection of people who know much more than me about any of these things and the way in which they actually are critical.



And the way in which we as a civilised society, and the governments we inform, need to take into account expertise and understanding and not make mistakes we made in the past; and incorporate learnings and understandings that are essential. Not just into our national policy frameworks, but into all of the aspects of our lives; in business, in our society, and the physical aspects of our land.

Just in case you thought everything was going along okay; this morning, we had the release of employment figures for May following on from April.

In April in fact, there was 700,000 Australians who were said to be in work but worked zero hours. This morning, unemployment rates have gone up to 7.1% – the worst in 19 years.

In April, we saw the figures on those in the job networks, those in so called JobSeeker, go from 600,000 to 1.5 million.

Our participation rate now is 63% of the workforce; it's lowest since 2001. Really worryingly, female employment fell by 118,000, making up 52% of jobs lost in the month of May.

Young people who are often the most affected by recessions made up 45% of those jobs lost in May. And youth unemployment is now at 16%.

In the modelling I'm associated with, in rural and regional Australia – where suicide rates are already high; where unemployment rates are already high; where youth unemployment rates are already higher – we have seen the most dramatic effects of downturns in tourism, hospitality, retail and the education sector.

But, I don't really want to drill on the size of the hole. I'd really like to get the information from the people we now have collected with us about solutions – place-based solutions; people-based solutions; things that can be done in education and in training and employment – that are relevant to the diverse needs in Australia. That are inclusive of all of us, that do not just benefit those who already have the resources or the skills or the assets to survive such a crisis.

So we're joined today by Professor John Buchanan from the Sydney Business School and previously led our workplace-based research centres at the University of Sydney.

My old colleague and I would say mentor, master to the apprentice here, Professor Allan Fels, who is the voice of competition in Australia, but has also been the inaugural Chair of the National Mental Health Commission.

Geoff Gallop, the previous Premier of Western Australia; and I didn't know this until recently, but a previous Education Minister in Western Australia.



Sam Mostyn, who has probably the longest CV of any of us, executive director of many companies, AFL Commissioner, Diversity Council of Australia, amongst many others; but works with employment schemes and very much in her role as the Chairman of Citibank retail in Australia. What does the private sector do and what does it need governments to do for us all to function?

And Professor Jaky Troy, who's the Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. In Australia, what is the expertise that Aboriginal peoples can bring to our national narrative and to our recovery?

So off the top, since it's economics that I need to more understand, and people in my field struggle to understand, I'm gonna go to Allan Fels. Important to say, Allan was the inaugural Chair of the National Mental Health Commission set up by Julia Gillard, in which Sam Mostyn was also with myself an inaugural Commissioner.

Allan tried for six years to get people in mental health to understand that mental health and wellbeing for the country – the mental wealth of the country, 4% of GDP – actually had a social and emotional context in housing and employment and in education.

So Allan, what do you make of the current crisis? What are we to do?

ALLAN FELLS

A little more diagnosis and then pointing to the way we should go ahead.

We have a health crisis of uncertain future magnitude and duration, but it is generated economic, social, political and global crises and/or tensions.

An economic crisis likely to scar us for several years; some social tensions we see them, especially in the US, but some likely to occur here.

Some political tensions and a rising degree of political instability both overseas and here, and it will affect all political parties, and create global tensions; economic, security-related, political.

So, we speak of flattening the coronavirus curve. As my colleague, [inaudible] has said; there are many other curves that have been affected.

The unemployment curve; the poverty curves; the inequality curve; the stress, depression, mental health curve; maybe the altruism curve. And at the political and governance level, the debt, spending curves; the trust curve, the blame curve; the politicisation curve; and especially in the US, the electoral curve.



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And at the political level, I expect some changing attitudes as time passes. A tendency to downplay COVID health issues. The public is going to get a bit tired of pursuing the health agenda.

Again, a bit of a change of focus from the idea that we're all dealing with a common enemy together; to growing social tensions as time passes.

Again, here and elsewhere, a change of view about the government from it being a caring government to a government that disappoints us in every respect. And also from an expert led government, to a politics as usual political situation.

So how long will our systems hold? What have we learned about them? What parts of the system really need to be challenged in the new situation? What improvisations and innovations do we want to evaluate and broaden?

Now Australia has some laurels to rest on. A fairly good health performance; prompt action to avert immediate economic disintegration and deep collapse; better governance through a national COVID cabinet process. But challenges – what are they? What do we do?

Well, the health challenge, the coronavirus challenge, will likely continue to lurk; we need to be vigilant. And that will be at a cost. Just as there'll be a cost in not paying attention to it.

Regarding the economy, there needs to be a very large, substantial set of government actions, mainly government spending, investments and incentives; maybe some tax cuts over several years, in my view, to bring about economic recovery and jobs.

Regarding the social side, we're going to need a safety net; a stronger, broader, bigger social safety net to catch the many who will fall or experience change.

And a major focus on education and retraining; and a degree of employee protection that's not there at the moment, to enable the labour market to adapt to the changes.

And above all, a focus in promoting human capital, through education and health. And, with a greater emphasis on this than in the present discussion, which is a little heavily weighted to infrastructure spending. Infrastructure spending, which is rather capital intensive rather than labour intensive.

