

Inquiry-led policy reform in Australia: Implementing inquiry recommendations

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Context - policy implementation

- Policy implementation research
- Implementation science

Never the twain shall meet?

Common issues in policy implementation research and implementation science. Research in both fields deals with challenges of translating intentions to desired changes.

Important learnings could be derived from bringing the two together....

Per Nilsen et al 2013

Context

General literature on public inquiries in Australia

Scoping Review undertaken by the PRC for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Systematic selection, collection and summarising of existing published work in a broad thematic area.

Part of a larger body of work PRC is undertaking for the RC on implementation of recommendations from previous inquiries

Inquiries - what are they?

Functions vary greatly – may have the following elements

- Instrument of exec government
- Investigation activities
- Agenda management and scanning
- Advice and problem solving
- Information gathering and research
- Knowledge synthesis
- Mediation and conflict management
- Legitimising government actions

(Prasser 2006)



Why does it matter?

Inquiries, particularly public ones, are an essential part of the Westminster system

Important policy advisory and investigatory roles

Many areas of public policy have been reviewed through inquiries

Increasing use – important for democratic accountability, especially in current political environment

Who undertakes inquiries?

- Public inquiries (publicly appointed, TORS and members publicly announced, seek submissions from community, release reports to the public) eg Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Senate Committees
- Statutory & regulatory bodies
- Joint working groups
- Consultancies

What do we know about implementing recommendations?

Not as much as we should given the investment?

Inquiry bodies and some jurisdictions track implementation internally

Results not always published

When published - Don't necessarily look *across* their inquiries to get a broader assessment and patterns

Published evaluations of implementation of recs is not common

Implementation of recommendations not nec in remit – eg Royal Commissions; Productivity Commission.

Prasser's case study successful implementation

Inquiries into the financial system in Australia

Significant implementation – 3 useful steps

1979 Campbell inquiry put the issue of deregulation on the **agenda**

1983 Martin inquiry further refined it and was important in gaining **bipartisan acceptance**.

1996 Wallis Inquiry reviewed the **impact of deregulation**.

Characteristics of why they worked

- High order policy advice on complex issues
- Mapping out of new policy directions for gov
- Perform advisory roles that current apparatus can't (for various reasons)
- Assist in legitimising roles and new policy initiatives and justifying policy reversals
- Exert impact and increase public awareness and legitimacy through the inquiry process, status and quality of research
- Assist but not replace tasks of gov (building support, articulating rationales)
- Have membership of key interest groups without effecting their status or independence

Scoping review

To identify the methods used in previous evaluations of implementation of recommendations arising from inquiries.

Search strategies: Electronic bibliographic databases, selected websites, reference lists of included evaluations.

PRC – Scoping Review for RC into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

17 relevant publications (15 Australian)

To understand suitable methodologies to review implementation of recommendations from previous inquiries in the context of vulnerable children.

PRC then examined the implementation nearly 300 recommendations from 67 Australian inquiries of interest to the RC.....

Inquiry topics

Child welfare

Indigenous Australians

Crime and justice, violence & law reform

Mental health

Bushfires, health, disability, defence, emergency response

Types of Inquiry recommendations

- Legislative change 8
- Broad systemic change 8
- Specific organisations 8
- Multiple organisations in one sector 3
- Multiple organisations in different sectors 3
- Service providers 3

Methods used in 17 evaluations

15 used multiple methods from most to least common as follows:

- Majority used invitations for written submissions (9)
- Document/policy reviews (8)
- Consultation (8)
- Requests for policies and procedures (7)
- Interviews (6)
- Community consultations such as public hearings (5)
- Analysis of existing quantitative data (4)
- Site visits (4); Surveys (3) etc.....

Were the recs implemented?

Reporting of implementation was variable

- Some very general
- Some went through each recommendation
- No reports had all recs fully implemented
- 12 said imp on track & most recs implemented
- 5 said most recs NOT implemented
- 3 reports said gov had rejected some recs

Identified barriers to implementation

Most to least mentioned

- Lack of resources (9)
- Concurrent reforms or change happening (6)
- Practice and service delivery issues (5)
- Lack of interagency collaboration and coordination (4)

Identified barriers cont.....

- Lack of implementation plan/oversight group (3)
- Lack of broader systems in place to support implementation (legislation, policy reform needing to happen first) (3)
- Complexity of organisation or scale of the reform (1)
- Organisational or policy culture (1)

Facilitators

12 of the 17 reports did not mention facilitators

5 reports mentioned facilitators which ALL related to the establishment of formal implementation processes and structures such as

- Project teams
- Regional steering groups
- Implementation meeting structure
- Timely appointment of staff to key imp roles
- Support for change at various levels .

Questions and conclusions

To what extent is the effort spent on inquiries leading to the desired changes being implemented?

The extent to which inquiries have been a useful driver of reform? Which types of inquiries and which types of reform?

Implementation science could play a significant role in thinking about a more systematic approach to implementation of inquiry-led reform

Implementation and impact evaluations could prove key to understanding what has changed and areas of intractability

Thank you

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