Where are we?

Place-based approaches to tackling
community challenges in Australia

June 2023

ABOUT THE PAUL RAMSAY FOUNDATION

At the Paul Ramsay Foundation, we believe that people and communities across Australia deserve to thrive. PRF's vision is to break cycles of disadvantage in Australia so that everyone has access to opportunities, regardless of their circumstance or postcode. We seek to identify and partner with individuals, communities, and organisations, and work across sectors to collectively achieve this change.

We are committed to continuing to support the growth of effective place-based work across Australia and value partnering with all of the organisations we have had the opportunity to support to date. Much of the great work of many place-based leaders and communities features in this report. Supporting development of this paper is part of this commitment, as is continuing to find ways to provide practical support to place-based leaders across Australia.

ABOUT EQUITY ECONOMICS

Equity Economics works with not-for-profit, community, and government clients on persistent social and economic challenges facing Australia and our region. Our aim is to help our clients contribute to building a more inclusive, equitable society. We work across family, education, health, housing, and gender policy, with a focus on social inclusion, reducing inequality, and closing the gap.

THANKS TO CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you to the organisations and people whose reflections and ideas feature in this report. We appreciate all those who gave their precious time and energy to contribute. We particularly thank Matthew Cox for his input and advice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Paul Ramsay Foundation and Equity Economics acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to both their land and seas.

Table of Contents

Executive summary

Australia now has the opportunity to make a game-changing shift and embrace the use of place-based approaches alongside broad-based policies and programs to address big social, economic and environmental challenges facing the nation, including persistent poverty in many of our communities.

People feel strongly about the places and communities they call home, as different as these are across Australia's vast lands. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples especially see connection to Country as central to self-determination. However, historically, most investments, programs and services have been centrally designed and delivered at the national or state and territory levels, and therefore unable to fully to meet the specific needs, priorities and aspirations of different communities.

This has stymied the nation's ability to address the disadvantage that is concentrated in some of our suburbs, towns and remote communities, particularly impacting government's ability to be effective in working with First Nations people to Close the Gap. More generally, it has also limited the ability of local communities, non-government organisations and service providers, businesses, universities and research institutes to bring their social capital and resources together and work in tandem with governments in particular places to assist communities to thrive.

The good news is that over the last decade communities, not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations, governments, businesses, universities and other research bodies have become far more serious about investing in place-based approaches that bring together a range of local leaders, organisations and funders to take a community-led approach and coordinate investments to address the needs and specific circumstances of a place, often with a focus on tackling disadvantage and supporting children and families. Recently, important networks have been built, including the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children, to help those committed to improving outcomes for children, families and communities align resources and demonstrate the value they can bring to the table.

Governments at the federal, state and local levels have also been increasingly investing in these approaches. The recent Australian Government 2023-24 Budget made a landmark commitment to invest $200 million in an integrated package to address entrenched and concentrated community disadvantage by accelerating existing place-based approaches under the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* program and supporting further initiatives alongside state and territory governments, philanthropic organisations, social enterprises and impact investors.

The Australian Government Department of Social Services' efforts to establish a National Centre for Place-based Collaboration (Nexus Centre) is also a major development. This will seek to amplify place-based work across Australia and bring together government agencies, service providers and communities to work together on common barriers and factors for success. A consortium comprised of the University of Queensland, Australia and New Zealand School of Government and Collaboration for Impact has been established to lay the groundwork for the Nexus Centre and has begun reaching out to a broad range of organisations considered active and important for the successful growth of place-based work across Australia.

This report seeks to contribute to the place-based reform agenda in Australia by acknowledging the work and thinking that has occurred across many organisations and to bring together:

1. A broad overview of place-based approaches and activity in Australia, particularly seeking to join up activities occurring in many different areas, including First Nations community development, early childhood, youth transitions, justice, employment and natural disaster recovery and adaptation, so they can be seen as a whole body of work;

2. The case for why place-based approaches will become even more critical to Australia's future;

3. Compelling evidence of impact, particularly in the early childhood area, while emphasising the importance of setting realistic expectations and further building the evidence base; and

4. Why additional structural policy and financing reforms remain critical in tandem with new commitments and investments to achieve sustained outcomes, and that these are increasingly within our grasp.

This report also offers a roadmap that brings recent commitments and investments together alongside pieces that still need to be strengthened and tackled, stepping out the potential roles of communities, governments, not-for-profit organisations and service providers, and the philanthropic, business, university and research sectors. It is hoped this may contribute to upcoming work announced in the 2023-24 Budget on a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage, as well as drive collaborations more broadly in years to come. With so many moving parts and new announcements, having a roadmap will be critical for all sectors to coordinate their efforts, share their expertise and connect with emerging investment and partnering opportunities.

The roadmap sets out actions that seek to:

1. **Support strategic investment in places** — maximise recent opportunities to improve certainty of resources for existing place-based initiatives and ensure opportunities to scale up partnerships across communities, governments, not-for-profit/for-purpose organisations, philanthropy, business, universities and research are not missed. This includes building on recent announcements establishing an Outcomes Fund, Investor Roundtables and the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children to end up with an ongoing national investment mechanism for all sectors to pool resources for ten-year place-based partnerships in communities across Australia.

2. **Strengthen practice and networks** — help place-based practitioners and supporters see themselves as part of the same body of work and increase capability and support for people working on all the complex pieces that need to come together for place-based approaches to achieve sustained outcomes. These include mechanisms for coordination of investment; robust governance models for ongoing collaboration across partners; defining theories of change and improving data and evaluation; and building capabilities of local leaders and organisations for long term resilience. The Nexus Centre will be a powerful anchor for this work but must bring in expertise from a broad range of organisations involved in supporting place-based and community-led practice and research.

3. **Reform program and finance structures** — ensure place-based approaches are elevated to sit alongside and support universal and broad-based program and service delivery rather than remaining as an add-on. The aim is to make it easier for governments and other potential funders to invest in place-based approaches for shared sustained outcomes over the long-term. Good place-based practice has the potential to inform a broader reform agenda to improve the delivery of community grants, programs and investment across Australian communities as a whole. To achieve this, detailed work is required to establish how place-based initiatives can complement universal and broad-based funding models and work in practice, with the Australian Government Department's of Social Services, Treasury and Finance playing lead roles. While significant place-based initiatives are underway and new commitments will improve resourcing, the long-term financing model is yet to be seriously grappled with. This is an area where Australia could play a major role as a leader in innovative policy financing and delivery for community outcomes.

Taking this reform journey will help Australia maximise the social capital, efficiency and effectiveness that can come from galvanising local people and organisations to develop local solutions to local problems. It will create a much stronger framework for addressing disadvantage and creating economic opportunity and inclusion in communities across the nation.

Key insights

1. **The growing spectrum of place-based work across Australia should be better recognised.**

   - Respecting the different philosophies and elements of individual place-based initiatives is important, but there is also great value in seeing the growing place-based activity underway across Australia as part of a whole body of critical work for the nation. We can learn from activities occurring in the areas of First Nations community development, early childhood, youth transitions, justice, employment, environment and natural disaster recovery and adaptation.

   - This will help elevate place-based approaches alongside universal and broad-based policies and programs as a key vehicle for the delivery of investments into communities.

"Where are we?"

Place-based approaches to tackling community challenges in Australia

2. **Place-based approaches are critical to Australia's future.**

   - Place-based approaches are central to First Nations empowerment and Closing the Gap. Sustained progress relies on improving the way communities, governments and other partners design place-based responses linked to national commitments and programs.

   - Australia faces rising locational disadvantage and child poverty that cannot be addressed through centralised delivery of services alone. Place-based approaches can drive the community relationships and solutions required for long-term change.

   - Growing environmental, economic and social disruption across Australia's diverse range of communities will increase the need for differentiated place-based approaches in decades to come.

4. **Significant investments across governments, not-for-profit, philanthropic, research organisations and other partners present a major opportunity for place-based work, but structural reforms to remove barriers need to be pursued in tandem.**

   - Top-down inflexible program structures and investment models remain a barrier to place-based work. Robust public sector and finance reform could deliver a more realistic pathway for embedding place-based work alongside large-scale program delivery and service design. This could also help meet the goal of putting people and partnerships at the centre of policy and delivery.

   - Reimagining the traditional roles of the community, government, for-purpose, philanthropic, university, research and business sectors is critical for driving maturing collaborations and long-term investment partnerships.

   - Improving access and use of local data and investment in robust evaluations is important for decision-making and tracking evidence of impact.

   - Risks in scaling up investment in place-based initiatives can be managed with careful program design, ensuring realistic expectations and learning and adapting along the way.

3. **Place-based work is achieving impact, but we need to build the evidence base further.**

   - There is compelling evidence demonstrating place-based approaches can be effective in addressing disadvantage and creating opportunities for communities.

   - The relative maturity of place-based approaches in the early childhood sector means the majority of evaluations and strongest evidence exists in this field, showing improvement of child and family outcomes.

   - There is a clear need to continue to build the evidence base and evaluate the effectiveness of specific initiatives, in parallel to ramping up careful investment in this work.

Australia must take the opportunity to make a game-changing shift to using place-based approaches alongside broad-based policies and programs to address big social, economic and environmental challenges facing the nation.
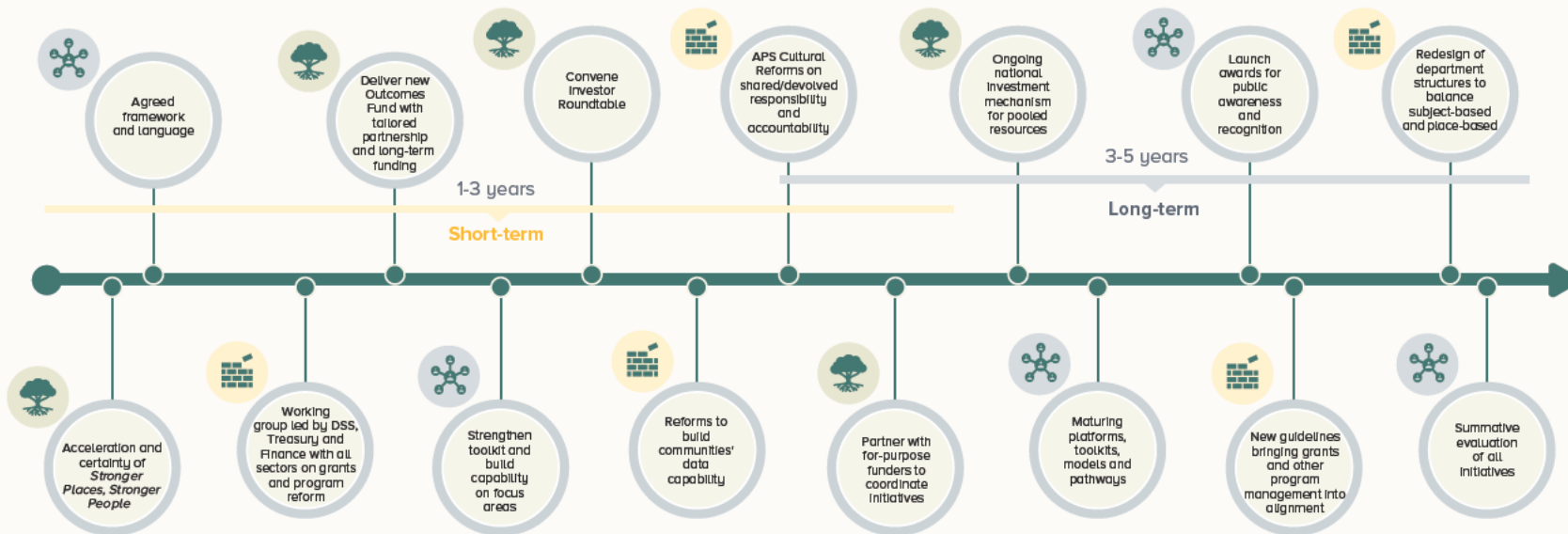
Place-based reform roadmap

Legend:
- Strategic investment in places
- Strengthening practice and networks
- Reforming program and finance structures

Community
- Leadership and momentum
- Clarity on community strengths and theories of change
- Increased but realistic accountability for outcomes
- Development of plain English common language and toolkits that help build capability and solve problems
- Understand the public finance reform challenge
- Contribute advice from the receiving end
- Demonstrate the power of effectively using local data

Government
- Longer-term funding agreements with funding for staged evaluations
- Development of large scale investment partnerships with ongoing national mechanisms to pool resources
- Inter-governmental processes and partnering with all sectors to develop a framework and language for reform
- Ensuring toolkits will work in practice for governments
- Strong leadership and commitment to multi-level reform
- Further exploration of the effective role local government can play

Timeline (top row nodes):
- Agreed framework and language
- Deliver new Outcomes Fund with tailored partnership and long-term funding
- Convene Investor Roundtable
- APS Cultural Reforms on shared/devolved responsibility and accountability
- Ongoing national investment mechanism for pooled resources
- Launch awards for public awareness and recognition
- Redesign of department structures to balance subject-based and place-based

Timeline (bottom row nodes):
- Acceleration and certainty of *Stronger Places, Stronger People*
- Working group led by DSS, Treasury and Finance with all sectors on grants and program reform
- Strengthen toolkit and build capability on focus areas
- Reforms to build communities' data capability
- Partner with for-purpose funders to coordinate initiatives
- Maturing platforms, toolkits, models and pathways
- New guidelines bringing grants and other program management into alignment
- Summative evaluation of all initiatives

Timeframes:
- 1-3 years — Short-term
- 3-5 years — Long-term

NGO/Service providers
- Increased use of integrated service models including co-location, service navigator, shared client and network models
- Ensuring toolkits work in practice and put forward incentives and barriers associated with integrated service models
- Support contract and program funding changes that support shared outcomes and integrated service models

For-purpose funders
- Convenors bringing sectors to the table to develop early large-scale investment partnerships
- Flexible resources for initiatives, including funding community infrastructure and activities to build readiness
- Resources and expertise to the development of toolkits, convening roundtables, supporting community leaders to ensure suitable inclusivity of what is working in all local contexts
- Demonstrate new ways of working, build evidence of what works, leverage resource base and reach to be early adapters and testers of key reform directions and longer-term investment/ partnerships
- Convenors to bring sectors along to assist in cultural reform

Universities and research
- Clear commitments to tailored education and employment pathways under investment partnerships
- Ensure the toolkits work in practice for the development of learning and professional development pathways
- Undertake research on barriers and examples of successful relevant multi-level reform nationally and internationally
- Elevate community perspectives and voices of lived experience to influence reform

Business
- Clear commitments to employment and local workforce and industry development
- Fund awards for practice and initiatives to build awareness and recognition
- Ensure the toolkits will work in practice for business
- Provide advice on business practice in managing investments for shared outcomes, devolved decision-making and risk

The growing spectrum of place-based activity in Australia

Over recent decades, Australia has developed a contemporary body of place-based work that brings together a range of local leaders, organisations and funders to coordinate investments that seek to address the needs and specific circumstances of a place, often focusing on tackling locational disadvantage or disruption.

