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An emerging model for enabling people with disability to live to full capacity is through the use of social impact bonds. AAP/Lukas Coch

Reimagining NSW: four ways to boost community well-being and why it matters

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This is part of our Reimagining New South Wales (NSW) series. For this series, vice-chancellors across NSW asked a select group of early and mid-career researchers to envisage new ways to tackle old problems and identify emerging opportunities across the state.

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Healthy, engaged people and communities will be crucial in a prosperous future for New South Wales. That's not a new idea – it's another way of saying everyone should have a fair go or we all suffer.

But what practical steps can we take to get there?

Here are four areas of policy focus that will help build a future NSW where every citizen has a chance to contribute to their full potential.

Access to employment for people with a disability

One in five Australians has a disability. Employing people with disability can help to redress skills shortages, increase productivity, contribute to economic growth, and lessen dependency on welfare.

As noted by the Australian Network on Disability, benefits of employing someone with a disability include low absenteeism and turnover, low incidence of workplace injury, improved employee loyalty

and a better understanding of consumers with a disability.



However, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that people aged between 15 and 64 years with disability have a much lower workforce participation rate than people without disability. People with disability are much more likely to be in the lowest income tier.

An emerging model for enabling people with disability to live to their full capacity is through the use of social impact bonds. That's where the government sets a specific, measurable outcome that it wants achieved for a particular segment of society, and promises to pay an external organisation if it achieves that outcome.

For example, the NSW government signed a seven year social impact bond with UnitingCare Burnside, focused on either safely returning children in out-of-home care to their families, or preventing children from entering care. With a principal of A\$7 million, the bond aims for a financial return of 10-12% per annum for investors over its term.

The NSW government should apply the lessons learned from this model more broadly to boost job market participation for people with disabilities.

Stopping a health crisis before it starts

Applying the lessons learned from Australia's world-leading approach to tobacco control, governments could consider steps such as boosting taxes on unhealthy foods, more strictly regulating junk food advertising, working with manufacturers to reduce the amount of salt, fat and sugar in processed foods and making the food labelling system more easy to understand.

Standing up to the food and beverage industry is no small undertaking. It requires long-term, persistent community support and enormous political courage.

More funding for mental health support always helps, but we could consider creating better systems for lifelong support of people with mental illness – and their family members.

The right to a secure, affordable home

Housing stress is growing across NSW, seriously affecting very low- to low-income households. Private tenancies in NSW are also notoriously insecure, typically lasting six-to-12 months with landlords able to terminate with short notice.

NSW needs models spanning the growing gap between renting and home-ownership. That could include shared equity ownership, which is where people own a home in partnership with a non-profit community housing provider or the government.

Under this model, the home is built by the housing provider and then sold to a selected buyer at below market cost. Community land trusts present another alternative model.

Practical steps to improve the situation might include a campaign to boost lenders' familiarity with such alternative housing models and new laws to clarify rights and responsibilities of owners or renters living in such homes. Local and state governments could also include such models in the establishment of affordable housing targets or inclusionary zoning requirements. We could also revise the First Home Owner's Grant to make it available for shared equity schemes run by registered community housing providers.

Decarceration as innovation

NSW has a record-high adult prison population and increasing imprisonment rates, even though there has been no spike in crime. All but one of the major offence types is falling or stable.

We need reconciliation and self-determination. Indigenous Australians are drastically over-represented at 27% of the prison population, despite comprising 2-3% of our population. Many of those who fill our jails in NSW have been in the out-of-home care system. This group is 68 times more likely than average to appear in the Children's Court.

Prison is also an unconvincing deterrent. Recidivism is at 79% for juveniles and 56% for adults. This suggests we urgently need new approaches.

Justice reinvestment projects, such as the one underway in Bourke, provide one example. Under this model, representatives from the local community, government, service providers and researchers collaborate to design and implement targeted "circuit-breakers" aimed at getting people off a path deeper into the criminal justice system.

In practice, that means programs such as addressing bail breaches and outstanding warrants before they escalate and developing a learner driver program.

It also means collecting better data on the factors associated with contact with the criminal justice system: early life, education, employment, health, housing, child safety, drug and alcohol use.

We envisage a future NSW that is fair, prosperous and inclusive. While some have been pushed to the edges of our society, we can create opportunities for all to participate meaningfully in building a healthy and robust NSW.

Further reading:

Reimagining NSW: how the care economy could help unclog our cities

Reimagining NSW: how good governance strengthens democracy

Reimagining NSW: going beyond 'wilderness' and finding fresh ways to relate to our environment

Reimagining NSW: five ways to future-proof NSW's innovation ecosystem



Housing **Disability** **Incarceration** **Preventative health** **Prison reform** **Criminal justice reform**

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