And so, within that especially greater priority than ever to the mental wealth of the nation – as explained by Ian, in his introduction, to mental health – and to a broad approach to it, not just the medical side, but all the services and so on, that can address the social determinants of mental ill health.

Housing and homelessness, employment, education, lack of connectedness, lack of inclusion, and other such causes. Not only because it's socially desirable, but because it would bring about economic benefits.



And that's why there's a Productivity Commission inquiry into mental health now. And it's found the direct cost of mental health is about 3% of GDP. And all its costs, including all the lost lives, shortened lives; health costs at about 10% of GDP.

And so, one of the ingredients of reform that's needed immediately, but also longer term is an investment in tackling mental health. It would generate economic gain that would dwarf almost any gain from much needed other economic reforms. Thank you.

IAN HICKIE

Allan. That's fabulous. You can see why Alan was a favoured person with the previous Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who's quite happy to talk about mental health and education by Fels along this.

This is much bigger than most of those so-called economic reforms that are talked about, but also create a more inclusive society that actually from a security point of view, a cohesive point of view, has many other additional gains. So thank you, Allan.

I'm gonna move quickly to Sam Mostyn.

Sam is, I can say, the most networked person in Australia and focus is on the team response, not the individual response. Sam, a lot of these issues around gender; around youth; around public/private partnerships in many of your roles, go to that particular issue. Do you think we're telling the right story? Have we made it clear what we're trying to achieve?

SAM MOSTYN

Well, thanks so much Ian and overly kind as ever, and I don't think we're telling the right story. I don't think we've got a national narrative right yet, and just listening to Professor Fels start to give us a bit of that narrative, we're hearing things that are about our future through a lens that I think the community really wants to understand and lean into.

Because when we have had that kind of narrative, as we did through the early stages of the health crisis that saw Australia do so very well, in our health response, we know that our community responds to a good strong narrative that we know where we're going.

And I thought I'd use my time to cover three things as quickly as I can, and start with where we were at before the COVID infection started to hit Australia and the world.



And that was the tail end of those horrific bushfires; don't forget the storms and the flooding that went on, and so many people are affected by these big climatic events.

And I think Australians were generally in a state of grief for a whole lot of things that we were losing from our environment and some, I think people have moved from ideological orthodoxy around climate change, to understanding that this is where we've got to we needed a response.

In fact, Bain & Company most recently has described our COVID experience as simply, a dress rehearsal for how we're going to handle the cascading exponential interconnected issues of a climate response.

So I want to start with the fact that we actually need a story and a narrative from our leaders to talk about building resilience in our nation, and particularly those that started with were directly and indirectly affected by those big events over our summer, and those affected by COVID.

But I think a commitment to Building Back Better – it's a known term now about using this moment to Build Back Better; a low carbon and a high commitment to renewables could be a really important part of our future. It also builds resilience into our communities and is job creating.

So a national mission that might actually talk about a narrative where we're leaning into the future for Australia, particularly given our great health outcomes, and put the issues of climate change response, health implications of increased heat, and a doubling down on collaboration and acceleration of transitioning our economy to a low carbon environment over the next decade – to me starts to set up a plan for us.

And interestingly, just turning to the mental health issues, on the specifics of how people are feeling, post those summer events and going into a climate change world; there's now a really strong evidence of the power and effectiveness of nature-based solutions.

And there are lots of jobs yet to be created in this country, that go to natural landscape restoration, investment in natural capital, regenerative land-based systems and new ways of actually supporting our food systems. And, I'm sure we'll hear more later on, care for country.

But all of that bound up, provides people who were hit by these big crises, with a sense of engagement in the future that is about the land and about nature. Which as, you know Ian, has such a direct impact on our sense of wellbeing.

And the beauty of doing that better in the way I've just described is that it delivers a triple dividend. So it's an environmental, social and economic set of outcomes. It's supported by the investment and banking community. I note this morning that the ANZ Chief Economist, Richard Yetsenga has said, we have no time to waste in the investment structures behind going green for the entire country, if not the world.



And the group Beyond Zero Emissions has already published its [The] Million Jobs Plan, where it, alongside people, have said that there are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of jobs if we actually lean into the resilience and response to climate change.

So they're some of the most secure jobs for our future, and without climate resilience built into our economy, many of our existing jobs become quite vulnerable and insecure anyway. So there's a lot of reasons why I think that's an important starting point.

Secondly, you've already raised the really catastrophic issues for women throughout the COVID experience and for young people. I'm not going to go back over those figures and those figures have played out through the last couple of months and shown that an existing inequality has just exacerbated.

So I think a story narrative needs to pick up the notion that our build back and our job creation has got to focus on the full inclusion and participation of women in our economy, the inclusion of young people in our economy, and there are particular ways that can be phased; and at the moment, we've heard nothing really, that deals with that issue from the national response to this current economic crisis.

And of course, women have been hit heavily by a rise in domestic and family violence in this period. So we still have an enormous amount of work to do that actually faces into that and understands the mental health impacts on women who live in controlled environments, who feel that their lives are miserable and they can't cope with this increasing rise in domestic and family violence.

We need more support for services and a greater understanding what drives those terrible outcomes for women so that they need purposeful responses.

The third thing I just wanted to touch on which really goes to the heart of I think what you wanted us to look at today, which is about how do we actually innovate and think differently about a response to the potential for deeply entrenched unemployment, particularly for certain parts of our community.