Looking at this work as a whole, at one end of the spectrum are structured collaborative place-based approaches and at the other end are broader policy and program delivery activities that are partially designed to be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of different places. See Box 1 for key terms and definitions used in this report.

Gujaga Foundation general manager Sally Walker and her daughter Ruby Thomson.

There are a number of questions that can be useful in working out where a particular place-based activity sits on the spectrum:

1. *To what extent is the approach community-led in the sense it is driven by community leaders and collective processes rather than outside agencies or organisations?* There are examples of governments and other actors trying to organise programs and resources to respond to local needs without initiatives being community-led. While these can be significant and useful, it is important to understand the absence of community leadership to collectively identify issues and own solutions can be a defining (and limiting) feature of these initiatives.

"

"We started without a ready-made project then took time to listen, foster trusted and strong relationships, and joined forces with our local people using their resources to build something incredible together that really works for our young people."[4]

- Becoming U (Nambucca Valley, NSW)

2. *Is the initiative part of a larger program that is being delivered in a flexible way to specific communities, or has it been developed specifically to respond to the community's needs and aspirations?* This is related to the above question, and it can help quickly determine to what extent the initiative is a structured 'place-based approach' or a form of place-based activity.

3. *What are the areas of focus and theory of change adopted to improve community outcomes?* Some place-based approaches are focused on improving outcomes in one area (e.g. employment) and others take a holistic approach to service integration across a range of socio-economic domains to address disadvantage and aim to achieve larger-scale system reform.

4. *What are the specific mechanisms involved in delivering the place-based approach?* There are common mechanisms place-based approaches use to provide more integrated services for people in communities focused on their specific needs.[5] This includes local governance structures, such as backbone organisations, that may emerge from the galvanising of existing community organisations or that newly form specifically to take on place-based work. Backbone organisations serve to align the objectives and efforts of service providers and investors. Other common mechanisms include formation of hubs for co-location of services, social service navigators[6] and shared client approaches. Identifying the types of mechanisms being used often helps work out the 'nuts and bolts' of what is being delivered under the place-based initiative.

There are now hundreds of place-based initiatives operating across Australia in the areas of First Nations community development, early childhood, youth transitions, justice, employment and natural disaster recovery and adaptation. While addressing serious locational disadvantage is a focus of many place-based approaches, there are those that seek to assist communities overcome new economic, social and environmental disruptions. For example, recent place-based responses have formed in the context of natural disasters, climate change adaptation and the Covid-19 pandemic.[7]

One of the critical place-based support programs currently operating across Australia is the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* program. In many ways, this program is seeking to take much that has been learnt about how to do effective place-based work across Australia and further evolve the practice at increased pace and scale (see Box 2). For a much broader list of key place-based activities that are currently in operation and/or are important for understanding the evolution of this work in Australia, see Appendix 1.

BOX 2: STRONGER PLACES, STRONGER PEOPLE

Stronger Places, Stronger People is an Australian Government initiative supporting place-based collective impact methodology in partnership with ten communities, state and territory governments and in some cases philanthropic organisations. It is a ten-year investment aimed at disrupting disadvantage and improving wellbeing for children and families living in these communities by 2029. A National Leadership Group that brings together leaders from communities, business, philanthropy, academia and service delivery has been working to learn from the experience of those involved in *Stronger Places, Stronger People* and further evolve place-based practice.[8]

An investment of $200 million was announced in the 2023-24 Federal Budget to accelerate and strengthen existing place-based approaches including $64 million over six years to extend the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* program and support further initiatives alongside state and territory governments, social enterprises and impact investor to fund projects that alleviate disadvantage in communities.

It is important to understand the different theories and movements sitting behind place-based initiatives across Australia, including sovereignty and rights-based advocacy, community development approaches, and social capital and resilience building (see Appendix 2).

Various place-based approaches also emphasise the multiple elements that need to come together for these approaches to work effectively in different ways. One model that has gained significant traction is the collective impact model that is aimed at re-designing functional relationships so people and organisations can come together to solve the complex issues that exist in a given community[9] (see Box 3 for further detail). For a summary of the common critical elements of place-based approaches drawn from a review of the literature and many recent reports across the philanthropic, not-for-profit and community sectors, see Appendix 3.

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"The field of place-based work in Australia is growing and maturing. Communities are increasingly self-organising to try to drive change. The last 10 years have seen more service providers, governments, philanthropists and researchers entering and influencing the field."[10]

Strengthening Communities Position Paper 2023 – Strengthening Communities Alliance

BOX 3: COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The collective impact model prioritises the elements needed to get multiple partners organised around a common interest in addressing a complex social issue in a given community:

1. A common social agenda
2. Shared measurement framework
3. Mutually reinforcing activities among all participants
4. Open communication fostering genuine collaboration
5. A backbone organisation with the skills and resources to keep everyone on track.[11]

Once formulated in 2011 in the United States, the collective impact model was met with wide interest. Many place-based initiatives such as *Logan Together* in Australia and the Tamarack Institute in Canada have developed modifications of the framework to nuance and amplify key concepts. Much of this work has sought to emphasise the role of 'place' in activating powerful social, cultural and spiritual processes.[12] It has also recognised the central role of communities in owning and driving approaches and prioritised understanding stages of community readiness for place-based work (discussed further later).[13]

Recently, founders of the collective impact approach came together to reflect on what its application over a decade has revealed. They concluded centering work on equity and systematically assessing and redressing disparities in opportunities, outcomes and representation is also a prerequisite for driving sustained change. This additional element highlights the need for collective impact initiatives to identify and understand the particular groups within communities that have experienced structural constraints, marginalisation and oppression, and how to take targeted action to address current and historical inequities.[14]

Respecting the philosophies behind, and elements of, different place-based approaches is critical because they are often deeply important to the people involved. A central tenant of these approaches is that they are uniquely designed to specifically suit the people, organisations and circumstances of a specific place.

However, there is also great value in seeing all the place-based activity underway across Australia as part of a whole body of work because it is only then that it will be possible to elevate this work, ensure place-based practitioners are learning from each other and drive the reforms required for these approaches to take their place as a key vehicle for the delivery of investments and support into communities aligned to local priorities, alongside universal and broad-based policies and programs.

Why are place-based approaches critical to Australia's future?

Place-based approaches have always been important, but they are likely to become more so as Australia seeks to address some of the big social, economic and environmental challenges facing the nation, including persistent and rising poverty in many communities. This is for four key reasons:

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES ARE CENTRAL TO FIRST NATIONS EMPOWERMENT AND CLOSING THE GAP

There is already a large body of place-based and community-led practice in First Nations communities given connection to Country and place underpin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural, language and nation groups across Australia.[15] Indeed, the leadership that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities have shown in paving the way for place-based work across Australia needs to be better acknowledged and understood as these approaches have long been considered as the starting point for discussions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law, identity, cultural, environmental, social and economic rights, responsibilities and opportunities.[16] Place-based approaches that are community-led and emphasise empowerment are seen as critical to overcoming a legacy of colonisation, dispossession and ongoing institutional racism.[17]

Commitments and Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap[18] and current place-based approaches including Empowered Communities[19] emphasise the critical importance of changing the way that governments and other partners work with communities to support these approaches. In particular, the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is seen as essential for designing services and investments that work to meet the needs and priorities of the specific communities. Promisingly,

we are seeing examples of expanded funding through existing programs being delivered through local, community-led First Nations organisations, such as the recently announced investments in early childhood education services in remote Australia[20] and strengthening of key sectors including the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector to play a leading role in Closing the Gap.

There is also a large body of place-based practice involved in the development of Native Title Settlements, Indigenous Land Use Agreements and Indigenous cultural and natural resource management, including the now large scale and successful Indigenous Rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas programs.[21]

The proposed Voice to Parliament and regional and local Voice reforms are also predicated on understanding the importance of listening to on-the-ground voices from communities and using these to design place-based responses linked to national policies and programs.[22]

While significant progress has been made with place-based community-led approaches in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there remains a long way to go. The effectiveness of major commitments in relation to Closing the Gap and potential Voice to Parliament reforms rely on getting the right structures, information and investment flows between community-led place-based approaches at the local level and national/state policy-making and programs. Significant evidence exists that it is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community-controlled organisations on the ground that are in the best position to improve outcomes if supported by effective place-based partnerships with governments, not-for-profit and for-purpose funders, business and others.[23]

> **"Our Indigenous Empowerment Framework...
> recognises the primacy of the local nature
> of peoples and places, and is aimed at the
> empowerment of the families and individuals
> connected to those peoples and places."**[24]
> *- Empowered Communities*
>
> **"Yuwaya Ngarra-li benefits from the
> Dharriwaa Elders Group's collaborative
> working relationship with local Aboriginal
> Community Controlled Organisations in
> Walgett to achieve positive outcomes for
> the community and implement programs
> using existing community strengths...Local
> Aboriginal leadership in the planning,
> design and implementation of programs is a
> critical factor for Yuwaya Ngarra-li's success
> in Walgett; something that is upheld as a
> primary operating principle."**[25]
>
> *One of five core principles developed
> collaboratively between the Dharriwaa Elders
> Group (DEG) and UNSW that underpins all work.*

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES ARE REQUIRED TO ADDRESS LOCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE AND CHILD POVERTY

There are persistent pockets of locational disadvantage in many Australian communities, and this is a major contributing factor to overall levels of poverty in Australia and children growing up in entrenched cycles of disadvantage.[26] The OECD's Framework for Policy Action on Inclusive Growth conceptualises locational disadvantage as a community's geographic and/or social disconnection from wider economic prosperity. It finds that locational disadvantage reduces growth as nations fail to benefit from a productive contribution from portions of the population.[27] According to the 2021 Dropping Off the Edge Report, locational disadvantage is highly concentrated, with five per cent of communities experiencing enduring disadvantage. It is also persistent — the 2021 ten most disadvantaged locations in Victoria were also on the same list in 2015. Further, it is multilayered, with multiple indicators of disadvantage occurring in the same locations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander communities continue to experience disproportionate disadvantage, with a deteriorating trend for some communities, particularly in parts of remote Australia.[28]

For the above reasons, addressing persistent locational disadvantage has emerged as being critical to poverty reduction in Australia. Several recent Australian research initiatives have sought to further quantify place-based disadvantage and poverty, looking at a range of indicators such as income, employment, education, health, housing, and other outcomes.[29] Some of these studies have placed locational analysis firmly into the current public discourse by translating statistics into 'apples with apples' suburb-level comparison across Australia, using metrics that communities strongly and easily identify with, such as overall level of advantage or disadvantage[30] or childcare availability.[31] Other key pieces of analysis are now underway including under the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children (being auspiced by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and supported by a range of not-for-profit and for-purpose funders) which is working to identify communities that could effectively use significant place-based investments to shift the dial on disadvantage and the service integration models that might best result in high value outcomes.[32]

The dynamics of locational disadvantage and how to address it is, in large part, best understood at the community level. Places dealing with entrenched disadvantage are not well served by centralised delivery of services alone. These services are best understood as necessary but not sufficient tools of social change. Relationships must also be built between community members, service providers and local institutions who share the community environment and who can work together effectively to solve problems and create opportunities as part of functioning community ecosystems.[33]

Areas of locational disadvantage also experience the concentrated effects of broader economic downturns. The current fiscal climate including rising interest rates and costs of living is impacting the most on those who were already strained under the weight of persistent disadvantage.[34] In times of wider economic pressure, it is also people who are on the cusp of financial hardship that are then pushed into definitional poverty or unemployment,

meaning there will be new pockets of disadvantage and new cohorts within communities that need targeted interventions or otherwise risk not being able to recover from the impacts, even when the economy does.[35] This is particularly true when it comes to skills and housing shortages, which are often also concentrated and more heavily felt in particular areas.

> **"Our region has not historically been recognised as having a high profile of entrenched disadvantage. In fact, Gladstone's high average incomes and industry investment have often created perceptions of a wealthy community…As a relatively small regional town that hosts global resource giants, Gladstone city offers high incomes to those 'in' industry, which results in a two-tier economy for residents…further exacerbated by the town's Boom-and-Bust growth cycle which creates an inflated cost of living for specific periods of time, further widening the divide between the 'haves' and 'have nots'."** [36]
>
> *Gladstone Region Together, Our Journey Story to 2021*

BOX 4: PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TACKLING HOW TO BEST HELP KIDS IN GREATEST NEED

The majority of Australia's vulnerable children are concentrated in a small number of places. In New South Wales, children living in locations of persistent disadvantage are:

- 4.4 times more likely to live in public housing;
- 4 times more likely to experience family violence;
- 2.7 times more likely to have jobless parents; and
- 2.4 times less likely to be in employment, education or training by the age of 24.[37]

Over 40 per cent of children in poverty live in single parent households[38] and at least 42 per cent of single parent households report a past experience of family violence.[39]

While macro-economic conditions and universal services such as income support are critical to addressing issues of child poverty, it is also vital to understand the complex dynamics of families and communities in specific locations and the ecosystem that exists there to support them.[40]

We know that vulnerable children tend to live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and face physical, social, service, socio-economic and governance barriers to getting the neighbourhood infrastructure and services they require despite increased support needs. The solution lies in designing supportive and networked local early intervention services such as child and family, early childhood education and broader social services that wrap around children and families to assist them to get a good start in life.[41] Research has also demonstrated the importance of fit-for-purpose built neighbourhood environments including housing, community spaces and parks, childcare facilities, and other infrastructure and services to child development.[42]

In Australia and internationally, place-based interventions have been developed as potential solutions that consider how to take a multidimensional and place-based approach to understanding the dynamics of childhood poverty and then create strong and supportive communities for children in different locations.[43] Research has shown that local decision-making is a key factor in predicting better outcomes in comparable disadvantaged neighbourhoods.[44]

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES ARE REQUIRED TO RESPOND TO THE GROWING DIVERSITY OF REGIONS ACROSS AUSTRALIA AND THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISRUPTION THEY FACE

Australia's huge landmass and the diversity of its environments and the social, economic, cultural, and demographic profile of its cities, regions and communities means aspirations and challenges vary markedly in different places. While some of the solutions can be found in broad-scale policies and programs, many of them must be designed and implemented at the regional and local levels. Initiatives designed for one place just often don't work the same way in another, given the different circumstances and needs in the diversity of Australian communities.

