

Equity guide for policy makers

The Equity Framework encourages policy makers to apply an equity lens to the issues being considered. To do this, we need to understand what equity is and know how to intervene. Visit the [Health and Wellbeing Queensland website](#) to learn more about equity.

Why equity matters in policy

Equity is both an outcome and a part of the process of policymaking. Policy makers can assess policies for fair impacts and outcomes but can also drive ongoing action for change. This includes the following impact areas:

Systemic impact

Policy can influence broad societal dynamics and impact populations. It shapes social, economic, and health outcomes for individuals and communities. Policies can influence the way systems work.

Structural change

Policy can create enduring shifts in underlying structures, norms and processes that amplify equity impact. For example, integrating equity principles into governance structures establishes a foundation for systemic change and accountability.

Prevention

Policy can help prevent unfairness from happening and help stop existing inequity from continuing. Policy can minimise unintended unfair consequences, encourage coordinated equity action, and help remove systemic barriers to equity.

Sustainability

Policy can address immediate issues while laying the groundwork for a long-term trajectory towards equity. Equity-focused policy addresses underlying causes to create deep change. Policies can help make sure the future is good for everyone.

Equity principles for policy makers

Equitable policy making is underpinned by the following equity principles.

Respect

Use a framing of fairness and systems thinking.

Recognition

Consider historical injustices, institutional and systemic barriers to equity, and different mindsets.

Representation

Build partnerships between policy makers and those the policy includes to enable social participation throughout the policy process.

Responsiveness

Act on what is learnt from understanding perspectives, conditions and underlying causes.

Putting equity into practice

The Australian policy cycle developed by Catherine Althaus, Sarah Ball, Peter Bridgman, Glyn Davis and David Threlfall explains the multiple stages of the public policy process. It is recognised that while policymaking follows numerous stages, it is a complex process subject to many factors, and may not always follow the staged progression.

The following guide uses the stages of the cycle to prompt policy makers with considerations for equitable policy development and implementation.

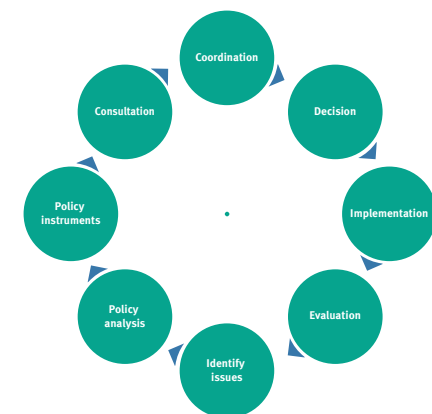


Figure 1. The Australian Policy Cycle.

Althaus, C., Ball, S., Bridgman, P., Davis, G., & Threlfall, D. (2023). *The Australian Policy Handbook: A Practical Guide to the Policymaking Process* (7th ed.). Routledge.



Acknowledgement

Health and Wellbeing Queensland respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands across Queensland. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, as two distinctly different groups, that are part of the First Nations peoples of Australia. We pay our respects and acknowledge the important role of Elders, past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, cultures, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Queensland.



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Stages of the policy cycle	What this stage involves	Prompt questions to apply an equity lens
Issue identification	Issues are raised by various actors including elected representatives, voters, interested groups and the public service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we seeking to understand the root cause of the issue? • What is informing this understanding beyond dominant mindsets and assumptions? • Are there different ways to learn about it? • How are society's assumptions, value and beliefs influencing the status quo? • Where are we accepting the status quo without question? • Is the issue considered to be a problem by all? If not, should it still be solved? Whose problem are we solving? • How do we enable impacted persons and communities to have influence? • How are we acknowledging and respecting different worldviews and needs? • Consider your own assumptions, values and beliefs. How are they impacting how you understand the issue?
Policy analysis	The issue is analysed to provide decision makers enough information about the policy challenge to make an informed judgement regarding potential government intervention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we intervening for lasting, meaningful change? Or if this is a deliberate stopgap, does it have a defined timeframe, where broader solutions will then be considered? • Will the policy options meet the identified needs of the people you we trying to support? • Who would be advantaged and disadvantaged, and is there a way to ensure a more equitable outcome? • Do the policy options perpetuate disadvantage? • Do the policy options enable participation, opportunity and autonomy? • How can the strengths and resources of people and communities be included? • Are we acting with respect, recognition and responsiveness, and championing representation? • How do we enable impacted persons and communities to have influence? • Consider your own assumptions, values and beliefs and how they are impacting how you see the problem? • Have we considered why certain views are assigned more merit than others? • How are we acknowledging and respecting different worldviews and needs?
Policy instruments	If government intervention appears likely, appropriate policy instruments, or ways forward, are identified. This could include providing a new service or changing the law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we intervening for lasting, meaningful change? • Are the likely consequences fair? • How can the strengths and resources of people and communities be included? • Do the policy options enable participation, opportunity and autonomy? • How are we acknowledging and respecting different worldviews and needs?

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<p>Engagement</p>	<p>The analysis of the challenge, and feasibility of the proposed response, are tested through engagement.</p> <p>This includes internal engagement within government. It also includes external engagement with the community and experts to explore potential impacts of future directions, test the proposed policy instruments and where appropriate, to gather support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we only engaging the community on identified options or are we co-creating solutions with the community? How are we working together, creating solutions and making decisions? • Are we acting with respect, recognition and responsiveness, and championing representation? • Whose voices are represented and respected? • How do we enable impacted persons and communities to have influence? • Are we engaging in a way that is accessible to diverse communities? • How are we acknowledging and respecting different worldviews and needs?
<p>Coordination</p>	<p>This stage requires coordination with government agencies and departments, including central agencies, to ensure the policy is feasible and consistent with existing policies and practices. Coordination may also be needed to resolve any issues between agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are we working together to create solutions and make decisions?
<p>Decision</p>	<p>Government makes a collective decision on a way forward to address the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we intervening for lasting, meaningful change? Or if this is a deliberate stopgap, does it have a defined timeframe, where broader solutions will then be considered? • Are we considering the needs of future generations? • Consider your own assumptions, values and beliefs. How are they impacting how you understand the issue?
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>The public service carries out the government's decision. This can require, for example, writing legislation for parliamentary approval, or creating a new program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we considering the impact on the most disadvantaged? Are we perpetuating or improving inequity? • How do we make sure implementation is flexible enough to allow for varied support for people with different needs and circumstances? • How do we enable impacted persons and communities to have influence? • Have we set things up to reflect, learn and adapt?
<p>Evaluation</p>	<p>Evaluation is needed to assess the impact of a policy and determine whether adjustments are needed. This evaluation can prompt a new cycle to begin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we measure intended and unintended change? • Who is involved in measurement? • Who will see results? Is it transparent? • Can the results be easily understood?