And I just want to spend a little bit, just a couple of minutes on young people. I'm really fortunate enough to chair the National Youth Employment Body's advisory group

That's an organisation that was funded by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, really collaborated with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and a number of other parties; that looks at transforming the way we think about those parts of the country that have some of the highest levels of entrenched youth unemployment.

And this started over 18 months ago, long before the COVID issues have raised much bigger unemployment issues for us. It's a really interesting, innovative, but simple set of ideas, where we put the pathways to employment, particularly for young people, in the hands of local communities, and apply a place-based system and a respectful system, of considering how jobs and connection training systems need to be done at the local level.



So the National Youth Employment Body is a collaboration, as I said, between the federal government, state governments, local governments, organisations like the Brotherhood, local employers and training bodies, local councils. And the whole plan is an investment in a local community-based model of pathways to skills and employment, which are agile and an absolutely tailored to local conditions.

I'm really proud too, that Citibank has had a role, as a corporate, in supporting the work of the NYEB and the work of the Brotherhood so there is a direct link back into the corporate world that really does want to see much better attitudes and opportunities to creating jobs where there has been great unemployment issues.

Just very quickly, three demonstration sites have been conducted over the last 18 months before thinking about; they were conducted in Shoalhaven on the New South Wales south coast, Logan in southeast Queensland and Adelaide north in South Australia.

And over that 18-month period there, community investment committees established in all those locations – based on the principles of local place-based – multi-sectors at the table, local community led with community organisations taking a lead role

Industry Skills Training, the youth employment services and all levels of government around the table, co-designing and driving outcomes and solutions that are coherent, based on collaboration, are actionable in the local communities; improve a link to education and technical and other training and deliver straight into the local employment opportunities for those young people who otherwise would be totally disconnected and may actually be stuck in the job active network, which we know as you've said Ian, has now lifted to 1.5 million people; and a disaster for young people to get trapped in that system as hard as governments try to work to get people out of them.

So it utilises the local labour market requirements and conditions. It's a better use of government investments in a collaborative fashion. It relies on the local community to actually just determine where the investments go. And it keeps young people absolutely connected to education, training and the labour market that they can play into.

Just a quick example, in Shoalhaven – post the bushfires, and now in the middle of the COVID recovery – that community investment committee has discovered that what they really need to do is link their local growth opportunities with the rising level of unemployment, which actually eclipses employment numbers we see in the national figures

And they've actually said, the pathway for young people at that part of the south coast in New South Wales is in construction for the rebuild, new manufacturing, very specific manufacturing that can be done in that area. Health care and social assistance programs have been quite clear about what it is that of the past, what pathways, and they then put young people in touch with those employers in those areas, link them to the federal and state systems of assistance and get those young people into jobs locally. So they don't get trapped in an employment death spiral



I've also seen at the Centre for Policy Development, very similar work that's been done in Victoria in Wyndham and the community of Wyndham that looked at the power of community deals.

And this is a model which again, just harnesses local state and federal resources, adapts programs locally; puts the funding that important spending that Professor Fels talked about, into the hands of local people with very particular outcomes; wrapped around the services of NGOs, providers, employers, and actually have pathways to jobs

And of course, many of those jobs in the future will go back to my opening remarks, there'll be things to do with care for country, care for each other, care for our health system

But they'll also be the jobs of the future that have greater resilience in them. So that to me, is the kind of sense of a narrative we could have. And it's all doable. It's happening in trials around the country

My advocacy would be we've got to have that happening in not just three or four sites around the country, but 50 to 100. And trust those local communities who've learned to operate through COVID in a way that actually sees a successful pathway through this resilience.

IAN HICKIE

So Sam, one of our clear problems in Australia is going from very successful and local and pilot programs to national implementation; and this issue of evidence, of effectiveness, and what I love about what you've been talking about is, it's place-based, it's community driven. It's actually working in some of the most disadvantaged and disruptive communities in the country who are most vulnerable.

I've just returned from Northern Rivers myself for exactly the same thing is going on for the North Coast collective in that area of combined community action, taking responsibility and working with local factors that needs support.

So I want to move to Professor Jacky Troy, who leads our Aboriginal Indigenous Research at Sydney University. I must confess to Jacky, one of the great failures of myself and Professor Fels – who have many, many failings – was our failure to get the National Mental Health Commission to adapt social and emotional wellbeing. I must say some of the artwork behind me is the national representation of that; as what Australia should do in mental health for all of us, not just for Aboriginal peoples.

What is to be learned Jacky here about the response of Aboriginal peoples to these adversities, that needs to become central to our national narrative and our national future?



JAKY TROY

Well, I'm actually really glad to hear what the other two speakers have said because I can see that non-Indigenous Australia, non-Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people, are finally catching up with us and our 72,000 plus years of knowledge about how to manage people and country in the place we now call Australia and this is characteristic worldwide of Indigenous communities

We are nothing if not connected, not just in Australia, but internationally. I can probably tell you more about what's going on in North Pakistan because I have Indigenous connections there. And down in Chile and South America, Brazil, Mexico, all over North America and most of Europe all over the Pacific.

And as I speak, I can think immediately of all the people I know in all those places, there's pretty much nowhere in the world; Japan.