It is likely that growing environmental, economic and social disruption in regions across Australia will increase the need for differentiated place-based approaches in decades to come. Policy makers and practitioners are seeing community or regional responses aiming to support community preparedness and recovery and regeneration in the aftermath of natural disasters as part of the evolving body of place-based and community-led work in Australia.[45]

There is also increasing evidence that place-based approaches can play an effective role in dealing with natural disasters or health emergencies because communities know what communities need and can mobilise to act quickly. The Dusseldorp Forum released a paper during the height of the Covid-19 response that provided real-time examples of how place-based approaches were enabling community driven resilience and response. The paper found that having community agency and

ownership at their heart, place-based initiatives were able to deliver timely, targeted and demand driven actions to support communities and they provided welcome contrast to top-down relief efforts that were stymied by duplication, delays and unmet demand.[46] One example is the role local Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations played with local leaders and communities developing localised strategies for the roll-out of vaccines and managing community health and safety.[47]

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES OFFER A WAY TO RESET RELATIONSHIPS AND RESTORE TRUST WITH COMMUNITIES

Place-based approaches are also critical for growing community connection, social inclusion and local democracy and offer a way of resetting and reinvigorating the relationships between governments, business, for-purpose funders and not-for-profit organisations, universities and research, and local communities.

There is growing momentum behind the idea significant reforms are required to ensure government agencies, programs and investments are more responsive to local contexts and able to support community-led solutions.[48] In 2020, the Edelman Trust Barometer found that over half of Australians attribute the government's inability to listen and understand their needs as key drivers of declining trust.[49] Reforming the way government engages with communities by putting places and people at centre is a critical part of the answer and investing in place-based approaches is a practical way forward.

"
"Lighthouse has been very effective at mobilising local businesses who want to contribute to the community but have not yet found a model that aligns with their workloads, skills and interests. This is not an insignificant finding, because it demonstrates that local businesses have an interest in community work and want to connect to opportunities but are not exactly sure how... As one company commented, 'It's great to hand the cheque over, but we actually wanted everyone to be part of something.'"[50]

Lighthouse Greater Shepparton Evaluation 2020

"
"ITAT [It Takes a Town] is all about growing permission and confidence to act. We want new leaders to emerge, who in turn can generate more opportunities for people to thrive.

ITAT will back anyone who has an idea that can contribute to thriving or wellbeing in the local area, whether it be social, environmental, economic or cultural. This backing of individuals has led to 31 new initiatives, projects and businesses being launched in the local area, benefiting everyone."[51]

It Takes a Town (Murwillumbah, NSW)

Naylarni Munro (R) and Shaylyn Smith from Moree have big dreams for their futures.

Place-based work is achieving impact but we need more evidence

The broad, varied and growing catalogue of place-based work across Australia continues to bring forth a range of approaches to measure impact including evaluations, progressive public sharing of measurement (e.g community dashboards), and external metrics seeking to monitor trends in locational disadvantage. However, there remains a clear need to continue to improve the evidence-base and evaluate the effectiveness of specific initiatives.[52] This is critical because if we are to move toward embedding place-based approaches as a key plank of Australia's policy, program and investment structures, there will need to be increased robust evidence and rigour around both impact and cost-effectiveness over time.

However, one of the fundamental realities of current place-based approaches is that they are often introduced when other supports have failed to make headway on entrenched problems. Steady investment, effort and time is needed before it is possible to expect sustained improvements in outcomes. It is also the case that given the early stages of many place-based and community-led initiatives in Australia, evaluations are often still at the developmental or formative stages and focus on qualitative information about the design elements needed to help improve the functionality of initiatives.

Despite these challenges, there is now compelling evidence demonstrating place-based approaches can be effective in developing community capability, creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage. Box 5 sets out a snapshot of early evidence of impact from the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative. The overall message from many working in this area is that there is enough evidence to ramp up place-based work in Australia with the expectation it will achieve results if carefully designed while, in parallel, maintaining a strong focus on improving tools to track evidence of impact and being willing to adjust and learn along the way.[53]

BOX 5: *STRONGER PLACES, STRONGER PEOPLE* IS DISRUPTING DISADVANTAGE

An early process evaluation[54] has compiled a combination of data to find evidence that:

* Community-led change is disrupting disadvantage, children and families are connected and have improved wellbeing;
* Communities, governments and service providers have changed their behaviour and are coming together to collaborate and use resources differently; and
* Backbone teams are essential and turn what the community knows they need into reality — without local governance infrastructure and ways of working, changes would not happen.

Some snapshots of improvements included in the report showcase the work of:

* **Logan Together** — the rate of First Nations still births at Logan Maternity Hubs being 0.3 per cent, compared with rates in other parts of Queensland of between 1-5 per cent.
* **Maranguka Justice** — Daily check-ins between Maranguka, police, service providers and education and community services has contributed to major reductions in youth offending (50 per cent reduction in charges from January 2017 to June 2022), increased student retention and support for youth.
* **Burnie Works** — increased year 12 completion (from 56 per cent in 2011 to 86 per cent in 2020) and reduced unemployment stemming from youth education and employment connections.

EVIDENCE OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Given the maturity of place-based approaches in the early childhood area, that is where we see the majority of evaluations and most evidence of improvements in outcomes. While achieving sustained changes in outcomes for children and families in communities takes time and is subject to a range of local and macro social and economic factors, there are a range of quantitative studies that have sought to track child development, health and education outcomes associated with place-based approaches. Importantly, there have also been qualitative studies that seek to understand how interventions are perceived by local communities to be achieving change.

"

CAPTURING THE STORIES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS

"In the last couple of years, I have noticed many changes in Wilmot. There is less crime. People feel more connected. Whereas before, people never left their house, now they are out more...Relationships are building with the teens too, which means they are less likely to destroy the place." [55]

Together in Wilmot Evaluation Report

"Believe me, Doveton College helped me a lot. I talk to the Aussie people. I learn lots of words and make lots of friends. My daughter says, 'Mummy, you have lots of friends. Everybody says hi and hello, you have more than I have!'" [56]

Our Place Evaluation, 2020

A recent international systematic review of 13 individual studies of the quantitative evidence of place-based interventions demonstrated improvements in childhood outcomes in some cases, with evidence focused on dental health, parenting and child development, while noting challenges sustaining progress as children move through schooling. The review also concluded more work is required to determine the effectiveness of place-based interventions in improving outcomes in children, with robust evaluation frameworks built in design stages. [57]

Studies of the place-based Communities for Children program that has operated in Australia since 2004 found some beneficial effects for child receptive vocabulary, parenting and mothers' involvement in community activities and reducing jobless households. [58] An evaluation of the place-based Children's Ground Project, Ampe-kenhe Ahelhe, in Central Australia found that 85 per cent of participating children spoke their first language better or much better, 66 per cent spoke English better or much better and 89 per cent of families reported a child's improved physical and mental health. [59]

An often sought ideal of policy makers is to use population level indicators of locational disadvantage to verify progress of place-based initiatives. However, changes in local communities are very difficult to measure at the macro level. Program areas do not always map well onto administrative and statistical boundaries, changes take time and there are many factors including mobility to take into account. [60] It is also important to understand that contribution analysis rather than attribution analysis is a more realistic way to proceed, looking for signs of patterns and significant changes. [61]

Preliminary analysis undertaken by Equity Economics of the 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) indicates that Local Government Areas (LGAs) with a Communities for Children coordinating partner may have outperformed the state averaged trends for child developmental vulnerability since 2009 in one or more dimensions by a factor of 2. Meanwhile, the ACT, which did not have a Communities for Children program, saw the largest increase in developmental vulnerability of all states.

CHILDREN IN AREAS WITH A CfC COORDINATING PARTNER SAW A GREATER REDUCTION IN DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY THAN LGAs WITHOUT A CfC PARTNER

Developmental Vulnerability On 1 Or More Dimensions
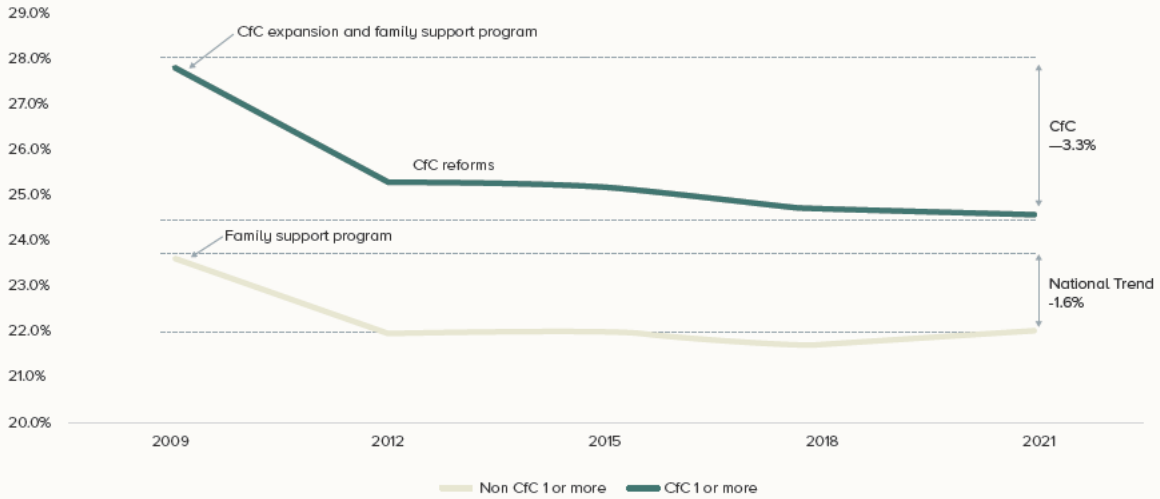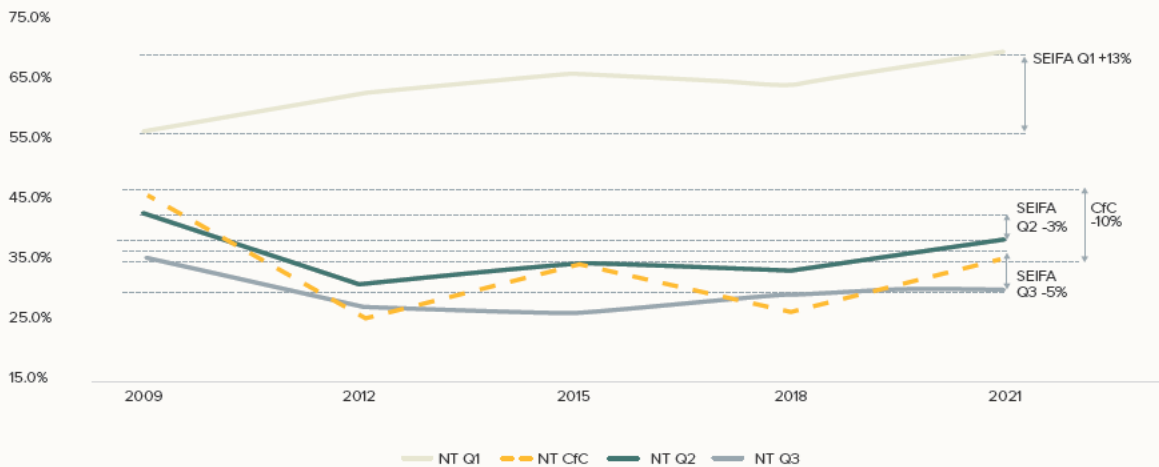

Figure 1: Equity Economics Analysis of AEDC 2021, DSS

IN THE NT LGAs WITH A CfC COORDINATING PARTNER IMPROVED MORE IN SEIFA QUINTILES 2 AND 3 WHILE QUINTILE 1 WENT BACKWARDS

Developmental Vulnerability On 1 or More Indicators, By SEIFA Quintile

- Lowest Quintile in the Northern Territory seeing an extreme deteriorating trend
- Other Quintiles have seen moderate improvements
- Signs that CfC Programs have an impact

Figure 2: Equity Economics Analysis of AEDC 2021, DSS

AEDC 2021 VULNERABILITY ON ONE OR MORE DOMAINS: CfC PARTNER AREAS AVERAGE IMPACT

State	2009	2021	State Level Difference	Difference in CfC Project Areas (LGA)	Net Impact
Northern Territory	38.7	39.1	+0.4	-10.0	-10.5
South Australia	22.7	23.7	+1.0	-1.5	-2.5
Victoria	20.3	19.9	-0.3	-2.5	-2.1
Western Australia	24.7	20.3	-4.4	-4.9	-0.5
New South Wales	21.3	21.1	-0.1	-1.0	-0.8
ACT	22.1	26.7	+4.5	n/a	n/a
Queensland	29.6	24.7	-4.9	-5.0	-0.1
Tasmania	21.8	23.2	+1.4	+0.7	-0.6
Program weighted average impact				-3.2	-1.6

Table 1: AECD 2021 Vulnerability on one or more domains: CfC partner areas average impact

