

ANZSOG CASE PROGRAM – TEACHING NOTE

Please cite this Teaching Note as: *Padula, Marinella. (2025) From pilot to policy: the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) Program. [Teaching Note] Australia and New Zealand School of Government, John L. Alford Case Library: Canberra.*

From pilot to policy: the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) Initiative

An ANZSOG Teaching Note by Marinella Padula

Keywords: policy development, policy cycle, mental health, education, primary schools, Victoria, knowledge-brokering, coproduction, state government, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, University of Melbourne, Ian Potter Foundation, philanthropy, evaluation, implementation, non-government organisations.

This Teaching Note references and provides a guide to: *Padula, Marinella. (2025) From pilot to policy: the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) Initiative. Australia and New Zealand School of Government, John L. Alford Case Library: Canberra. DOI:10.54810/SVTO5850.*

Abstract

In 2019, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), was given permission and funding to launch a 10-school pilot to test the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) Initiative. Developed in consultation with sector stakeholders, the initiative's goal was to increase the capacity of teachers and schools to recognise and respond to primary school students with potential mental health challenges – an issue that had been largely overlooked in that age group. This would be achieved via the introduction of Mental Health and Wellbeing Leaders (MHWLs) who would provide support to classroom teachers while addressing the broader needs of the school community. Promising results from the initial rollout saw the pilot expanded to 26, then 100 schools across two Victorian school regions. The 2022 pilot evaluation found that educators in MHiPS schools felt more confident in dealing with mental health issues and observed improved student mental health and wellbeing. Similar observations were also made by parents. The pilot evaluation also convinced the Victorian government to introduce the program in all state, Catholic and low-fee independent primary schools. The government allocated \$200 million to the MHiPS rollout across ~1800 schools – part of the largest single investment in child mental health in Australia.

This case was commissioned by ANZSOG for the John L. Alford Case Library. Views expressed in it are not necessarily those of ANZSOG. This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence, except for logos, trademarks, photographs and other content marked as supplied by third parties. No licence is given in relation to third party material. Version 08032019. Distributed by the Case Program, The Australia and New Zealand School of Government, www.anzsog.edu.au



AI Statement

AI tools were used to assist in creating the outline of this teaching note.

Audience

This case could be used with a broad range of public policy/management students, from undergraduate, to postgraduate and professional learners.

MHiPS resources

Mental Health in Primary Schools website (nd). <https://www.mhips.org.au/>

Mental Health in Primary Schools video (nd) <https://www.mhips.org.au/evidence-impact/school-student-and-community-impact/videos/>

Victorian Government (2022). Mental Health Support in Primary Schools <https://www.vic.gov.au/mental-health-primary-schools#mental-health-in-primary-schools-pilot-evaluation>

Suggested Teaching Approaches

For undergraduates, or students new to public policy, the case can be used as an example of policy development and to illustrate different stages in the policy cycle. For more advanced learning, the case can be used as a demonstration of how codesign works in a real-world setting. How evidence for policy is developed and questions of rigour is another topic revealed through the case. The following outlines two different focus areas for teaching: the policy cycle and codesign in public policy.

1. THE POLICY CYCLE

Learning objectives:

- gain an understanding of different aspects of the policy making process
- consider the importance of evidence, evaluation and consultation in policy development, and explore the influence of factors such as timing, networks and reputation
- for advanced learning, evaluate claims about evidence for policy and limitations to the evidence base
- gain an insight into how non-government actors can participate in the policy making process

The Policy Cycle attempts to describe the policy-making process in the public service from inception to implementation to evaluation. MHiPS takes readers through idea formation, model creation, proposal pitching, program piloting, evaluation and eventual adoption. In this case, the policy was initially driven by non-government actors but from the pilot stage, the government was on board as a key partner in the process.