I also speak many languages. This is typical of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous people worldwide, we have a bit of a giggle about monolingual English-speaking people – sorry for those who are in the audience. It's difficult and of course, the sign languages for use and all the nuancing we have a human expression.

So I'm really glad that people are catching up with us. But the sad thing is that in talking about place-based and community driven programs to take us through into the future out of this pandemic, which won't be the first and hasn't been the first. We are not, in Australia, harnessing this wealth of Indigenous knowledge that we need to harness. And I would like to see the Commonwealth Government particularly, place more emphasis on funding research led by Indigenous scholars in Australia.

This is not to exclude non-Indigenous scholars. You are all absolutely our partners. And the fact that I'm on this panel demonstrates that

It is a collective effort. We've just come out of Reconciliation Week; the theme was we're all 'In this together'. That is such a typical Indigenous point of view.

So the plan for the future for me, and should be for the whole country, is that we tap into the extraordinary Indigenous ability to create cohesive social networks that also include country.

We don't make an exclusion between human and non-human caring for countries and embodied experience. I am my country. One of the great tragedies at the moment is that many of us who are refugees in our own broader country, Australia, are locked off country.

I can't go down to the Snowy Mountains at the moment. I think it's just opened again, because it's a national park. That is my country. The fires kept me out of there earlier in the year, it's more nearly six



months since I was down there. This is the experience for a lot of Indigenous people in Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

But what we have done is keep ourselves networked extraordinarily well. I think we are way more agile than anybody else in this country, at keeping in touch with each other and making sure our own social and emotional wellbeing is managed and also keeping the social emotional wellbeing of the broader community always foremost in our minds and supporting all of Australia. This is what we do

We are only about 800,000 people and the commitment we make in this country to supporting everybody, bringing everybody into our thinking, is something that the rest of Australia doesn't do with us. We are not brought into everybody's thinking

We may be a very small group, but we are the jewel in the crown of this country. If you want to survive through major economic and social crisis, look to us for advice. We have a lot to give.

It's time that Australia started listening. The Uluru Statement from the Heart, which places us front and central, not only in the Constitution of this country, but also in the thinking of this country. We are your country people. You are our country people. You are on our countries. We know how to manage these countries, listen to us.

IAN HICKIE

Yes, Jaky. Well, perhaps this is the time when Australia might finally listen and reconcile those particular issues and we might be able to walk and chew gum at the same time.

I just; move to John Buchanan now, and I've had the pleasure of learning from John about how work really happens across the course of one's life.

He's spent his lifetime on the workplace-based research centre in trying to work out how to do these things, not talk about it at a higher level. But the fundamental notion of work particularly for those in the skill sector, the classically the vocational education, training sector; the relationship between work and education

John's also introduced me to a new concept, which is what happens every day. I have conversations with these people of the foundation economy, and what are the skills for the future when a society faces the style of challenge that we now face, John? I require further education.



JOHN BUCHANAN

Yeah, look in responding to the current situation, I think there are three points I want to make

The first is, I think we've really got to get a sense of scale here. The ABS put the data out today, just in the last month alone, one Australian in five either lost their job or lost hours of work; that was just in the last month that's on top of the calamity that occurred the month before

So we are in in a crisis of a scale that we haven't previously seen, unless you remember, we were not starting in tip-top shape, anyway

The OECD did some really important work on disadvantage. And it calculated that before this in 2017, the equivalent of 20% of the workforce was already out of work because of disadvantage. So that was sitting there after 30 years of uninterrupted growth. On top of that, we've now had these setbacks.

But I think the second point I really want to make is that we can solve it. I mean, this is a big challenge, but we can solve it.

And we got to remember the average Australian worker now is twice as productive as they were 30 years ago. I mean, we are a prosperous society, we have immense wealth, and the key issue is what do we do about it, and this gets to your point about the foundational economy

Ian, what I've liked; one of the really interesting things to see over the last two months as we've seen the absolute infrastructure, everyday life come to the fore. We've seen the importance of education, we've seen the importance of health, we've seen the importance of instrumentalities like telecommunications and the like, and we've seen the importance of the food supply chain.

Researchers I've been involved with for the last five or six years have been studying this foundational economy and accounts for around, depending how you look at it, 35 to 45% of the workforce.

It's been there for a while. It's gonna be there for quite some time into the future. So if we're thinking about what is the platform for renewal, revitalising the foundations is a good place to start. And this isn't just an abstract idea. There are examples dotted all around the country of how this can be done.

If you look at, say the GROW initiative in Geelong, for example, this is an initiative that's been running since 2014. It involved the local councils getting together with the local water authority.

It got involved in true instrumentalities, around airports, and got in local businesses and that cross collaboration provided a means by which government could disperse creative funds to help do something about disadvantage.

Now they haven't solved the problems. Now the problems in Geelong have been a long time in the making, but an infrastructure is there.



So, if we do have a major problem before us, but we do have the means to get out of it, and I do think there are practical examples we can learn from, and you know, in a funny sense, I'm excited about the future because I think things haven't been good for a long time in Australia and a crisis gives us a chance for renewal.

IAN HICKIE

John, you brought to my attention that, was it – now I get this figure wrong – was it 800,000 people went into TAFE based tasks in New South Wales?