AEDC 2021 VULNERABILITY ON ONE OR MORE DOMAINS CAPE YORK WELFARE REFORM

State	2009	2021	State Level Difference	Difference in CfC Project Areas (LGA)	Net Impact
Queensland	29.6	24.7	-4.9	-13.7	-8.8

Table 2: AECD 2021 Vulnerability on one or more domains: Cape York Welfare Reform

The Dropping off the Edge (DOTE) report publishes indices that draw on a wide variety of vulnerability indicators and includes a table of highly disadvantaged communities that have experienced positive changes.[62] Five SA2s linked to the programming areas of five key place-based initiatives founded around or before 2015 (Logan Together, The Hive, Doveton College, Growing Brimbank, Maranguka Justice) were listed as having band 1 or band 2 improvements in 2021. LGAs associated with these place-based interventions also saw significant improvements in AEDC outcomes (where programmatically relevant).
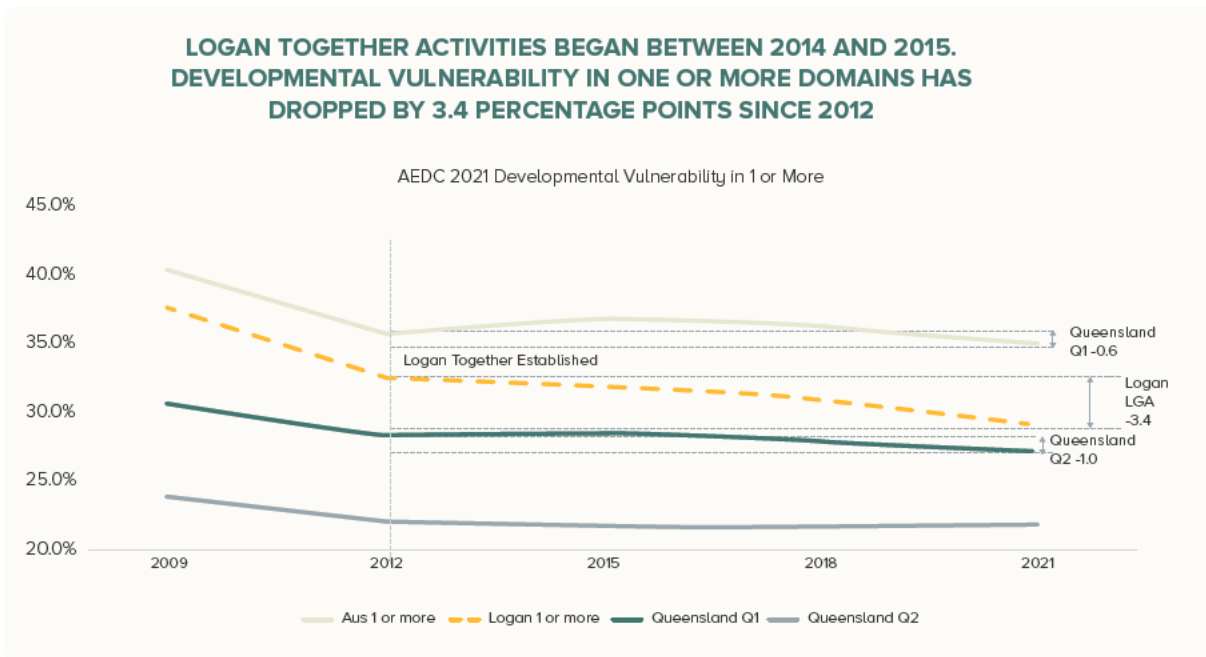
LOGAN TOGETHER ACTIVITIES BEGAN BETWEEN 2014 AND 2015. DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITY IN ONE OR MORE DOMAINS HAS DROPPED BY 3.4 PERCENTAGE POINTS SINCE 2012

Figure 3: Equity Economics Analysis of AEDC 2021, DSS

CHILDREN IN DOVETON SA2 OUTPERFORMED VICTORIA TREND FOR LOWEST 2 QUINTILES FROM 2012 TO 2021

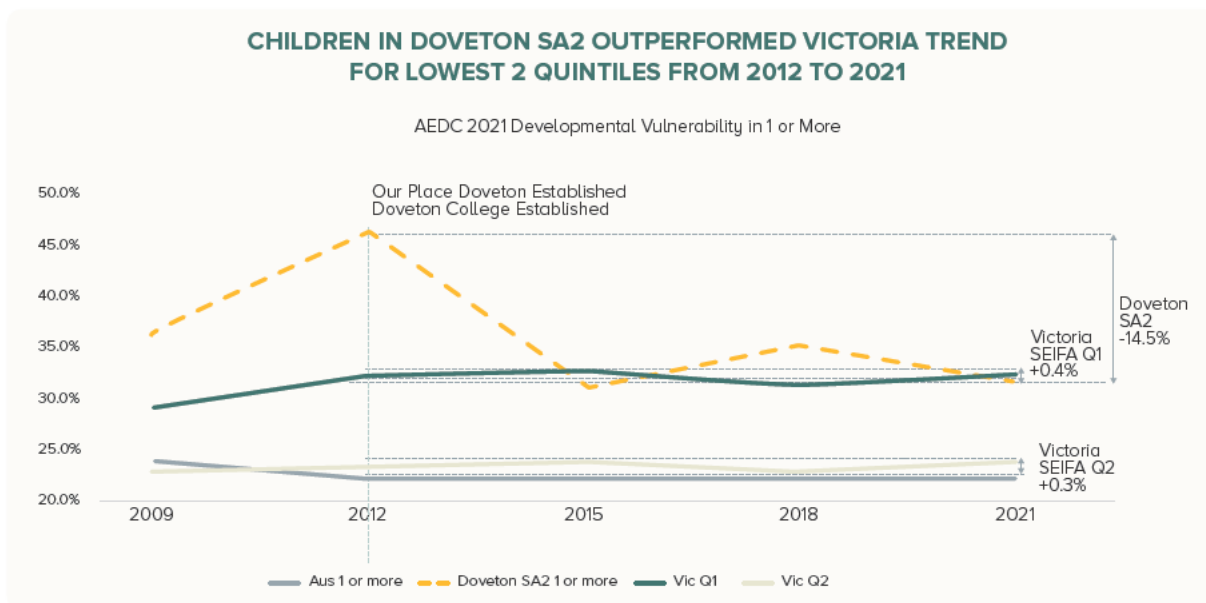AEDC 2021 Developmental Vulnerability in 1 or More

Figure 4: Equity Economics Analysis of AEDC 2021, DS

DOTE 2021 MOST IMPROVED DATA AGAINST PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES

Place-based community-led initiative	DOTE 2021 most improved SA2	Change in AEDC 2012-2021 data LGA or SA2 Developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more
Logan Together	Kingston (Band 1)	Logan LGA -3.4 (cf. Queensland lowest quintile -0.6)
The Hive	Mt Druitt (Band 1)	Mt Druitt SA2 -0.7 (cf. NSW lowest quintile +1.3)
Doveton College, Our Place Doveton	Doveton (Band 2)	Doveton SA2 –14.5 (cf. Victoria lowest quintile +0.3)
Growing Brimbank	St Albans Nth (Band 2)	N/A
Maranguka Justice	Bourke (Band 2)	N/A
Connecting Community for Kids	-	Cockburn LGA -4.0 (c.f. W/A lowest quintile -3.0)

Table 3: DOTE 2021

While this is early analysis, it does indicate that careful use of locational disadvantage metrics can help demonstrate that place-based and community-led approaches are important to addressing childhood disadvantage in Australia.

Structural reforms are needed alongside new investments to achieve long-term outcomes

Place-based work is increasing in scale, with energy being invested into improving resourcing and strengthening the networks supporting communities and practitioners across the country. For-purpose funders (i.e. philanthropic foundations) and not-for-profit organisations, who in many cases acted as early funders and partners of place-based and community-led approaches, have shifted from not only providing resources to specific initiatives but explicitly focusing on building capacity at

scale in multiple communities across Australia and coordinating their investments for greater impact, including through the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children.[63] Governments have also demonstrated their increasing commitment, including through the recent Australian Government 2023-24 Budget announcing investment of $200 million in an integrated package to address entrenched and concentrated community disadvantage (see Box 6 below).[64]

BOX 6: COMMONWEALTH BUDGET 2023-24 PACKAGE TO ADDRESS LOCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE[65]

The Budget package to address entrenched and locational disadvantage will be underpinned by a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage and includes:

- $64 million to extend the *Stronger Places, Stronger People* initiative;
- $16.4 million to build community data capability and develop an integrated data asset to better inform priorities and track outcomes, with funds also provided for the Australian Bureau of Statistics to support this work, including through the Life Course Data Initiative;

- $100 million to establish an Outcomes Fund to be co-designed and supporting investment partnerships with states and territories and other stakeholders including philanthropic organisations under the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children for programs delivered in local communities;
- $11.6 million Social Enterprise Development Initiative to provide education and mentoring for community organisations to access capital and support improved outcomes; and
- $8.7 million over four years to support the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee.

There is also an increasing body of research and tools available to place-based practitioners. Platform C is a knowledge and learning platform supported by Collaboration for Impact which offers support, learning and connections for those engaged in collective impact work.[66] The Jesuit Social Services Centre for Just Peace recently worked with a number of partners to bring together lessons on what works for place-based approaches

across Victoria and to identify areas for future focus including: governance models; evaluation methods supported by theories of change and data; and community engagement and participation.[67] Important networking events such as ChangeFest are also playing a vital role in strengthening networks across place-based initiatives and celebrating achievements.[68]

> **"ChangeFest 2023 was a powerful moment in time for the ChangeFest movement – we celebrated, learned and deepened our connections with each other and with place in Lutruwita/Tasmania...this was the fourth gathering of the ChangeFest movement, and what a turn out!**
> **...**
> **At the same time, there is much more to be done to realise the shared and bigger vision we have for community-led systems change in Australia being, 'the way we do things around here', rather than the 'nice to have' of how change happens."** [69]
>
> *ChangeFest website*

The Australian Government Department of Social Services efforts to establish a National Centre for Place-based Collaboration (Nexus Centre) is also a major development. This will seek to amplify place-based work across Australia and bring together government agencies, service providers and communities to work together on common barriers and factors for success.[70] A consortium comprised of the University of Queensland, Australia and New Zealand School of Government and Collaboration for Impact has been established to lay the groundwork for the Nexus Centre and has begun reaching out to a broad range of organisations considered active and important for the successful growth of place-based work across Australia.

Multiple state and territory governments have also developed frameworks for place-based practice within their jurisdictions. For example, the Victorian Government has introduced a framework for place-based approaches and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions houses a Place-based Reform and Delivery Branch.[71] In South Australia, the Department of Human Services is supporting Together SA.[72] In Queensland, the Department of Communities, Housing and the Digital Economy is supporting place-based practice across government agencies in the state.[73]

However, major structural challenges to place-based work remain. Australia now has a chance to capitalise on current momentum and create a more fertile authorising environment for place-based work. A key objective should be to remove the significant barriers that currently prevent it from becoming embedded as part of the suite of investment, policy and program approaches we commonly use to achieve outcomes for people and communities across the nation.

Multiple recent thought pieces and reports, including from the Australian Government's Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, have contributed to an overall stocktake of place-based and collective impact approaches in Australia. In different ways this body of work suggests the nation is reaching a critical decision point about whether or not we will go down the path of comprehensively embracing place-based approaches alongside other central pillars of program investment and support and the reform agenda we may need to do so.[74] Efforts to link up place-based initiatives, increase resources and maximise their capacity for improved outcomes will only go so-far without everyone agreeing a clear reform agenda, coordinating efforts and understanding their roles.

> **"The Committee recommends greater focus on place based approaches to rewire investment in areas where the biggest lift in economic inclusion can be achieved. To do this well, Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments should work together to empower shared decision making at the local level and combine investment across many agencies into integrated, people-focused, and capabilities-based models of care and support."**[75]
>
> *Interim Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee: 2023–24 Report to the Australian Government*

Optimising the operating environment for place-based work is not straightforward, while also not being as difficult as many would make it out to be. Below we identify three major roadblocks that will impede the future potential of place-based approaches in Australia if they are not squarely tackled.

REFORMING TOP-DOWN INFLEXIBLE STRUCTURES, PROGRAMS AND INVESTMENT MODELS

At present, broad-based subject programs (e.g. health, education, housing) and cohort-based programs (e.g. older Australians, teens, children) are the dominant government investment strategy for public spending and the appropriation of public money. These underpin much of the structure of government agencies, programs and reporting requirements. Major investments and social programs are commonly designed to be rolled-out centrally at the Commonwealth and state/territory levels and with a relatively uniform approach.[76] Many of Australia's non-government organisations and businesses also operate in highly centralised ways. Overall, the culture and practice in Australia of appropriately devolving decision-making power and resources to the regional and local levels to allow a tailoring of local solutions to local issues and priorities remains a work in progress across all sectors.[77]

"

"The first 12 months of funding for The Hive was pulled together from a hodge podge of unexpended funds from FACS central office... It was seen as an opportunity to fund an innovative model. The Hive doesn't neatly fit into any of the department's funding streams".[78]

NSW Department of Family and Community Services employee speaking about The Hive (NSW)

Top-down inflexible structures, programs and investment models present a major challenge for place-based approaches. It is common for initiatives to have to deal with a large number of Commonwealth and state government agencies and non-government organisations delivering multiple different and, at times, conflicting investments and programs, tied to specific purposes and timeframes. It proves very difficult to align these or seek to re-direct investment to community priorities or decision-making processes.[79] This has been a key issue in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities seeking to grapple with fragmented service delivery and has had a detrimental impact on achieving sustained improvements in community outcomes.[80]

While there are examples of governments seeking to re-frame programs or investments to support place-based and community-led initiatives, the reality is this is extremely hard work because most government departments and programs are not currently set up well to support these initiatives and there is a limited authorising environment — many of the incentives embedded in existing agency structures, programs and guidelines in fact steer public servants away from being able to support these initiatives effectively.[81] As a result, more often governments seek to deliver funding for these initiatives as an 'add on' to pre-existing programs, for example by developing a separate pool of funds. While a practical and welcome solution, this does not deal with the underlying need to make existing programs and service systems more responsive to the needs of specific communities and places and severely limits the pool of funding available. Place-based initiatives founded on well-designed theories of change designed to address specific community issues and priorities can get swamped by existing programs that are, at best, unaligned, or at worst, pulling in a completely different direction.[82]

The fact existing programs and investments are often not being effectively harnessed towards supporting place-based initiatives is also a missed opportunity in achieving more effective investment and expenditure in communities across the board.