Different scholars have conceptualised the cycle in different ways, though they share common elements. The Australian Public Service Academy refers to The Australian Policy Cycle as outlined in "The Australian Policy Handbook: A Practical guide to the policymaking process" (2022) by Catherine Althaus, Sarah Ball, Peter Bridgman, Glyn Davis and David Threlfall. The stages are listed as follows:

- **Identify issues** – how issues get on the policy agenda
- **Policy analysis** – how public servants investigate the issue and gather information
- **Policy instruments** – how the public service identify which types of policy tools to use
- **Consultation/Engagement** – how the public service involves different stakeholder groups and sectors of community in the policy making process
- **Coordination** – how central agencies enlist different parts of government to examine policy proposals and coordinate efforts
- **Decision** – how Cabinet deliberates policy proposals and enacts decisions
- **Implementation** – how the public service puts Cabinet decisions into practice

- **Evaluation** – how the public service assesses the impact of the policy and makes adjustments if needed.

The model recognises that policy-making rarely occurs in a neat, sequential fashion. For example, consultation will often happen throughout the policy cycle and evaluation is often considered as policies are being designed. The MHiPS was codesigned with sector stakeholders and illustrates the benefits of allowing sufficient time to analyse needs and engage with those so crucial to the initiative's acceptance and success. It also shows how evaluation was used from the beginning to refine the initiative and build an evidence base for further expansion.

Class Exercises:

1. Discussion/Essay – using the MHiPS case as an example, explore the different stages of the policy making process? How well does the Australian Policy Cycle describe what happened in the MHiPS case? What other models could you use?
2. Discussion/Essay – which factors were the most critical in taking MHiPS from an idea into practice? Timing? Evidence? Consultation? Something else?
3. Discussion/Essay – how important is it to consider evaluation at the policy design stage? What should you take into account when planning evaluations?
4. Discussion/Essay – think of another example of policy development you have studied. How does it compare to the MHiPS case? Who led the policy development process? What did they do similarly/differently from those involved with MHiPS? How did that work? What are the risks/benefits of the approaches used?

Background reading/resources

Althaus, C., Ball, S., Bridgman, P., Davis, G., & Threlfall, D. (2022). *The Australian Policy Handbook: A Practical Guide to the Policymaking Process* (7th ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003351993>

Mercer et al. Eds. (2021) *Learning Policy, Doing Policy*, ANU Press.
<http://doi.org/10.22459/LPDP.2021>, <https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/anzsog/learning-policy-doing-policy>

The Australian Policy Cycle (illustration) (2023). <https://www.apsacademy.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/Australian%20Policy%20Cycle.pdf>

2. CODESIGN IN PUBLIC POLICY

Learning objectives:

- Understand the concept and principles of codesign in public policy.
- Analyse the role and contributions of stakeholder engagement in the codesign process.
- Consider the risks and benefits of codesign.
- Apply codesign principles to their own policy development projects.

Codesign is an approach to public policy making which enlists those involved with the issue in the policy design and development process. The rationale is that those with the greatest understanding and experience of the issues can and should contribute to policy design in order to achieve the best outcomes. Whether this consistently translates in practice has not been established but governments (and other organisations) faced with challenges of growing complexity have increasingly looked to codesign as a way to improve policy development and implementation.

In MHiPS, the MCRI sees a gap in the policy space regarding child-mental health. They take their expertise to those working in the primary school sector to develop a model aiming to ultimately improve child mental

health. They then enlist the University of Melbourne to develop training. Once the pilot is up and running, teachers and schools provide feedback to further improve the initiative. Mental Health Wellbeing Leaders also confer regularly in communities of practice to enhance their skills and share knowledge.