JOHN BUCHANAN

85,000 into –

IAN HICKIE

Sorry, 85,000 in New South Wales, in a month?

JOHN BUCHANAN

Yeah. Well look to be fair, that's a pretty good, that's a pretty responsive entity where, you know, the government says, we've got a lot of people out of work, what are going to do with them.

They are in short courses, the courses that will run for six to 12 weeks or so. And I think that becomes the question, and that's why I gave the example of the GROW initiative in Geelong; it's a partnership. It's a public sector enabled partnership for growth.

IAN HICKIE

So those VET-based things, those TAFE-based things, need to be linked to employment to actually be meaningful? So the industries in local areas need to join up between the education scheme and the employment scheme.



JOHN BUCHANAN

And see, Australia's done; it's world leading in that regard in the downturn of the late 70s, early 1980s, that was a very deep recession and what Australia pioneered there was a thing called group apprenticeships which have gone on to be called group training.

And this is a means, it's like ethical labour hire. And then you have a community based entity or an industry based entity which goes out to employees and says, can you give us some hours of work and then the group training company then links up employers across the district so that you can turn fragments of jobs into whole jobs

So there are ways of using the vocational education system and the best parts of the apprenticeship system.

IAN HICKIE

And the vocational thing isn't just tradies. As you pointed out to me yesterday, you know, the foundational economy is health, education, utilities, food supply; Sam's raised the ones in relation to the natural environment, the economy.

I think, the notion of what are jobs – every time we have a crisis, a job is simply a tradie's job or an infrastructure job or a construction job. That's one set of important jobs. But in many of these other areas, the value of the healthcare economy; or the education economy, which is, to the amazement of most of us, why universities aren't JobKeepers? I don't know. I've had to apply for JobKeeper and then told actually, no, you're not. You're not part of the economy. I don't know what I'm part of, I'm part of something else, you know, in these areas.

I mean, this notion of where jobs are high value jobs in the foundation economy and those skills – can you just, I don't think people really get that. You know, where people are working, where valuable jobs are, at different levels of skill.

JOHN BUCHANAN

Well we've been doing work on where these people come from and where they go. And people don't just say, work in care work or just work in customer service work there's quite dynamic labour flows between occupations.



And I think something we've been arguing for some time is the vocational education system is too narrow. It trains people just for narrow quals. And we think there's a virtue in actually thinking about well, what does a modern service work look like?

How do we give them the basics of care, the basics of customer service, the basis of clerical work, and you can do the same in the blue collar area. And we've done work in northern New South Wales around the notion of rural operations.

And you can give people skills that are relevant to agriculture, construction, local government and mining. And in that way, you can actually enrich someone and give them a broader range of skills and a bit of depth. And that gives them the capacity to then move between sectors as the economy.

IAN HICKIE

But you've also emphasised in the short term, particularly for young people, the educational component has to be there. You can't say to other young people, just go get another job; when jobs in the casual workforce jobs in retail and tourism and hospitality and education, just aren't there.

I think one of the things – and others might want to comment on this – one of the key learnings in mental health of the global financial crisis in 2009 is when governments went for austerity afterwards, that actually the biggest group that was harmed for up to 10 years later, data just coming out now, was young people who failed then to be in employment in participation and just dropped out of the economy. For life. They've not returned and the mental health issues impacts have been severe.

So on this theme I just want to move to Geoff Gallop, because Geoff, it may not be known, but Geoff is a fundamental optimist.

Geoff, as a what we call, I think Geoff still thinks politics works? He's a pragmatist. He's a believer that actually through the New Democracy, and I think through citizen participation, we can make a difference and out of the current crisis, as he reminded me, pretty good fortune and good governance, Australia is not in the current situation.

We do now have a national cabinet that's in operation. We have a capability; the challenge is Geoff – and several questions have already gone to this on the Q&A and I encourage people to engage with us on the Q&A – is politics up to it?

We have departments that are named for 1950s type tasks. For example, in health, we almost never discussed the social context of health. When other people have ministries for loneliness, Allan and I have spent our lifetime at homelessness to find out in fact, you can fix homelessness when you have a COVID-19 crisis, you know, you could fix social housing.



You know, Geoff, should we be optimistic, that our national governance structures can actually respond citizens aspirations?

GEOFF GALLOP

Well, I think if we look at our historic experience, there have been moments when the way we have been governed has facilitated major change. We can go back to the focus on competition and competitiveness in the 1980s and 90s. An agreement between the major sectors of Australia to go forward.

We can go to the early part of the 21st century when the notion was that we widen out our objectives to incorporate social and environmental matters. We have an agreement between the federal government and the states. There's various funding arrangements and there's a process by which we try to measure our performance and report to the people.

We see other jurisdictions around the world, the most recent being Ireland – where the two major parties who for years just fight each other – have come together with the Green Party to create an agenda for change.

So the way we are governed is going to be a fundamental factor in determining whether or not we achieved the broad range of changes that the speakers today have pointed to

That we don't just want to go back onto a path of economic growth, we want to have incorporated in that, recognition of the demography of Australia, the age care that that needs to be dealt with, the continuing issues related to mental health, we'll need the skilled workforce to be able to deal with those things.

We need it to be more green, so that we're making sure that the, our contribution to climate change internationally is good. So we need those things as part of the project projection into the future. But that won't happen unless the way we are governed is different; that we engage with communities we involve them.