A number of pieces of research and analysis have been done in Australia on the very high spend per head on social services that occurs in places of disadvantage for insufficient outcomes. For example, in Roebourne, WA, a case study of social investment found that 206 services were delivered in the community across 63 service providers at a total cost of $58.7 million ($41,600 cost for each of the 1,410 population). Yet over the past 15 years there has been little material change in underlying social conditions or in population level indicators, despite programs successfully meeting their delivery requirements.[83] The 2018 Queensland Productivity Commission into remote service delivery found expenditure of $29,000 per person or $1.2 billion per annum, highlighting one example of 78 discrete services delivered to a town of 1,100 people.[84] A critical take-out from these and similar pieces of research is that this investment is not adding up to change in part because of the siloing and delivery of services controlled from afar and that joined-up place-based and community-led approaches are a part of the answer.

>
> **"We have a problem. We don't have a Department of Growing Kids Up Well. We have instead a fragmented social investment system that has developed across the years and across different agencies and tiers of government in an organic, reflexive way...We have homelessness programs to deal with homelessness, jobs programs to deal with joblessness, family support programs to deal with families in crisis ... and so it goes on... These investments land in local communities like a random meteor shower, each one inspiring in its own way, but often too small or fleeting to meaningfully attack the root causes of poverty."[85]**
>
> *Matthew Cox, founding Executive Director, Logan Together.*

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

The solution lies in government and other leaders setting out a substantial reform agenda for place-based approaches to be more readily used alongside broad-based subject and cohort programs which are also critical and often founded on important principles of universal rights and access. The goal is to develop systems that can more easily integrate local place-based work and large-scale policy development and service design. We should seek to avoid overly simplified portrayals of place-based and community-led approaches as desiring a radical upending of authority where local is king and universal systems and technical and administrative authority are exiled.[86] What is required is for the reach, authority and capability of big systems and services to be harmonised with local context and knowledge, and harness the powerful social and cultural processes that already operate in communities through place-based and community-led work (and for all processes to influence and inform each other").[87]

Place-based approaches can be of major assistance in addressing many of the problems faced trying to deliver centralised investments and programs with individual pipelines across urban, regional and remote Australia.

>
> **"The Challis model has enabled local children to go from a position of disadvantage to exceeding the state average at the start of their education, proving the importance of early intervention.**
>
> **It has informed a number of policy initiatives, including the Western Australian State Government Child and Parent Centres and the federal government's Connected Beginnings initiative, and provides a platform for ongoing Minderoo Foundation advocacy around effective early childhood investment."[88]**
>
> *Challis Primary School Integrated Early Childhood and Family Support Service*

It is often the case that individual agencies are not alone able to build the organisations, workforce, IT and data infrastructure required for the effective delivery of their specific programs to achieve outcomes, particularly across regional and remote Australia where there are significant provider and workforce issues. The reality is they need to either decide to heavily invest in creating this architecture or rely on existing community organisations that are already in place and are often working to deliver other programs and initiatives for governments and other investors.[89] There is an opportunity to make this reality more explicit through normalising the practice of agencies entering into place-based partnerships with backbone organisations and seeking to achieve their outcomes through aligning investments with existing community priorities and plans. Backbone organisations engaged in place-based work are critical in enabling agency investments to be more effective, efficient and less duplicative in the long run.[90]

One of the priorities of the Australian Public Service Reform Agenda is to set a higher standard of partnership, engagement and co-design aimed at putting people and business at the centre of policy, implementation and delivery.[91] In addition, existing principles of good policy and program delivery such as those contained within the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines already highlight the importance of working closely with community organisations and partners in the design of grant opportunities aligning with existing efforts, ensuring value for money and reducing administrative burden and duplication.[92]

While challenging, the task firmly needs to be set of fixing the 'plumbing' of aligning appropriations for specific outcomes through program and grant reform processes so they can be better matched up with place-based approaches. Taking on this challenge offers a way of reforming the existing outdated scattergun grant funding mechanisms to better support community planning and change based on local priorities and need. This will be hard work to be pursued in stages as capabilities are developed but it is by no means impossible.

The starting point could be undertaking a public sector reform and finance process to highlight ways agencies can flexibly use grant opportunities under the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines to support place-based approaches and particularly how to link up investments to achieve community plans and shared outcomes. This needs to be done while maintaining lines of accountability and ensuring there are opportunities for a wide variety of organisations to play roles according to their capabilities, respecting the need for new entrants and competition where appropriate. New guidelines could be issued to agencies asking them to consider how new programs and investments might seek to back in place-based approaches. They could also be asked to consider the success factors for place-based work when designing their community grants programs (e.g. duration of funds) as many of these are also critical to the successful delivery of community investments across the board (see Appendix 3). This work could occur in parallel and be informed by the new proposed whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage.

It is also important to recognise that pursuing these types of reforms, while challenging, is not an insurmountable stretch. There is a bigger base of existing place-based activity and models to draw on in Australia than is commonly understood if we look across health, employment, natural resource management and other sectors. There are many ongoing policy and program design discussions that highlight the need for major universal social services programs, for example employment services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, to ensure they work effectively with local communities and organisations rather than seek to superimpose new structures and networks over them. For example, Community Development Program (CDP) providers are now re-directing around 25 per cent of their funding to work with remote communities to trial community-led approaches to securing real jobs for participants based on local knowledge and networks of organisations and business.[93]

In heading down this path, it is critical there are also cultural reforms across governments, business, for-purpose funders, not-for-profit, business, universities and research that assist in demonstrating the value of more equal power relationships critical for genuine negotiations; 'paying what it takes' to local organisations so they can build their capability to represent their communities, keep pace and make good decisions[94]; and supporting smarter local investment structures that allow investors to pool money for collective outcomes.[95] The ultimate aim is for all sectors to share leadership with the communities and people with lived experience of the challenges everyone is seeking to address.

REIMAGINING OF TRADITIONAL ROLES ACROSS SECTORS

There is now growing emphasis on developing much clearer governance structures and long-term partnerships to support place-based approaches across community, NGO, for-purpose funders, government, university and business partners.[96] However, further maturing of these models and partnerships is still required to ensure partners play to their strengths and balance their contributions in an environment of much greater openness, flexibility and collaboration. A reshaping of traditional, archetypal roles and responsibilities that actors and sectors have held is proving necessary to transcend the persistent challenges of locational disadvantage even beyond Australia, as recently showcased in the United Kingdom's major reform piece 'Levelling-Up'[97]. Box 7 contains a snapshot of the contribution different sectors are already making to place-based work and identifies key strengths that could be built upon.

"

"Sometimes government people come with the assumption that they are in control and forget about the importance of the two-way relationships and decision-making. If governments don't come with an open mind and heart to hear our voice, that's when problems occur."[98]

Mandaka 'Djami' Marika, former managing director, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation

"

**"Our researchers and project staff are working with the learning communities connected with eight schools in NSW, to establish the 'culturally nourishing' schooling model as central to their current strategic planning and operations. The model is a research-informed framework designed to improve the academic achievements of Indigenous learners while concurrently fostering a strong and healthy cultural identity grounded in the local context.
...
"This incredible partnership has the capacity to transform the school experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across NSW."[99]**

Associate Professor Kevin Lowe, Chief Investigator – Culturally Nourishing Schooling

BOX 7: ROLES AND STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS COLLABORATING IN PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Key strengths to bring to the table

- Source of momentum, inspiration, advocacy, commitment and accountability.

- Local knowledge of community strengths and challenges.

- Understanding local actors, organisations cultures, traditions and languages.

- Source of leadership and in-kind contributions.

- Access to workforce of community service staff that locally tailors delivery.

Community in place-based approaches refers to both active participants and voices (i.e. community leaders and organisations engaged in place-based work or delivering local services), as well as the population who live and/or work within the footprint of the initiative.[100]

Communities must play a leading role as both key stakeholder and key beneficiary, but not all place-based activities are community-led in the sense they are driven by community leaders and collective processes rather than outside agencies or organisations. Community-led approaches shift beyond simple mechanisms of community-engagement to genuine and sustained community ownership.[101]

Community leadership and involvement can take on many forms — from grassroots initiatives that have formed through the advocacy of individuals through to community 'backbone' organisations acting as the implementation vehicle for place-based work. A key focus of recent research on place-based work has been highlighting the critical element of 'movement building' based on local lived experiences addressing community-defined priorities and not an approach that focuses only on program management and service delivery/coordination.[102]

Key drivers of success are often the ability of a place-based initiative to meaningfully connect with and be representative of communities in a location, investing time and effort in the careful and skilful work to ensure trust, engaging and collaborating with groups central to the aspirations for change of a community, including First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse families, people with disability, people of different ages, and LGBTIQ+ people.

Many non-government organisations with service delivery arms at the local level (e.g. community legal centres, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, child and family services and many others) also play a critical role in delivering elements of place-based initiatives (e.g. co-located child and family services and networks of community liaison/link officers).

BOX 7: ROLES AND STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS COLLABORATING IN PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Key strengths to bring to the table

- Knowledge of government policies and programs.

- Ability to navigate funding opportunities and address problems with existing program approaches and investments.

- Access to government data.

- Birds eye view of what is happening in other places and ability to share best practice.

- Understanding requirements for public investment and accountability.

The governments in place-based approaches refers to Commonwealth, state and local Government agencies. A major issue for all place-based approaches is how government agencies grapple with determining: how they might be represented in the place-based approach (e.g. appointing 'leads' to work across many agencies); obtain an authorising environment for co-design and shared local decision-making; and seek to align their policies and funding.

The work of **local governments** is place-based but they operate with relatively small amounts of decision-making authority and funding given Australia's highly centralised system of government at both the state and Commonwealth levels. The Australian Local Government Association has recently highlighted the increased role local councils could play in creating place-based synergies between community facilities and programs.[103]

State governments play a major role in place-based work with responsibility for much of the infrastructure and programs in communities including schools, child and community health centres and community housing being delivered by state governments.

The **Commonwealth government** is also a key player in place-based approaches due to the size of its budgets in social welfare and payments, health, education, First Nations development and other areas. Responsibility for many social service investments are shared between the federal and state governments. Since 2000, the Commonwealth government has led a number of initiatives aimed at responding to the circumstances of specific places (e.g. Stronger Places, Stronger People, Communities for Children and the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership).

BOX 7: ROLES AND STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS COLLABORATING IN PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Key strengths to bring to the table

- Community organising and facilitation.

- Convenor able to bring communities, government agencies and others to the table.

- Provision of seed funding and flexible resources for initiatives.

- Keen interest in sharing best practice and building networks.

For-purpose funders, including philanthropy, social impact investors and other donors have acted as early backers and partners of place-based and community-led approaches and have been particularly important in helping to establish and grow independent and innovative models such as justice reinvestment. Organisations in this sector have in some cases been able to bring the flexibility required to understand what communities seek, and the seed funding and support to the table, as well as obtaining the resources required for early evaluations.

In the US, place-based approaches are now emerging as a dominant mechanism for philanthropic grant-making.[104] In Australia, philanthropists and social impact organisations are also working hard to elevate the growing evidence of place-based activity and also realising their collective power in moving forward the agenda by creating networks across place-based initiatives, convening leadership and elevating the work of communities and practitioners. Social impact investors may be businesses, but also foundations or individuals, who are committed to their dollars catalysing social return alongside a financial one[105].

Some philanthropic and non-government organisations that operate at the state or national levels are also involved in providing program, administrative and other forms of support for place-based initiatives operating across multiple locations and ensuring they learn from one another. Organisations, including the Paul Ramsay Foundation, have been working hard to look at how they can most effectively support individual place-based initiatives but also contribute to the structural reforms required to create a more supportive environment for communities and leaders undertaking this work.

BOX 7: ROLES AND STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS COLLABORATING IN PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Key strengths to bring to the table

- Major institutions with facilities, expertise and the ability to unlock learning and employment pathways in their regions.

- Skills in knowledge exchange, research and evaluation.

- Ability to deliver education and professional development to place-based practitioners and future leaders.

The tertiary education and research sector is playing a growing role in place-based initiatives in a number of ways. Universities, including Victoria University in the Visy Cares Hubs[106], Griffith University in the case of Logan Together[107] and University of NSW in the case of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership[108], have been active partners in the design, delivery and ongoing strengthening of place-based activities in their local communities. The University of New England (UNE) has also made a public commitment to being 'place-based'. In Tamworth, there is a need for stronger local employment, and yet the town has lower than average levels of educational attainment. In response, UNE is working with local employers and community members to rapidly develop specialised undergraduate certificates in areas relevant to Tamworth workplaces.[109]

Many universities and research institutes are also playing an important role in evaluating place-based initiatives and bringing evidence of what works to the table. They also have a role to play in building the knowledge-base of place-based approaches and integrating this into tertiary education to contribute to a future pipeline of leaders and change-makers across all sectors who have a close understanding of the importance of 'place' and more significantly, have the toolkit to mobilise and strengthen place-based initiatives. There are early examples of universities heading in this direction, such as the University of Notre Dame which is offering short courses in Place Leadership that are high quality, masters-level learning experiences for place-sector professionals. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) in Melbourne is using its platform to elevate how the rise in place-based thinking applies to urban planning and housing, and is showcasing how place-centred policies are key to facilitating healthy, liveable, walkable, lively and inclusive cities.[110] The University of Queensland is also an increasing source of place-based research and practice.

BOX 7: ROLES AND STRENGTHS OF DIFFERENT SECTORS COLLABORATING IN PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Key strengths to bring to the table

- Local employers with an understanding of employment and business trends and needs.

