



Reimagining care

How might citizen-led policy development improve ideas and policy to address the crisis in care in Australia?



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

—
Sydney Policy
Lab

July 2023

Ngyini ngalawangun mari budyari Gadinurada.

We meet together on the very beautiful Gadi Country.

The Sydney Policy Lab acknowledges the generations upon generations of Traditional Custodians that have held responsibilities for Country, “custodian-ing” it from one generation to the next. We acknowledge the cultural protocols of protecting and holding knowledges that have sustained culture and Country for over 60,000 years.

Based in Sydney, we acknowledge the Gadigal Elders, past and present, and the beautiful Gadi Country where we work. We extend this acknowledgement to the Country, Elders and Ancient Ones of many other First Nations communities across Australia. We honour and respect the sovereignty of the many Nations where we live and work.

We are committed to working respectfully with First Nations communities across these beautiful lands, seas and skies.

People's Assemblies on Care: Bringing people to the forefront of policy development

“Not another Royal Commission!” is now a common lament. In Australia and around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic made clear that we face a crisis of care. At the same time, Australians, like many others around the world, are losing faith in democracy. They are calling for greater engagement with policymakers to address a perceived failure to tackle the serious global and domestic challenges we face as a nation.¹

To rise to the challenge presented by the dual crises of care and democracy, The Sydney Policy Lab, based at the University of Sydney, seeks to strengthen how care policy is conceived. We seek to do that by inverting the Royal Commission model of looking at what went wrong, and instead support forward-looking, collaborative policy development that is led by the communities and the people whose lives and livelihoods are most at stake.

Taking inspiration from consumer health movements and person-centred models of care, the Sydney Policy Lab, will convene People's Assemblies on Care to give citizens the opportunity to deliberate on the care policy matters most important to them and come up with new ideas to address the pressing problems within Australia's broken care sector with the support of expertise from the University of Sydney.

The Sydney Policy Lab believes care-giving and care-receiving are fundamental functions of society. Policy to support these functions cuts across our most intimate and social bonds and determines the extent to which we can all live well and with dignity. The development of care policy therefore demands sustained engagement with affected communities and individuals. When there is an active role for communities in policymaking, a rich diversity of lived expertise is brought to bear on policy design, outcomes and evaluation.

By exploring the potential of deliberative democratic methods, which have been applied with increasing frequency in key OECD countries including, experimentally, in Australia,² we hope to develop new means of addressing the dual crises in care and democracy.

With the support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation, the Sydney Policy Lab will initially trial two pilot People's Assemblies on Care in locations where the University of Sydney is part of the community landscape. We look forward to working with communities in Broken Hill and Westmead in New South Wales (NSW). Our aspiration is for the People's Assemblies on Care to enable members of the public to write their own agenda for care, deliberate over relevant evidence, and determine key priorities for the future of care policy, thereby improving outcomes and, in turn, strengthening our democracy.

1 Gerry Stoker, Mark Evans and Max Halupka, “Trust and Democracy in Australia: Democratic Decline and Renewal” (2018), available online: apo.org.au/node/208536

Edelman, “2023 Edelman Trust Barometer: Australia Report” (2023), available online: edelman.com.au/trust-barometer-2022-australia

2 See for example: OECD, “Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave” (2020), Chapter 5, available online: doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en



What is deliberative democracy, and what can it achieve?

In Australian representative democracy, citizens elect their representatives to form a parliamentary body. Those elected representatives then deliberate on matters in parliament, including on policy made through legislation. Parliamentary democracy allows for representation and deliberation, subject to party discipline, but limits the ongoing direct participation of citizens.

Deliberative democratic methods complement and strengthen representative parliamentary democracy by creating additional opportunities for members of the public to directly and carefully weigh and discuss important public questions. What has been described as a “deliberative wave” prioritises discussion among members of the public, learning and collaborating with the support of trained facilitators and experts to form collective recommendations for policymakers.³ Possible formats include citizens’ assemblies, citizens’ juries and citizens’ panels. Each of these provide opportunities to arrive at better solutions to policy problems because they tap into a diverse range of community perspectives that are tested through social interactions with others.