I mean, in a sense, Jaky's point about Uluru's important; the Aboriginal people saying to Australia, look, we want to be part of the process and give us a voice and we can offer our ideas and make our contribution.

We see it in some state jurisdictions where an effort is made to incorporate the community into a big issue and to say, look, how do we handle this one? Can we do it? The best example of that, of course, being the way we've handled COVID-19 in recent times.



One: public servants have been listened to when for many, many years, they're sidelined from public policy debates. They do know a lot, they do have wisdom.

Secondly, of course, the public sector itself has had to re-gear it's; in the health system to deal with a crisis, should the other measures that we took didn't work.

We've had to involve our medical profession, we've had to involve our police services, all of these things, in trying to make sure that and finally and crucially, the public have had to be engaged. They've had to be part of the solution. And of course, overall, we've done extremely well.

So the question I ask is, are we up to it? Are we capable as a nation to have the partnerships – Indigenous, non-Indigenous, state, federal government, community, other sectors of the community work – are we up to the partnerships that we're going to need to create this balanced growth that we're talking about, which is jobs, social justice, and environment and tackling climate

The great danger, I think in the current situation we face, is what I call a huge collective complacency. Look, how great Australia has been, we've dealt with the crisis. We don't have to worry anymore about COVID. Of course, we still do.

As we're finding out day by day, we still have to deal with that. And we'll just go back to where we were. Unfortunately, that's not possible.

One of the reasons is pointed out by yourself and that reason is of course, that anxiety amongst young people is growing. The psychological pressures on people as they face uncertainty and unemployment is growing. These have always been seen as issues with people like Allan and yourself through the National Mental Health Commission.

Now they're going to be exacerbated because of the challenges we're going to face and unless we tackle that, as Allan said, we're going to have major disruption in our community and perhaps major dysfunction in our community. So we can't afford not to be optimistic. We can't afford not to have hope.

IAN HICKIE

And so complacency here, I mean, for the great philosopher, Australia's, or two of them – HG Nelson and Roy, "Rampaging" Roy Slaven – Rampaging Roy said recently he found the current situation to be a lot of cautious optimism in a tranquil sea of complacency.

Do you think this is Australian exceptionalism? Oh, you know, we didn't get the virus, what's all the fuss about?



GEOFF GALLOP

You know, we've been successful partly because we're an island nation. That's just luck.

No, look, the complacency in Australia has been for some time, we've seen the inequality building through our education and health systems.

We've seen the failure to deal with serious mental health. I think we've made progress actually, in the terms of a whole lot of mental illnesses. Yeah. So if you're a person suffering from serious mental illness, you know, life isn't easy.

We've got the whole Indigenous question of voice into the parliament. I think if we move the whole community forward, step by step, partnership by partnership, I think we can start to get that hope back on and then when the hope's back into the equation we can do even more.

But at the moment, I think we're just we're just imagining it's all going to be okay. Don't worry.

IAN HICKIE

An island nation won't protect you from the world economy, I suspect. Sam wanted to make a comment about the economy versus –

SAM MOSTYN

Thanks Ian. This whole conversation, we have been invested in a discussion around our society and our community and we're not really talking about the components of an economy.

I think we have a real trap. We're getting a narrative at the moment, we've got to rebuild the economy. And that's all about spending and growth.

And if you listen to everything that people have said today, that's not the way forward. And an economy is an outcome of a really strong society, and a strong society that understands what its principles and values are, what it cares about. It goes back to community, it goes to Jaky's point about listening to First Nations peoples who understand community better than anyone, as she has described. And as we've been learning, through the listening to the advocacy around the Voice.

You know, I would worry that everything has to be about building the economy and the governments get frightened about investments and going into debt to invest in people, invest in community and invest



in a good resilient economy that faces forward and says, that will define us more than setting up a GDP or other kind of growth measure for the economy. So it's probably self-evident. But, you know –

IAN HICKIE

So let's get back to the economist. Let's go back to Fels on this one.

So Fels, Sebastian Rosenberg wants to know, did we make a typo when we said mental wealth, not mental health, and that people still think it's a typo?

And I think your work with particularly the Turnbull Government and others, was to say this about growing the national cognitive and emotional resources of the society, not necessarily growing the GDP, per se, but we do slide into four to 10% of GDP. We do try and talk dollars.

Allan, is it clear to economists that we're talking about people?

ALLAN FELS

For those who don't know, GDP is a technical term in economics – Grossly Distorted Parameters is and indeed, we have to take a broader view. Wellbeing is one term, another is wealth, and that is relevant to taking a broad view of the nature and consequences of the mental health challenges we face.

GEOFF GALLOP

You know, I think we're in a moment too, we need to take the best of everything that's around. And our Kiwi cousins, of course, always one step ahead of us.

They're now presenting their budget in terms of gross progress indicator terms rather than just GDP. And I think it's that sort of discipline if you bring into your budget process, that can deal with the sort of issues that Sam has raised.

It requires a discipline. It requires the government to commit to sustainability; social, economic, and environmental change; contributing into wellbeing. The French, of course, had a major inquiry into this, chaired by some of the leading economists in the world, and they're doing it in Kiwi land.