There are varying definitions of codesign but they tend to emphasise principles of inclusivity, active participation and iteration. For example, the principles of codesign followed by the NSW Council on Social Services (2017) are:

Inclusive	<i>The process includes representatives from critical stakeholder groups who are involved in the codesign project from framing the issue to developing and testing solutions. It utilises feedback, advice and decisions from people with lived or work experience, and the knowledge, experience and skills of experts in the field.</i>
Respectful	<i>All participants are seen as experts and their input is valued and has equal standing. Strategies are used to remove potential or perceived inequality. Partners manage their own and others' feelings in the interest of the process. Codesign requires everyone to negotiate personal and practical understandings at the expense of differences.</i>
Participative	<i>The process itself is open, empathetic and responsive. Codesign uses a series of conversations and activities where dialogue and engagement generate new, shared meanings based on expert knowledge and lived experience. Major themes can be extracted and used as the basis for codesigned solutions. All participants are responsible for the effectiveness of the process.</i>
Iterative	<i>Ideas and solutions are continually tested and evaluated with the participants. Changes and adaptations are a natural part of the process, trialling possibilities and insights as they emerge, taking risks and allowing for failure. This process is also used to fine-tune potential outcomes or solutions as it reaches fruition and can later be used to evaluate its effectiveness.</i>
Outcomes focused	<i>The process can be used to create, redesign or evaluate services, systems or products. It is designed to achieve an outcome or series of outcomes, where the potential solutions can be rapidly tested, effectiveness measured and where the spreading or scaling of these solutions can be developed with stakeholders and in context.</i>

Although codesign is becoming more common in many contexts, it still represents a different way of working for many in government. While the benefits may be more innovative, effective, efficient and legitimate programs (as well as better stakeholder relationships) there are also risks, along with other considerations. They may include:

- Increased complexity
- Greater time requirements
- Less control for government
- Not having the right participants/recruitment issues
- Preparation/training for participants
- Workload and compensation of participants
- Cultural or communication differences
- Conflicting perspectives between stakeholders
- How codesign processes will align with bureaucratic processes.

Class exercises

Discussion/Essay Questions

1. How do the principles of codesign apply to the MHiPS initiative?
2. What were the key codesign challenges faced and how were they addressed?
3. How did codesign contribute to the success of MHiPS?
4. What are some of the risks/benefits of codesign? How can they be mitigated/enhanced?

Assignment examples

1. Take an example of a codesign process from your own organisation. What worked? What could have been improved? What were the challenges and benefits of the codesign process? Or;
2. Choose a policy or policy area that could benefit from a codesign approach. How would you set up the process? Who would you include? What factors would you need to consider?

Background reading/resources

Bason, C. (2010). *Leading Public Sector Innovation: Co-Creating for a Better Society*. Bristol: Policy Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgnsd>

Bason, C. (2016). *Design for Policy*. London: Routledge. https://www.routledge.com/Design-for-Policy/Bason/p/book/9780367670047?srsId=AfmBOoqHFS0DQqAMqzMZA0xGq0rGXgYG7NW3z5-wLw_iclYX1_rfcF0W

Blomkamp, E. (2020). The promise of co-design for public policy. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*.
<https://anzsog.edu.au/research-insights-and-resources/research/the-promise-of-co-design-for-public-policy/>

Mintrom, M., Goddard, P., Grocott, L., & Sumartojo, S. (2024). Co-design in policymaking: from an emerging to an embedded practice. *Policy Sciences*.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11077-024-09550-9>

NSW Council of Social Services (2017). Principles of Co-design <https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Codesign-principles.pdf>

Trischler, J., Dietrich, T., & Rundle-Thiele, S. (2019). Co-design: from expert- to user-driven ideas in public service design. *Public Management Review*, 21(11), 1595–1619.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1619810>

Feedback on Teaching Note use

To assist with continual improvement, if you've used this Teaching Note, we'd greatly appreciate your feedback and suggestions for improvement. To do so, please email caselibrary@anzsog.edu.au with the name of the case and your comments. Many thanks in advance.

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Licence, except for logos, trademarks, photographs and other content marked as supplied by third parties. No licence is given in relation to third party material. Version 08032019. Distributed by the Case Program, The Australia and New Zealand School of Government, www.anzsog.edu.au



Australia &
New Zealand
School Of
Government

ANZSOG