- Investment and return principles, sometimes with longer-term horizons that can assist in understanding what is needed to generate long-term positive impacts.

- Flexible resources as part of corporate social responsibility.

- Ability to address how local business practices and culture can positively or negatively impact on community wellbeing.

Businesses are both a key enabler and funding partner in place-based work, given employment is so closely linked to wellbeing outcomes for families. The link between local industry and 'place' is strong, and particularly prominent in locations where a business or sector dominates the local economy and drives employment trends. Businesses are starting to realise the double dividend of investing in place-based approaches that extends further than good corporate social responsibility. Individual businesses choosing to invest in a place creates a flow-on effect, building other businesses. Investing in local economies and their 'downstream' supply chain in turn increases labour market participation and lifts socio-economic status, which has a knock-on effect for increasing business. Examples are also emerging of where industry and local government are working together in partnership within a local community to rescue and reroute local manufacturing or supply chains with great success.[111]

Business strategy can also be honed to align with community goals, for example providing employment and training opportunities to target marginalised groups and ensuring safe and dignified work at living wages.

Business also has a role as funder with a long history of charitable donation and community investment, however this is evolving into a more conscious and deliberate engagement with place-based approaches. According to the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs there has been a leap in the value of business 'giving' in Australia and corporate community investment in particular is reaching $17.5 billion. Partnerships with non-profit organisations to generate positive social impacts has emerged as the preferred way the largest businesses give in the community.[112]

More opportunities could be leveraged, such as large financial institutions, who tend have a strong history of community investment, but where existing scattergun grants/donations and volunteering hours could be used to 'back in' endorsed place-based models.

> "Understanding and addressing community needs is becoming critical to business success. I encourage managers and executives to look at their business through a new lens and find areas where community engagement can play a meaningful strategic role…
>
> In Bell Bay [Aluminium]'s case, helping the local community [George Town, Tasmania] leads to productivity benefits in terms of logistics savings and improving the socio-economic conditions in its workforce capture area. It's also helping to increase the innovation capacity and value-add of local suppliers."[113]

Phil Preston, Business Consultant, Facilitator

EFFECTIVELY USING DATA AND EVALUATIONS TO MONITOR IMPACT

Measurement and evaluation systems are a vital component of place-based and community-led initiatives.[114] While accountability to funders is a critical consideration, data and evaluation tools are also essential for communities to understand their situation and the results of their initiatives. The Indigenous data sovereignty movement is also predicated on communities playing a critical role in deciding what is measured and for what purpose.[115]

Communities need to be able to access good, meaningful local data at the outset as part of building the evidence base required to identify community priorities and establish baseline information. However, at present, government data systems are often still too aggregated to be sensitive to place and are siloed and unable to provide a full picture of all investments flowing into specific communities or regions. There needs to be significant effort towards improving the access to, and sharing of, government data that is meaningful at the local level.

> "The remoteness of the Far West Region is both a difficulty and a blessing from a data perspective. Small populations over a large area make it difficult for governments to report at a local level, but it creates a richness in local understanding of issues and data accuracy. Data is about telling stories: stories captivate, data validates." [116]

Far West Community Partnerships

There are clear commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap[117] and across a range of social service agencies to make progress on this issue but more action is required. The recent Budget 2023-24 announcement supporting place-based work also contained funding of $16.4 million to build communities' data capability and develop an integrated data asset to improve access to local data for decision-making. [118] Governments, philanthropic and university researchers also all have critical roles to play in assisting communities and backbone organisations to set realistic measurement targets and in providing the data they need to determine the extent to which their efforts are making a difference.[119]

> "Research is the story of 65,000 years of learning from observing what was happening. We passed this on through the stories of old people. This is research. This is what we are doing now – evaluating what we do at Children's Ground. We are doing research our way and the Western way."[120]

William Tilmouth, Founding Chair of Children's Ground (NT)

As a next step, place-based practitioners and researchers have also suggested it is critical that more work is undertaken to describe the key components and theories of change of particular place-based interventions in order to better establish data monitoring and evaluation frameworks.[121] While progress has been made improving the data and evaluation plans for place-based approaches in Australia, there remains a significant way to go, as is the case in most areas of policy and program delivery in Australia.[122] This makes it difficult to test cause and effect and draw conclusions about the cost effectiveness of interventions.[123]

It is also important there are supportive tools developed to increase understanding across all partners on the time it takes for communities to catalyse, start to grow place-based initiatives and the outcomes that might be realistically expected along the way. The Harwood Institute usefully describes five different stages of community readiness to embark on a process of collective impact: waiting; impasse; catalytic; growth; and sustain/renew.[124] The table in Appendix 4 seeks to explain these stages and the potential actions to take and outcomes we might expect to see at different stages. Unrealistic expectations can be damaging and lead to the perception that community problems are too entrenched and cannot be solved.[125]

Finally, it is critical for evaluations to highlight cases where there is lack of progress due to problems aligning design factors such as resources for backbone organisations, and capability building. Here, developmental evaluations can be key in understanding the barriers to progress and how to overcome them. Funders and other partners should be open, flexible and supportive during these processes so issues can be resolved.[126] It is also important to remember that while more effort is required on data and evaluation it also needs to be manageable, targeted, useful and accessible to communities (for example, many place-based initiatives are building in website-based data dashboards to showcase impact against metrics that matter most to locals). As is the case across many areas of complex social policy, good data and evaluation practice is difficult to achieve and, in particular, excessive and centralised reporting can undermine effectiveness of approaches.[127] Promisingly, this sits against the backdrop of recently announced Commonwealth funding toward increasing government evaluation-capability that will build and broaden the evidence of policy efficacy, beyond the often traditionally fiscally-focused remit of evaluations.[128]

Children learn and connect to culture at the Gujaga child care centre.

While the above three structural reforms are critical to sustain and elevate place-based work in Australia, it is important in tandem to strengthen ways of working on-the-ground with community leaders across all sectors. It is often behaviours and practices that are the key to maintaining momentum and reducing risks of burnout across place-based actors. Box 8 below outlines some of the common feedback from community leaders on what they really need to be able to fully, meaningfully and sustainably take forward place-based work.

BOX 8: SO, WHAT DO COMMUNITY LEADERS NEED?[129]

Ownership, but not overburdening

Engagement with community is not enough for place-based approaches to succeed. In order for initiatives to strive for ambitious levels of impact and change, communities need to be empowered and placed on an even footing with other partners as the shared owners of the activities taking place in their regions. This is a delicate balance as the community leaders or community organisations central to design and delivery of initiatives must not be overloaded with responsibility under the guise of devolved 'hands-off' responsibility. All contributing partners to any place-based activity have the responsibility of ensuring local community leaders and organisations are not overburdened, and where they are identified as the best or only option to take on particular functions, they are backed-in with adequate short-term support while effort is put into identifying others who are suitable to share leadership roles or to develop capability within existing local organisations.

Sustained support, offered flexibly

Community leaders need partners who turn up, consistently. In other words, investment in place-based activity, both in the sense of funding and in the form of partnership capability and capacity, must be sustained overtime. There needs to be an acknowledgement that designing, establishing, and settling these activities is a long game and support is needed end-to-end in the process. Alongside continuous support, community leaders need flexibility from contributors. The flexibility in offered resources will assist community leaders in being able to respond to real-time issues that emerge throughout the implementation of initiatives and to at all times strive to be led by what is the best solution configuration for community, rather than what restrictive resourcing allows.

A 'learning and sharing' mindset and culture from all partners

Place-based approaches, while established from a deep understanding of need within a location, are inherently a new way of thinking and working. In order to be most effective, community leaders should be supported in evoking a culture and mindset of learning across all activity and from all contributors. This means accepting that structures and processes will be built and developed over time, and that continuous feedback loops will be used to foster improvements. Communication and connection are key ingredients in effective place-based activities, so an information-sharing culture that has built in mechanisms for regular touchpoints with community leaders and sharing between partners is vital. Transparency to partners and to the community at large should be upheld as a key principle.

Where to from here? Roadmap for place-based reform in Australia

Australia has done promising work with place-based and community-led approaches across many policy domains but is yet to truly see what might be possible with sustained effort and structural reforms. Greater ambition and leadership, combined with practical system reforms are needed to create an environment more supportive of place-based and community-led work for the duration and at the scale needed to address locational disadvantage and, more broadly, position Australia's communities to be able to navigate increasing social, economic and environmental disruptions.[130] The reform roadmap in this section brings recent commitments and investments together alongside pieces that still need to be strengthened and tackled, stepping out the potential roles of communities, governments, not-for-profit organisations and service providers, and the philanthropic, business and university sectors. It is put forward for further discussion and refinement across all sectors.

Many of the actions in the roadmap build on the ideas and efforts of many place-based practitioners, policy-makers and researchers over years.[131] It is hoped the roadmap may contribute to upcoming work announced in the 2023-24 Budget on a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage as well as collaborations more broadly in years to come. With so many moving parts and new announcements, having a roadmap will be critical for all sectors to coordinate their efforts, share their expertise and connect with emerging investment and partnering opportunities.

The reform roadmap sets out an agenda at three levels:

1. **Support strategic investment in places** — maximise recent opportunities to improve certainty of resources for existing place-based initiatives and ensure opportunities to scale up partnerships across communities, governments, not-for-profit/for-purpose organisations, philanthropy, business, universities and research are not missed. This includes building on recent announcements establishing an Outcomes Fund, Investor Roundtable and the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children to end up with an ongoing national investment mechanism for all sectors to pool resources for ten-year place-based partnerships in communities across Australia.

2. **Strengthen practice and networks** — help place-based practitioners and supporters see themselves as part of the same body of work and increase capability and support for people working on all the complex pieces that need to come together for place-based approaches to achieve sustained outcomes. These include mechanisms for coordination of investment; robust governance models for ongoing collaboration across partners; defining theories of change and improving data and evaluation; and building capabilities of local leaders and organisations for long term resilience. The Nexus Centre could be a powerful anchor for this work and bring in expertise from a broad range of organisations involved in supporting place-based practice and research.

3. **Reform program and finance structures** — ensure place-based approaches are elevated to sit alongside and support universal and broad-based program and service delivery rather than remaining as an add-on. The aim is to make it easier for governments and other potential funders to invest in place-based approaches for shared sustained outcomes over the long-term. Good place-based practice has the potential to inform a broader reform agenda to improve the delivery of community grants, programs and investment across Australian communities as a whole. To achieve this, detailed work is required to establish how place-based initiatives can complement universal and broad-based funding models and work in practice, with the Departments of Social Services, Treasury and Finance playing lead roles. While significant place-based initiatives are underway and new commitments will improve resourcing, the long-term financing model is yet to be seriously grappled with. This is an area where Australia could play a major role as a leader in innovative policy financing and delivery for community outcomes.

Children learning at Gujaga child care centre.

	Strategic investment in places	Strengthening practice and networks	Reforming program and finance structures
Short-term actions **(1-3 years)**	• Accelerate and deliver certainty of funding and strengthened scaffolding for the Stronger Places, Stronger People initiatives. • Deliver the new Outcomes Fund supporting investment partnerships with States and Territories and other stakeholders. Efforts should be made to tailor investment partnerships to different stages of community readiness while maintaining long-term funding horizons (e.g. 5 plus 5 years) linked to evaluation and data points. • Convene the Investor Roundtable to support social impact investing initiatives. • Partner with philanthropic organisations to coordinate investment and support for initiatives including through the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children.	• Build on the Nexus Centre and commitment to a whole-of-government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage to develop a common broad framework and language[132] for place-based reform that helps bring together the body of work and share learnings across initiatives operating in different areas. This could be agreed across communities, governments, for-purpose funders/NGOs, universities, research and business. • Strengthen the toolkit for place-based approaches and build the capabilities for all sectors with a focus on: local mechanisms for coordination of investment; robust governance models for ongoing collaboration across partners; defining theories of change and improving data and evaluation; and building capabilities of local leaders and organisations.	• Establish a working group led by the Australian Government Departments of Social Services, Treasury and Finance with all sectors represented to develop public service and finance reform advice on how grants and program processes, guidelines and rules can be used to encourage all agencies to consider using existing and developing place-based approaches and backbone organisations to deliver investments for shared portfolio outcomes. • Deliver reforms to build communities' data capability and support from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other agencies to increase and improve local data for decision-making. • Cultural reform package developed as part of APS reforms to help navigate shared and devolved decision-making and accountability.
Long-term actions **(3-5 years)**	• Develop an ongoing national investment mechanism for communities, whole-of-government, business, philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations, universities and research to pool resources for ten-year place-based partnerships in communities across Australia.	• Ongoing maturing of place-based platforms, toolkits, social impact investing models and learning and professional development pathways for practitioners. • Launch of awards for place-based practice and initiatives to build public awareness and recognition. • Summative evaluation of all place-based initiatives to better understand what is working and what is not to assist sectors better target resources.	• New guidelines issued to bring principles for good community grants and other relevant programs into alignment with those guiding place-based approaches. • Redesign of department structures to better balance subject-based and geographic-based branches (particularly in key portfolios such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs).