And I think it'd be nice to think that coming out of this particular crisis and entering the next stage, the Federal Government sat down with the states and said, let's try a similar thing.



IAN HICKIE

So Geoff, it's really important, I think; I used to say Australia is the most mentally health aware nation on earth due to people like yourself, sharing your own experiences, the movements we had in Australia, Beyond Blue and everything else. We're so mentally aware.

Someone pointed out, not as good as New Zealand, recently. But I thought it was a little unfair, but the point that they had actually built it into their economic structure now, that just Jacinta doing has made it part of the national budgetary process.

So someone's asked a question along the way, Allen, should we really be talking about a wellbeing index? You and I've been talking about a mental wealth index.

I do worry in the wellbeing thing that it gets a bit lost as to how the economy; the participation issue that we've been talking about. The participation issue does drive economic wealth, but it drives many other factors as well. Do we have the right measures in place, what's your view Allan?

ALLAN FELS

The OECD has been drawing up a kind of agreed wellbeing index which takes into account income, income distribution, environment, health, education, social inclusiveness, and so on.

So we have most of the participation and jobs, we have most of the elements. So it turns out, most of the countries disagree about which weight to give to those individual items. And we've also cross-checked as to whether they all correlate with movement in GDP.

If GDP went up, they all went up, if it went down, they all went down. That would be interesting, but turns out that's not the relationship.

IAN HICKIE

So taking this kind of discussion forward, the OCD thing I think that many of the people here have been aware of, I've also found their use of the NEET acronym, Not in Employment Educational Training, which was particularly for 15 to 25-year-olds, and 15 to 30-year-olds



If you want to know the future prosperity of your nation, you need to know the number of people between 15 and 25 or 15 and 30, who are not in employment, education or training; that predicts your future, and I would say predict your social future, as well as an essential economic future.

So that's one of the issues we've tried to look at it. In fact, in the last downturn in 2009, it went from nine and a half percent of Australians to 12 and a half percent of Australians, young Australians. Fortunately, a great many went off to the education sector during that particular time, which gave them three or four years of not seeking jobs.

Now, Geoff, you're an ex, actual Minister for Education, old school, state services – is the education sector up to the kind of developments that we need now, for actually bringing younger people through education? Mark Scott here in New South Wales made the point that many of our education systems are sitting in the 1960s.

With our teenagers and others were still using the assessment systems that were invented in the 1970s, in particular ways as success or not.

I mean, on these key kind of things that we should be measuring and their outcomes, are the key factors – we've mentioned the vocational education training to some degree post school education – but what about the fundamental education sector? You know, are we now up to it?

GEOFF GALLOP

Well, I think there are, there are lots of issues that you could raise there. I mean, one of them that I immediately need to raise, of course, as the level of social anxiety grows, as it will, you know, as we're uncertain about the future, and that reflects in families and it starts to drift down and then the teachers, they're in the classroom, and they've got, you know, a real issue that they have to deal with. And that's the sort of the generalised socio-psychological climate if you like, filtering down to the attitudes and worries of the kids in the classroom. So I think that's an important issue that we've got to note

That leads us to the next question, which is, you know, we have to have the best and the brightest people in our community, in our schools and in, I'd add to that; into our hospitals

These are foundational issues to use, John Buchanan's terminology. And at the moment, if you compare the, you know, the way our society rates teachers compared to other professions, it all starts out well, but as time moves on, there's a gap emerges there

And as a community, what we're saying is education is perhaps not as important as it actually ought to be. And so I think they're the two things, we've got to make sure our teachers have the capacity to deal with the social environment within which they're operating, which can have a huge impact on their capacity to deliver.



And secondly, we've got to make sure that we rate teaching very highly and that we rate education much more highly than we have done, particularly in this long period of economic growth that we've had.

IAN HICKIE

You're also Geoff, you're also a New Democracy guy. Sam's just pointed out to me that 25% of Australians are under the age of 28, do you think we should lower the voting age and let some of those [inaudible]?

GEOFF GALLOP

Totally, totally agree.

Down to 16 – be interesting to see what the others think.

IAN HICKIE

I mean there's a lot of retirees. I seem to be the focus of every government initiative, and I'm the person least needing of it.

Sam, you've made comments about what's happened with superannuation, and its actual use and abuse in recent times. You want to comment further? Because this issue about really the transgenerational aspects here, again raised a number of the questions, is one that really doesn't seem to receive the attention that it should.

SAM MOSTYN

No. And so many people have utilised that form of short-term financing by accessing the superannuation. For some, it's been absolutely crucial. And you can't deny people that right to actually get that, that use of that money, but to think about the lost value of that investment, when there could have been other ways of actually helping those people, particularly those that were in the arts sector that had to go to their superannuation as meagre as it is, because they weren't in JobKeeper or JobSeeker.



So the people who kept our mental health buoyant because of their great performances and their, the notion of keeping us engaged without our creative minds, [have] gone back to their super accounts; but there's another disturbing trend.

I think it was 29% of the men who access their super spent that \$10,000 on gambling. So the idea that we access this and then use it for good purposes has not paid out the way, I guess, the policymakers hope. And to think about not seeing in place as our spending, that is bad for the economy, leaves them distraught later. And to think more clearly about what these supports need to look like.

IAN HICKIE

Jaky, you had a comment?

