

National Urban Policy

Consultation draft

July 2024

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is made by Professor Hannah Badland, an ARC Future Fellow and Director of the Social Equity Research Centre at RMIT University.

I provide background information about the Social Equity Research Centre followed by the framework and its contents presented in the consultation draft.

1. About the Centre

The Social Equity Research Centre at RMIT University provides a platform for a multidisciplinary community of practice across a range of thematic areas related to delivering transformational research for social justice and equity. Working in partnership we generate excellent innovative research that drives policy and practice transformation. The Centre focuses on wide ranging critical research areas and the intersections within, grouped under four research themes:

- Community Wellbeing
- Gender and Social Change
- Housing Insecurity and Homelessness
- Local Global Relations

Launched in 2024, the Centre has about 70 researchers. Staff expertise spans sociology, linguistics, housing, social work, public health, criminology, legal studies, psychology, gender, education, human geography, and public policy.

2. Consultation draft feedback

Overall, the National Urban Policy draft has the right ambition and intent, and I welcome the renewed focus on equity through accessibility and inclusion. The high-level vision, areas of focus, and principles align with contemporary urban, and by default, social challenges that need attention in Australia. None of these challenges, however, can be addressed in isolation, and effective solutions must be implemented through a sustained integrated and systematic approach. For example, urban productivity has a symbiotic relationship with an equitable society that has access to and availability of necessary infrastructure (liveable). As such, solutions to support optimal urbanisation require a multi-sector and multi-portfolio approach to work on complex issues and solutions that move beyond a 'silver bullet' approach.

The vertical structure running from federal to local government and to communities and businesses, with attention paid to suburbs is welcomed and if effectively coordinated, will help with supporting typically underserved areas with strategic gains. Including 15 recommendations from First Nations stakeholder consultation is also welcomed, noting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' successful custodianship of Australia over the last 65,000 years and that much can be learned from First Nations' stewardship.

The proposed structure of the National Urban Policy needs to explicitly include measurement and monitoring into the overall Strategy structure. Measurement and monitoring are different to evidence; having these included as key design elements will ensure the Policy holds the government, communities, and businesses to account and provides transparency as to what is and is not working and how inequities are narrowing or widening over time. This level of information is needed to guide prioritisation of policies and accompanying strategies to achieve the desired outcomes. Regular State of the Cities reports will help achieve this, but these data need to be available at fine enough scales so as inequities in delivery are not masked and can be actioned and monitored at local government and community levels.

2.1. Australian Government goals

There is greater opportunity to integrate universal design policy principles into housing and public infrastructure, including public transport. By doing so, there will be better inclusion opportunities afforded to our most vulnerable groups (e.g. aging-in-place, people with disability, young children) and support people to age-in-place.

The Policy's equity ambition could be strengthened to 'Where everyone has fair access to resources, opportunities and amenities, no matter where they live, WHO THEY ARE, or their socio-economic status'. Suggested revision in caps. This signals inclusion and that people have a right to be the people they are, which extends beyond geography or individual advantage.

Disaster preparedness has a brief mention in the 'urban areas being sustainable' section, but could it also be captured as a marker of urban resilience?

2.2. Australian Government objectives

I support the recognition of the inequitable provision of infrastructure and services, and that this Policy seeks to redress these.

While schools are important (rightly so), there is a dire need to increase the number of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) and preschool services available; this will support optimal child development trajectories and also ensure that caregivers are able to enter / remain in the workforce. Continued and accelerated efforts are needed in this space, especially considering new ECEC access policies and the globally recognised importance of a child's first 2,000 days.

Urban safety needs to explicitly mention the provision of separated cycle lanes. A large body of evidence shows separated cycle lane infrastructure is required if commuting cycling is to become a major mode of transport that is acceptable to diverse groups.

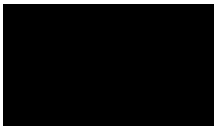
Urban sustainability could also extend to include planning for and implementing inter-city high speed rail. This is a major opportunity to further reduce transport emissions yet is currently missing from the Policy.

'Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing' section could explicitly incorporate that a variety of different housing types need to be available locally. In turn, this offers people the option of changing the type of housing they live in but do not need to leave their community (e.g. empty nesters downsizing), which can support ageing-in-place and a sense of community.

The Policy document notes skills shortages into the future and need for workforce development. Migration is part of the solution, but strategies for employers and infrastructure better supporting people with disability into and remaining in the workforce can play a major role in alleviating this issue. It is estimated \$50B in GDP could be added to the nation's economy by 2050 if Australia became one of the top eight OECD countries for employing people with disability. This emphasis on getting people with disability into employment is welcomed as a productivity initiative investment.

To conclude, I thank the Committee for their time and for providing the opportunity to make this submission. Please direct any queries related to this submission to Prof Badland:
hannah.badland@rmit.edu.au.

Sincerely,



Professor Hannah Badland
Director, Social Equity Research Centre
ARC Future Fellow
RMIT University

Acknowledgement of Country

We at the Social Equity Research Centre acknowledge the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct our research, teaching, and service. We respectfully acknowledge Ancestors and Elders past, present, and emerging who have always been caring for Country. We pay our respects to Country, the lifeworld that sustains us all. Our research, education, and service are already in a relationship with Country and the people of Country, here and in all the places we undertake our business. As mostly non-Indigenous people, we acknowledge our obligation in this relationship: to uphold the ngarn-ga [understanding] on Bundjil and practice respect for community and culture. Though there is much we still need to

learn, especially about ourselves, we affirm our dhumbali [commitment] to that work. We hold as central to our business, dhumbali to a shared future with Indigenous peoples everywhere and especially Kulin Country and its people.