

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Logan Together: how working across sectors for our kids is the answer to everything

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Logan Together is a whole-of-city child development approach based on well-established evidence-based prevention principles and using collective impact methodologies to galvanise action across sectors and the community. The operating assumption for the project is that the first eight years are foundational for life success and that the societal and public policy costs of children failing to grow into healthy, capable adults are profound. An approach that acted longitudinally across the child's lifecourse and universally across the whole 0-8 age cohort had a chance to alter outcomes for a generation of children and through their success, society at large.

While no one is a prisoner to destiny, the life trajectories of children who struggle in their early years commonly lead to difficulties and disengagement in adolescence and marginal employment, poverty and exclusion as adults. When these adults have children of their own, the cycle is repeated. Taken at a population level, this continuing dynamic is arguably the single most significant and costly public policy issue confronting developed economies. It drives demand in welfare, social services, health, policing, justice, mental health, disability, public housing, homelessness, addiction, family violence and related areas of public service provision.

Moderating these trajectories and interrupting the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage has long been the goal of social policy and practice. But despite over 40 years of increasing investment we have underwhelming results to show for our efforts in terms of population-level shift in the quantum and core characteristics of disadvantage.

In Logan, as elsewhere, the bulk of social purpose investments have been focused on either ameliorating the impacts of undesirable social conditions after those problems manifest – think homelessness, mental health, unemployment – or addressing the point in time needs of particular cohorts who are associated with difficult social conditions – disengaged young people, young parents.

While both these kinds of investments are important, action is triggered once people arrive at difficult life circumstances and are typically focused on short-medium term remediation of those circumstances. This kind of community investment is neither designed for, nor has the

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capability to respond to, the enduring characteristics and complexities of social disadvantage in Australia.

An alternative policy prescription that deals realistically with the nature of social disadvantage is emerging however. Coming together from diverse theoretical origins with roots in neuroscience, early childhood, human development, community organizing, social and behavioural marketing, prevention science, population health and actuarial approaches to modelling economic impacts, a developing literature illuminates a credible, if long term, path forward.

Taken individually, the ideas informing Logan Together are not new. It is however the aggregation of the policy and practice themes they reference and the articulation of a credible whole-of-population-scale execution strategy which marks out the approach as unique.

This presentation will overview the development and execution of the Logan Together campaign and talk to the core design principles that inform it and which may inform replication in other contexts.

Keywords: prevention; collective impact; lifecourse; intergenerational change