		Strategic investment in places	Strengthening practice and networks	Reforming program and finance structures
Sector roles	**Community**	• Source of leadership and momentum. • Increasing clarity on community strengths, challenges and theories of change. • Increased accountability for outcomes based on realistic assessments of the stages of initiatives.	• Community leaders and practitioners contributing to the development of plain English common language and toolkits that help build capability and solve problems, with organisations and leaders remunerated for their time.	• Understand the public finance reform challenge faced by agencies. • Contribute advice from the perspective of being at the receiving end of grants and programs. • Demonstrate the power of effectively using local data.
	Government	• Longer-term funding agreements the rule rather than the exception with funding for staged evaluations. • Development of large-scale investment partnerships and design of ongoing national investment mechanisms to pool resources.	• Commonwealth, state/territory and local governments using inter-governmental processes and partnering with all sectors to develop a common broad framework and language for place-based reform. • Commonwealth, state/territory and local governments ensuring toolkits will work in practice for governments.	• Strong Minister and agency leadership and commitment to policy, public service and finance reform to build momentum and achieve results. • Further exploration of the effective role local government can play in more strongly supporting place-based approaches.
	NGO/Service Providers	• Increased use of integrated service models including co-location, service navigator, shared client and network models.	• NGOs and service providers ensuring toolkits work in practice and put forward incentives and barriers associated with integrated service models.	• Support contract and program funding changes that support shared outcomes and integrated service models.
	For-purpose funders	• Convenors able to bring sectors to the table to develop early large-scale investment partnerships. • Provision of flexible resources for initiatives, including funding critical community infrastructure and activities that will build readiness.	• Contribute resources and expertise to the development of toolkits, including convening necessary roundtables. • Support community leaders to share knowledge and to participate in making sure frameworks and toolkits are suitably inclusive of what is working in all local contexts.	• Demonstrate new ways of working to governments by building evidence base of what works and leveraging their resource base and reach to be the early adapters and testers of key reform directions as well as to encourage longer-term investment horizons and partnerships. • Convenors able to bring sectors to the table to assist government and assist in development of the cultural reform package.
	Universities and research	• Clear commitments to tailored education and employment pathways under investment partnerships.	• Ensure the toolkits work in practice for the development of learning and professional development pathways.	• Undertake research on barriers and examples of successful relevant policy, public service and finance reforms in this area nationally and internationally. • Elevate community perspectives and the voices of lived experience to influence reform.
	Business	• Clear commitments to employment and local workforce and industry development.	• Fund awards for place-based practice and initiatives to build public awareness and recognition. • Ensure the toolkits will work in practice for business.	• Provide advice on business practice in managing investments for shared outcomes, devolved decision-making and risk.

Risks to manage along the way

In forging ahead on a reform pathway towards further embedding place-based approaches as part of policy and service delivery in Australia, a series of risks and challenges will need to be managed.

Significant scaling of funding to local backbone organisations in various stages of maturity must be sensibly and sustainably paced. There is a need to test that the established governance models and partnerships in place are sufficiently robust to withstand the additional pressure from increasing the volume, scope and reach of place-based activity and to move carefully. Creating undue burden on these organisations could threaten their ability to meaningfully perform their critical function in place-based work, potentially destabilising existing initiatives and also undermining the success of new activities from the outset. Over the long-term, removing barriers to investment and increasing the scale of place-based activities must work to make it easier not harder to make progress.

Where backbone organisations don't yet exist, there will be a need to stimulate their development. This must not be a copy + paste of models from other locations and should take into account the context and existing local community organisations and their governance structures and move at the pace at which communities and local organisations need to go.

> **"Brokering relationships takes time, but trust has been earned. This trust has built because our stakeholders have seen we have done what we said we would do, through hard work, integrity, and with the best interests of the community at heart."** [133]
>
> *Backbone Manager, Go Goldfields (VIC)*

There has been a natural emergence of a cadre of community leaders and backbone organisations underpinning the place-based movement in Australia. There is an obvious benefit in harnessing their deep knowledge and experience to strongly contribute to reform, and also in using their skills to plant the seed for new place-based activities in locations where there are no such existing initiatives or history of this kind of approach. But caution should be applied in avoiding the overburdening of individuals and organisations and creating single points of failure. Current leadership needs to be supported by a sustained pipeline of 'new', energised and appropriately skilled individuals from communities and across sectors to form a network of place-based champions and sustain the pipeline of community leaders that undertake this work on behalf of their communities and local organisations. All sectors should put strategies in place to actively identify and grow this place-based leadership within their own organisations.

> **"There is just one person who has this huge responsibility… But I have to write funding applications to ensure the security of my job. One of the things that we've asked for is an extra person to do the community relationship and participation work. I'm not putting any energy into communications at the moment."** [134]
>
> *Backbone leader, Sanderson Alliance (NT)*

Leveraging and 'backing in' existing backbone organisations and/or established community leadership or governance structures can also create the potential for community gatekeeping or anti-competitive behaviour, whether real or perceived. When dealing with individuals and organisations with a history and existing relationships in a location, there should be transparency and clarity in processes as much as possible to ensure management of biases and conflicts, and so that funding or leadership decisions are merit-based and defensible, as well as well documented and communicated. There is also a need to continue to encourage new organisations and leaders to come to the table and demonstrate the outcomes they can achieve for their communities, aiming to link up and value different contributions rather than produce unnecessary duplication.[135]

In an attempt to tackle the portfolio-level siloing inherent in how the Australian government system organises itself, a new pattern of siloing at the geographic level must also be avoided. There should be adequate flexibility in funding across regions and strong data and information sharing mechanisms that link up individual geographic areas as parts of the whole, at both the state and national levels. There is also a need to clearly establish roles, dynamics and connection points between activities within the same place. Some are pointing to early signs of siloing already happening within and across the existing body of place-based activity, with the demands of such a new way of working creating blind spots to the opportunities to better align or connect with activity already taking place in particular localities — resulting in different initiatives 'tripping over each other'.[136]

Care also needs to be taken not to dilute the local sensitivity and responsiveness to context by scaling-up place-based activity to become a more mainstream delivery option. Consistency has typically been a key feature of program delivery across Australia under the guise of satisfying the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (PGPA) Act and Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines. It will require both a change in thinking, and in ways of working, to see that achieving scale can be managed without solutions looking the same in different local contexts, and while maintaining high standards of probity and accountability. Changes to Commonwealth grant rules and processes come with the risk of being only symbolic or 'tick-a-box', potentially subverting true community-led place-based approaches by simply increasing community engagement or making surface level tweaks to program delivery based on local priorities.

Finally, the challenges in demonstrating the impact of place-based initiatives are both well-documented and acknowledged and there does need to be a strong focus on continuing to adequately evaluate impact of individual initiatives. If there is to be a pivotal shift in the way Australia tackles disadvantage and inequity in every locality, direct effort must be given to the development of summative evaluations and developing an integrated body of evidence for place-based approaches as a whole, as compared to other investment approaches or policy delivery mechanisms.

Conclusion

Australia now has the opportunity to make a game-changing shift and embrace the use of place-based approaches alongside broad-based policies and programs to address big social, economic and environmental challenges facing the nation, including persistent poverty in many of our communities. While there have been significant recent gains in attracting additional resources for place-based work and developing partnerships necessary to support this work at scale, it is critical that structural reforms are also pursued to develop the authorising environment and supports required for place-based approaches to maximise their chance of sustained impact.

Putting place-based approaches up alongside universal programs and service systems is the key to Australia making sustained headway on First Nations self-determination and Closing the Gap, reinvigorating government and community partnerships and trust and responding to the increasing geographic, social and economic diversity of communities, as well as building the resilience required to manage community change and disruptions and create thriving places for us all.

Mekayla Cochrane and Elisha Ralph from Moree.

Appendix 1 – Key place-based and community-led initiatives

The following table provides a non-exhaustive collection of examples of the spectrum of place-based activity happening across Australia. It includes both current initiatives and some that have now concluded, with an indication of whether evaluation or review materials are available. Given the proliferation of place-based work across all domains and sectors, this list is not reflective of all activities.

Name	Activity	Dates	Status	Locations
Barkly Regional Deal	28 economic, social and cultural initiatives	2019 –	Ongoing – developing Evaluation Framework	Barkly (NT)
Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants Program	Local initiatives to address priorities and activities for recovery and resilience after the 2019-20 bushfires.	2020	Concluded (one-off grants now provided) – no published evaluation	524 projects in affected areas across 110 LGAs
Becoming U	Becoming U projects help youth be work-ready, mentally and physically healthy, and connected to opportunities and to their community.	2019 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Regional NSW, initially Nambucca Valley
Better Futures, Local Solutions (Place-based Income Management Trial)	Jobless Families trial, Job Services Australia demonstration projects, the Priority Employment Area Initiative and Local Connections to Work.	2011 –2015	Concluded – 2014 Evaluation. Note income management activities have continued in other forms since.	Ten LGAs across Australia
Beyond the Bell	Supporting young people in the Great South Coast to achieve their full potential. Year 12 completion goal.	2012 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation. Measuring Impact Framework developed in 2020	Great South Coast region (VIC)
Burnie Works	Education, employment, justice, family wellbeing	2019 –	Ongoing – published Developmental Evaluation and Progress Mapping Review	The greater Burnie region (TAS)
By Five WSM Early Years Project	Incorporates a range of health, education and social services including early years, education and community health services, and Child First and Integrated Family Services, with a goal of improving children's outcomes.	2016 –	Ongoing – 2020 Evaluation	Six LGAs: Horsham, Northern Grampians, Buloke, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera (VIC)
Cairns South Together	Childrens development in their first 1,000 days and launch into early learning	2020 –	Ongoing – monitoring, evaluation and learning plan will be developed in 2023	Cairns South (QLD)
Cape York Welfare Reform Trial (CYWR)	Social responsibility, economic opportunity, justice education, and housing	2008 – 2011	Concluded – 2012 Evaluation	Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge (QLD)
Centrelink Place-Based Services (PBS) initiative	Six action research projects designed to use innovative, locally based approaches to improve the capability of the service delivery system	2008 – 2010	Concluded – 2010 review in external conference paper format	Peachey Belt (SA), Logan City Council (Qld), Darwin (NT), Broadmeadows (VIC), and Fairfield and Cooma (NSW)

Name	Activity	Dates	Status	Locations
Challis Primary School Integrated Early Childhood and Family Support Service	Integrated education and health services	2013 –	Ongoing – 2014 Evaluation	Challis (WA)
Child and Family Learning Centres	Early childhood support – education and health services	2009 –	Ongoing – 2018 review report	A growing number of locations across TAS
Child and Parent Centres	Early childhood care and development program	2013 –	Ongoing – 2017 Evaluation	22 locations across WA
Child Friendly Alice	A whole-of community approach to addressing complex social issues in communities experiencing vulnerability, to enhance the wellbeing of children	2018 –	Unclear – Communities for Children in Alice Spring is active, but website for Child Friendly Alice collaboration is no longer active	Alice Springs (NT)
Children's Ground	Culturally authoritative, language based early learning, family health, economic, community and cultural development	2016 –	Ongoing – 2021 Evaluation	Top End, Central Australia (NT)
COAG Trials – Indigenous communities	Eight trial sites for better coordinating services and agreeing priorities	2002 – 2007	Concluded – 2006 Evaluation	ACT, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yakunytjatjara (APY) Lands (SA), Murdi Paaki (NSW), Shepparton (VIC), North Eastern TAS, East Kimberly (WA), Wadeye (NT), Cape York (QLD)
Collective ed.	Initiative in six schools to support students in years 9-12 with pathways to employment	2015 – 2021	Concluded – 2021 Evaluation	South/North West Glenorchy (TAS)
Communities for Children (CfC) and CfC Facilitating Partners Program	Better joined up services for children in communities across Australia	2006 –	Ongoing – 2009 Evaluation of CfC and 2021 Evaluation of CfC FP	Currently 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia
Connected Beginnings	Collective impact approach to early childhood services and education	2016 –	Ongoing – 2019 Evaluation	Currently 34 locations across Australia with goal of 50 by 2025
Culturally Nourishing Schools	Collaborative research on teaching and learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	2022 –	Ongoing – collaborative research study	Six communities across NSW
Doveton College	Integrated school as community hub initiative – first school in Our Place program	2012 –	Ongoing – 2020 Evaluation	Doveton (VIC)
Early Years Initiative	Early childhood development place-based work	2021 –	Ongoing – Developmental Evaluation underway	Four community across sites WA
Education Benalla Project (Tomorrow Today)	Whole-of- community initiative that aims to reduce disadvantage in the Benalla district of Victoria.	2010 –	Ongoing – 2016 Evaluation and recent 2022 10 year report	Benalla (VIC)

Name	Activity	Dates	Status	Locations
Empowered Communities	Place-based and Indigenous-led approach to improving outcomes through backbone support organisations	2015 –	Ongoing – no evaluation to date	10 regions across Australia – Cape York (QLD) Central Coast, Inner Sydney, Goulburn and Murray (NSW), East Kimberley and West Kimberley (WA), Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Ngarrindjeri (Central AUS)
Far West Community Partnerships	Empowered decision-making, addressing intergenerational social and economic disadvantage, enabling cultural recognition and determination.	2021 –	Ongoing – 2022 Impact Report	Ceduna, Koonibba, Scotdesco, Yalata and Oak Valley (SA)
Gladstone Region Together	Focusing on families and enabling and supporting parents to provide a happy, healthy, and nurturing home environment. Ensuring our families have access to the right supports at the right time.	2021 –	Ongoing – 2023 early evidence SPSP report	Gladstone region (QLD)
Go Goldfields	Community-led approach to addressing disadvantage	2009 –	Ongoing – 2014 Evaluation and 2022 Research Report	Goldfields (VIC)
Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project	Series of community-based initiatives aimed at supporting children before they fall into crisis	2014 –	Ongoing – 2020 Evaluation	Greater Shepparton (VIC)
Growing Brimbank	Reduce illness in early childhood, school, starting a family, adulthood	2014 –	Ongoing – 2017 Evaluation	Brimbank (VIC)
Gujaga Foundation, UNSW CNSP – Mattraville Education Partnership	Social cohesion and educational advancement partnership	2015 –	Ongoing – no published Evaluation	La Perouse (NSW)
Hands up Mallee	Social impact initiative with backbone organisation	2015 –	Ongoing – 2020 Evaluation	Northern Mallee region (VIC)
Indigenous Land and Sea Management Program	Support for community-based Indigenous natural and cultural resource management	2007 –	Ongoing – 2016 SROI Evaluation	Multiple projects in sites across Australia
It Takes a Town	Asset-based community development (ABCD) and collective impact approaches focused on shared wellbeing, activating ideas and change within community culture.	2017 –	Ongoing – 2020 portrayal evaluation	Murwillumbah and surrounding villages (NSW)
Just Reinvest and Maranguka Justice Reinvestment	Empowers community to coordinate the right mix and timing of services through an Aboriginal community owned and led, multi-disciplinary team working in partnership with relevant government and non-government agencies	2012 –	Ongoing – 2017 Impact Assessment	Bourke pilot with Mt Druitt and Moree added thereafter (NSW)
Kids Early Years (KEYS) Network	Early years support for vulnerable families and children	2021 –	Ongoing – No published Evaluation to date	Western Sydney Local Health District (NSW)
Logan Together	Health and potential of Logan kids	2014 –	Ongoing – 2019 Progress Report and used in 2020 to pilot the development of a broader Place-Based Evaluation Framework	Logan (QLD)