Careful determination of who participates in deliberative activities ensures that those who are normally excluded from policymaking are included. Deliberative processes can also strengthen support for policy outcomes in the broader community because people are more likely to trust, and consider legitimate, a decision that has been informed by their fellow citizens, as opposed to decisions made by government at a distance from community needs.

³ See for example: OECD, “Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave” (2020), Chapter 5, available online: doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en

Piloting the People's Assemblies

The pilot People's Assemblies will be held in two locations. The first pilot takes place in the regional town of Broken Hill in far-western NSW, the home of our colleagues and research partners at the University of Sydney Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health. The second pilot takes place in Westmead in Western Sydney, where the Sydney Policy Lab collaborates with University of Sydney colleagues based at the Westmead Health Precinct.



Pilot 1: Broken Hill

Broken Hill is within the Far West Local Health District (FWLHD) which covers almost 200,000 square kilometres of remote NSW. The FWLHD is sparsely populated, with 62% of its estimated 30,000 residents living in Broken Hill. The remainder of the population live in agricultural towns along the Murray River, in small remote communities of between 80 and 800 people or on stations. The FWLHD is the most sparsely populated local health district in NSW and has the highest proportion of Aboriginal residents (12%). The population is decreasing, ageing and experiencing significant morbidity related to lifestyle factors and chronic illness.⁴

⁴ NSW Health, "Far West," accessed 8/6/2023: health.nsw.gov.au/lhd/Pages/fwlhd.aspx



Pilot 2: Westmead and surrounds

Located approximately 28 kilometres from the Sydney CBD, Westmead is a suburb in the demographically-diverse urban domain of Western Sydney. The suburb is home to the Westmead Health Precinct, one of the largest health, education, research and training precincts in Australia. Westmead and surrounds are home to a large community of Indian-born residents. Neighbouring Harris Park, a suburb where almost half of its residents were born in India, has recently been renamed Little India in honour of its diaspora communities.

“Responding to the demand for greater democratic input from communities, each of the two pilot People’s Assemblies will occur in two phases. In each phase, approximately 20 members of the public will come together to reflect on the most pressing public questions related to care in their everyday lives and communities.

By exploring the issues relevant to participating individuals and their broader communities, we seek to uncover obstacles to the effective delivery of care, chart the social and material resources available to the communities in question, and identify new avenues for community-led reform of the care sector.”

– Dr Kate Harrison Brennan, Director, The Sydney Policy Lab

The two phases of the People's Assemblies



Phase 1: Community agenda-setting

On a mid-week evening, the Assembly members in each location will be invited to reflect upon what care means to them. The groups will then discuss the challenges in care in the communities represented. By the end of this session the groups will be able to identify a care issue that matters most to them and their local community upon which they will deliberate in the second phase of the Assembly.



Phase 2: Deliberation and recommendations

On a weekend day, the Assembly members from the first phase will be reunited and provided with resources, including insights from diverse experts, to enable their development of new policy ideas and recommendations.

Stipends, meals and all necessary materials for participation will be provided to participants in the People's Assemblies.

The Sydney Policy Lab is excited to put this democratic innovation into practice. We will make every effort to ensure that participants have an engaging experience, and perhaps even some fun, as we experiment with this venture in deliberative democracy.



What happens after the People's Assemblies on Care?

We are working to ensure that there are multiple paths to impact for the policy recommendations developed in these People's Assemblies on Care. Our priority is that these deliberations inform and engage policymaking processes in Australia.

We envision working with more communities who wish to hold a People's Assembly on Care and establishing a People's Commission on Care, housed at the Sydney Policy Lab. The Commission would act as an anchor, a resource and an innovator for the forward-looking, community-led approach to care policy development in the People's Assemblies, supporting Australia's communities to play an active role in care policy development and reform.

Get in touch

For more information or to contact the Sydney Policy Lab:

policy.lab@sydney.edu.au
(+61) 2 8627 5977

Twitter: @SydneyPolicyLab

sydney.edu.au/sydney-policy-lab

Sydney Policy Lab
Level 5 RD Watt Building
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006

Produced by Theo+Theo for the Sydney Policy Lab, theoxtheo.com