JAKY TROY

Yes. I just wanted to say there's been a couple of good ones on the comments. There's many, many I'm enjoying it.

But I just want to say this bit about how big can we dream about achieving the triple bottom line: social, economic and environment?

Well, we, as Aboriginal people achieved that. We still achieve it. We have overall less money than anyone else. We're in fewer power positions. But within our own communities, no one has ever not had a job and that's still the case.

We don't regard people who aren't in paid work as somehow people who need to be fixed up or supported. It would be nice if everybody did have an income they could rely on, but we are used to being the people who are in contract jobs or casual positions. This goes to the university sector as well. And we stand to lose that cohort in our universities. That's very concerning.

But overall, we support each other all the time. And we care for our environment and each other. Irrespective of what government policies there are or aren't, they come and go.

I lived through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, which was the only Indigenous self-government really, in the world at one point, and then it was gone. So we are a model for the rest of Australia.

And I love the other point that I think Rhonda Wilson put up – a voice in Parliament isn't an Indigenous question, Geoff.



Yeah, to leave our voice out of the management of this country or sideline it into something that you do when you're doing Indigenous stuff, is a mistake.

IAN HICKIE

So just on the participation issue Jaky, we're gonna run out of time shortly, that you raise; this question of, you know grandparents taking care of grandchildren, those people in caring roles. The issue of participation at the moment in your society, in your groups, whether exactly in paid work or not, and I guess that's what we're trying to emphasise participation and inclusion is in all those roles, along with education, along with employment, but the sustainability and these things don't play out equally.

Now, I'm just gonna invite the panellists in the last three minutes to each, just a takeaway point out of all of this, that most concerns. And so in reverse order, Geoff first.

GEOFF GALLOP

Better government.

IAN HICKIE

Oh, well, that's it. That's it. I can stop right there. I think we need to participate in that government don't we, Geoff?

John.

JOHN BUCHANAN

I think Australia's got to be confident about its ability to negotiate this challenge in a novel way. It shouldn't be looking overseas for lessons.

Out of the downturn in the 1890s, we generated the arbitration system and the, what is now called the TAFE system. As I mentioned, we had group training come out of the downturn of the 1980s. I think there's a real chance for renewal here and I think that idea of creating partnership between government and communities is the way forward.



IAN HICKIE

Funny that we have a lot of innovation here. We just don't really like to take it national.

Jaky.

JAKY TROY

We need take this moment and harness the Indigenous capacity to make connections between people that are meaningful and supportive, and to create the kind of social innovation that is not innovative for us, but it's for everybody else in the world.

IAN HICKIE

Sam.

SAM MOSTYN

I'd like to see a purposeful mission and narrative for the country that draws on the innovation we've heard about, that relies on community, trusts community far more, and is also prepared to invest and co-invest with others and make better use of that investment rather than thinking about cutting programs; but supporting community through direct investment and being proud to do that, as a co-investor in our future.

IAN HICKIE

Allan.

ALLAN FELS

Jobs first.



Secondly, I mean, that's going to be the focus, given the crisis. The second thing is, don't forget the long term like climate change, as we've heard, but thirdly, remember the long term issues look a little different in the current situation with such unemployment.

And, for example, the Productivity Commission, their agenda is being reconsidered. It was formed three years ago in a different situation. It was about reforming health and education and where they lie. Think those issues look very different in the current situation, so long term, recognise some changes in how we look at those problems.

IAN HICKIE

So just to sum up, because I'm also picking up some themes here – and I'm grateful to Sebastian Rosenberg here – that when Allan and I talked about mental wealth, a lot of emphasis has been on how mental ill health decreases productivity.

What we're really trying to champion with mental wealth and wellbeing with a society more broadly, is how we grow our wellbeing and our productivity over time. As Allan says, that was in the pre COVID-19 situation.

Right now, we've got to think really differently. But to use those famous things, why waste a crisis? There are a lot of things we never fixed, as Minister Hunt said, more has been done in the health system in 10 days, than was done in 10 years. Some might say we didn't do much for 10 years. But boy, we need to take the opportunity to think differently.

Hopefully, we brought to you today perspectives about actually thinking differently, and that actually there is a lot of local expertise. It's placed-based, it's innovative, it's community orientated, it's smart. It may not be reflected in the national discourse on any particular day.

And the national discourse might seem particularly narrow or targeted on just a specific part of the community. I think what we're trying to say, and Allan and I have pursued this in a number of other areas in relation to mental health initiative; it's about the emotional cognitive resources.

It's about the wider context. Mental health and wellbeing I think, being picked up by Jacinta Ardern, is as important to our nation's future as any other economic parameter.

It is the society in which is in Australia, inclusive and diverse, and to pick up Jaky's point, very long standing; this is the most long-standing inhabited continent on the earth

Perhaps it's about time, we use that innovation, to drive our national social and emotional wellbeing and I'm sure Jaky, a restored Gadigal language could communicate that better



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But that's the goal for all of us. And I thank you all for your participation today. And I particularly thank our panellists, from whom I continue to learn things I never even dreamed of. Hope to see you again through Sydney Ideas.

ANNA BURNS

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Finally, we want to acknowledge that this podcast was made in Sydney, which sits on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. It is upon their ancestral lands that the University of Sydney is built.