Name	Activity	Dates	Status	Locations
Maranguka Community Hub	Improving outcomes and creating better coordinated support for vulnerable families and children through the true empowerment of the local Aboriginal community.	-	Ongoing – developed data infrastructure platform for access, analysis, collaboration, sharing and secure storage of data contributed to Maranguka in one place	Bourke (NSW)
Mid Coast 4 Kids	Collective impact initiative designed to address long term and entrenched social issues, with a focus on issues that affect children and young people.	-	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Mid Coast Communities/LGA (NSW)
Mid Murray Family Connections	Activities centered on children's early development, positive well-being and emotional maturity. Connecting families with services and supports as they are needed.	2012 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation, but tracking AEDC data	Mid-Murray region (SA)
Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly	Peak representative structure representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	2004 –	Ongoing – 2006 Evaluation of original trial and 2019 Lessons Learned in Community Governance	16 Communities across Western NSW
National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery	Improving access to and coordination of services in remote communities	2009 – 2014	Concluded – 2013 Evaluation	29 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across remote Australia
One Community Together	Activities focused on community life, community spaces, work and learning, activities, and services	2014 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Clarence Plains (TAS)
Our Place	Scale up of Doveton College	2017 –	Ongoing – Evaluation work underway	10 locations across VIC
Partnership FaHCSIA/ PM&C Petrol Sniffing	Roll out of Opal Fuel and associated health and substance abuse interventions	2009 – 2014	Concluded – 2013 Evaluation	Multiple communities across remote Australia
Play2Learn and Play2Learn+ Payment by Outcome Trial	Early childhood care and development program	2011 –	Ongoing – desktop study	200 Play2Learn playgroups across Australia with new Play2Learn+ Trial commencing in TAS
Preparing Australian Communities Program - Local	Improve resilience of communities against natural disasters	2021 – 2022	Concluded – the Disaster Ready Fund commences 2022-23 and will fund similar projects	158 projects from local council areas across Australia
Restacking the Odds 1.0 and 2.0	Data and evidence for collaboration	2017 –	Ongoing – 2023 Lead Indicators Framework will measure impact	VIC
Sanderson Alliance	Network of schools to ensure every child has a good start	2009 – 2015	Concluded – No published evaluation	Darwin (NT)
SMBI Families We Are Listening/ SMBIListeners	Activities focusing on: 1. Healthy, thriving children 2. Healthy family relationships 3. Strong, connected community 4. Well-being activities	2018 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Southern Moreton Bay Islands (QLD)
Strengthening Grantham Project	Land deal to relocate housing and community services	2011 – 2016	Concluded – no published evaluation but public information about each stage meeting its objectives and widely praised	Lockyer Valley (QLD)

Name	Activity	Dates	Status	Locations
Stronger Places, Stronger People	Place-based approaches to tackling disadvantage with backbone support organisations	2020 –	Ongoing – early evidence findings to be released in 2023	Currently 7 locations across Australia: Logan and Gladstone (QLD), Bourke (NSW), Mildura (VIC), Burnie (TAS), Far West SA (including Ceduna), Barkly NT (including Tennant Creek). Kempsey (NSW) and Rockhampton (QLD) are also named as locations under the initiative.
Support for Day to Day Living in the Community (D2DL)	Mental Health	2008 – 2019	Concluded (transferred to NDIS) – 2010 Evaluation	Multiple sites across Australia
The Community Plate	Strengthening the local food system and improving healthy eating outcomes	2018 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Region (VIC)
The Hive (includes Together in Wilmot)	Every child thriving	2016 –	Ongoing – 2021 Evaluation	Mt Druitt (NSW)
The Huddle	To engage, support and empower young people to build on their strengths and to participate in the community. The Huddle's programs target youths from migrant and refugee backgrounds	2010 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Melbourne and Wyndham (VIC), and Tasmania
Wyndham Employment Trial (now Opportunity Wyndham)	Employment opportunities, particular focus on refugees and vulnerable migrants	2019 –	Ongoing – no published evaluation	Wyndham (VIC)
Yuwaya Ngarra Li	Improved community-led pathways out of the justice system, food and water security, and community capabilities and control	2016 –	Ongoing – Embedded developmental evaluation and ongoing research	Walgett (NSW)

Appendix 2 – Getting philosophical: theories driving place-based thinking

There are a number of overlapping social, economic, cultural, and political theories and perspectives behind place-based approaches. As place-based theorists and practitioners emphasise their relative importance differently, understanding these can be helpful. Key theories include:

Rights-based theories, that emphasise self-determination, sovereignty, land and sea, cultural and economic rights to places. This is a key driver behind many calls around the world for national governments to recognise the rights of cultural groups and need for local ownership and community control over resources and is often advocated for in the context of addressing impacts of, and moving forward from, colonisation. Discussions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about place-based approaches need to reflect understanding of these rights as a part of the picture.[137]

Whole of person and/or community service design theories, that emphasise the social determinants of health and wellbeing. This thinking focuses on the importance of breaking down silos between different departments, policies, services and programs (for example across education, employment, health, safety and housing) and joining-up responses around the needs of individuals and communities.[138]

Social capital and resilience theories, that describe the need to build social capital through bonding (trust and cooperation within a group), bridging (that emphasise connections between different groups) and linking capital (for example between community members and decision makers).[139] Place can be considered the local environment that allows the network of relationships to be built. There is increasing recognition that social capital is a key factor in community resilience.[140] In the UK, Hilary Cottam is leading a movement for change in the design of welfare programs calling for a move away from an emphasis on state centred compliance driven welfare services, to solutions that recognise and are anchored around human relationships.[141]

Strength-based community development theories have long been considered better practice in international development with approaches including Asset Based Community-led Development.[142] Closely related are community-led empowerment approaches (such as the Empowered Communities initiative operating across Australia) that seek to overcome historical and ongoing disempowerment of communities and push back on approaches that emphasise deficits over strengths.

Political power sharing between the state and communities theories seek to foster new relationships and partnerships between communities and the state and devolve decision-making about resources from the national to local levels. These emphasise the importance of the principle of subsidiarity – that authority to decide to act should rest at the closest level as possible to the people or organisations that the decision or action is designed to serve.[143]

Functional aspects of physical place theories emphasise housing ownership and community control of land and housing, child friendly urban design, access to parks as a social determinant of health, and local economic development and jobs.[144] This includes Porter's cluster theory of economic development.[145]

Dynamic community formation around language, culture, and belonging theories, focuses on the role of place in language, culture and customs while recognising some of the challenges in defining 'communities' and that overlapping communities of interest exist in different places.[146]

Appendix 3 – Common design elements for place-based approaches

Building on significant place-based practice and research over the last decade[147], below are fifteen important design elements of place-based approaches. Many of these are principles that could be useful in guiding good community investment and program design in general.

Design element	Explanation
1. The 'community' and its size	Identifying the 'place' that is the site of the work. It could be a school community (e.g. Community Hubs Program); neighbourhood (e.g. Alice Springs Town Camp); larger community (e.g Logan Together); city (e.g. Launceston City Deal); First Nations country (e.g. Indigenous Land Use Agreement); or region (e.g. Regional Partnership Agreement).
2. Community readiness, call to action, mobilisation	Understanding community readiness (e.g. Harwood stages of community readiness) and mobilisation. There is often a coming together of community leaders based on opportunity (e.g. Native Title Settlement), crisis (e.g. natural disaster or peak in community unrest and distress) or worsening social and economic conditions (e.g. ongoing locational disadvantage or disempowerment). The extent to which the process is instigated by community leaders or others including governments is key to establishing early relationships and dynamics.
3. Theory of change across the life course	Most place-based approaches recognise the interplay of all social and economic determinants of community wellbeing but seek an entry point from which to drive change. Often this is a point of intervention in the life course (commonly looking at the antenatal to age 25 period). Other approaches may focus on a common resource such as land ownership or an economic opportunity. Some place-based approaches focus on multiple areas at once to develop a holistic response to community needs.
4. Mechanisms for connecting people and communities with wrap-around support	There are common mechanisms involved in providing more integrated delivery of support for people in communities focused on their specific needs including the formation of hubs for co-location of services, appointment of social service navigators and community liaison roles and routine check-ins for services working to support the same client cohorts (e.g. at-risk teens in a community).
5. Roles and relationships between partners, leadership and governance	The relationship of the partners, including the extent to which the initiative is community-led, government-led and/or philanthropic/NGO-led. Sometimes partners are vying to lead in different ways. Many place-based approaches now aim to be community-led with government, NGO, philanthropic and business partners fulfilling roles and responsibilities, backed in by governance arrangements that elevate community voice and leadership supported by trusted partnerships and accountability.

6. Individual or networked approach	Some place-based approaches are stand-alone (e.g. Burnie Works) or part of an umbrella program that is supporting place-based work in multiple sites and that include overarching parameters and support (e.g. Empowered Communities and the Communities for Children Program).
7. Building trust, shared goal setting, co-design and planning	These processes help partners build trust, determine common interests, develop a theory of change, design mutually reinforcing activities among participants and determine how they will work together over a duration of time (e.g. Children's Ground Approach).
8. Stages and duration of commitment	The stages of work and duration of the commitment required to expect to see positive change. It is common for approaches to have initial set-up stages of 2-3 years and then expect formative evaluation results at year 5 and then impact in years 7 to 10. Enduring commitments from partners that build trust are critical.
9. Level of investment	The level of investment and its purpose. It can be catalytic (e.g. investment to prompt formation of communities of interest and discussions or trials); a time-bound package (e.g. City Deal); medium term; long-term; and/or light touch or intensive.
10. Investment coordination	Whether the place-based approach has a vehicle for investment coordination to try to prioritise and sequence effort across multiple partners. Many approaches in Australia find it very challenging to coordinate investment across multiple programs and partners.
11. Local data, measurement, evaluation and learning	The type of framework that is established for obtaining local data to illustrate the strengths and needs of a place (e.g. Logan Together Suburb Profiles and Community-based data profiles for transitions to employment) and the process for tracking progress (formative/developmental/summative). A number of place-based initiatives are using community indicator dashboards for community accountability (e.g. Go Goldfields).
12. Backbone support	The location of backbone support (management, funding and resources) through a community organisation such as an academic institution, government, NGO, community-controlled or philanthropic organisation. Increasingly, in networked initiatives there may also be a second higher level backbone organisation providing support (e.g. Community Hubs Program).
13. Partner and community capability building	The resources going into developing the ability of community members and partners to carry out place-based practice. It could be across a range of areas including community facilitation, case management, data and negotiation.
14. Scale of system and service re-design	The extent to which the initiative seeks to manage within the existing government and NGO service system, seeks to change it to better respond to the needs to the specific place and community (e.g. Cape York Welfare Reform Trial), and the extent to which partners seek to share learnings to drive broader service reform.
15. Continuous Communication	Regular or continuous communication between communities and partners is important for sharing perspectives, troubleshooting problems early and maintaining legitimacy and trust with local organisations and people.

Appendix 4 – Stages of community readiness and the maturity of initiatives

This table seeks to explain the stages of community readiness involved in community-led place-based and collective impact approaches and the potential actions to take and outcomes that we might expect to see at different stages. It also sets out possible evaluations to use at different stages,[148] including:

- Developmental evaluations that can be used throughout – providing real time feedback on strategies and actions;
- Formative evaluations – evaluating the design and implementation of the initiative itself; and
- Summative evaluations – looking at the projects influence on systems and outcomes.

Stage of readiness	Description	Useful areas to focus on	Outcomes at different stages
Waiting	Community feels stuck and has a sense change is needed but people are fractured and waiting for someone or something to make things right.	• Empowering leadership and community discussion. • Assisting in gathering evidence on what is happening. • Strengths-based initiatives that build resilience and create hope.	Community is ready consider constructive change. *Developmental evaluations*
Impasse	Community is at a cross-roads. The old way of doing business is now in direct conflict with a yearning among people to move in a different direction but the path to action is not yet clear.	• Assisting in gathering evidence on what is happening. • Supporting leaders and institutions to auspice planning and formation of place-based and community-led approach.	Community ownership of issues. Scoping some form of place-based and community- led approach. *Developmental evaluations*

Stage of readiness	Description	Useful areas to focus on	Outcomes at different stages
Catalytic	A small group of people and organisations emerge to take risks and experiment in ways that challenge existing norms of how the community works. People begin to discover they share common aspirations and can, in small ways, start to make a difference and reach out for partners.	• Working on design features, theory of change and early 'wins'. • Trust-building across initial partners and broader engagement and • Communication of the approach.	Initiative up and running with real time feedback, trust growing across initial partners and early understanding and interest from a broader range of stakeholders. Progress tracking relates to design and strategies rather than community level change (although possible to see wins depending on program type and level of community engagement). *Developmental and formative evaluations*
Growth	There are initiatives and networks developing to tackle issues. There is a linking of ideas and public action and new leaders throughout the community are identified and nurtured.	• Expansion of scope of work and partnerships to see significant activity on the ground. • Evidence building and accountability to partners and community.	Initiatives growing in scale with real time feedback, trust growing across more partners. Many outcomes still relate to development of design and strategies rather than community level change (although possible to see early community change depending on level of engagement and challenges). *Formative evaluations*
Sustain/ Renew	Initiatives growing in depth and breadth to prevent from stagnating. New emphasis on growing networks and links throughout the entire community, especially "disconnected" areas.	• Support for sustaining and renewing approach. • Expansion of scope of work and partnerships and growing activity on the ground. • Effective systems to review progress with partners and community.	Initiatives growing in depth and breadth and tackling underlying challenges. Possible to see sustained community change depending on level of engagement and challenges (although attribution will always be challenging) *Summative evaluations*

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