

Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity

 Innovation image

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Organisation: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

Country: Australia

Level of government: Regional/State government

Sector: Health

Type: Methods, Organisational Design, Public Service

Launched in: 2015

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity involved everyday people in the process of decision-making on a major population health issue. Actions to address complex public health issues such as obesity can elicit polarised responses from government, industry and the broader community. The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) provided 117 Victorians' with an independently designed and facilitated process to allow them to make their own decisions on obesity, and how they would like government, industry and community to respond. The Jury's remit was framed around a single question: How can we make it easier to eat better? The Jurors were a randomly selected yet representative group of Victorians who helped move the debate beyond the usual 'experts and lobbyists'. The objective of this deliberative process was to provide a Steering Group of sector leaders with a clear and actionable set of recommendations or 'asks' and create an authorising environment for policy-makers to act. Victoria's Citizens' Jury on Obesity was innovative in its: Scope: Many citizens' juries consider much narrower fields of inquiry. VicHealth took the bold step of inviting the community to deliberate on multiple aspects of one of the big, costly issues affecting our health and wellbeing. Question: The question reframed how solutions to obesity are normally presented. The Jurors weren't asked for solutions to obesity, but were asked how they may be promoted to change their eating behaviour. Scale: We involved 117 randomly-selected Victorians as jurors to ensure input from the widest possible range of ages, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds and health status. Duration: Many citizens' juries are conducted within the space of a single day or weekend. Our jurors deliberated for six weeks before coming together in person at a weekend deliberative forum. Digital engagement: Jurors were organised into a number of online groups so they could share views on the submissions.

Why the innovation was developed

- It is anticipated that by 2025 more than three quarters of the Victorian population will be overweight or obese. VicHealth recognises the reciprocal relationship between people and their food environments. As we consume more unhealthy food, our environments reflect this demand by offering more of the same, and then our options for healthier choices are limited. We need to focus on shaping our 'food environment' either on a personal level, or working with the people who currently shape our food environment to change it. Importantly, these changes need to happen at a population level to have the impact required to reduce obesity. In creating the Citizens' Jury on Obesity, VicHealth sought to generate conversations with the community about acceptable and effective solutions to halt rising levels of the obesity. The intent was to mobilise communities and individuals to take action, encourage industry to initiate change, and create an enabling environment for stronger government action.
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Objectives

Enhance public trust, Enhance transparency, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction, Increase citizen engagement

Main beneficiaries

Academia, Businesses, Civil Society, Government bodies, Government staff, Young people

Existing similar practices

Varied

In public administration of my country

Varied

Governments have begun to explore innovative democratic models such as citizens' juries to develop better, and more enduring, public policy and deliver public value. Across Australia civic participation is being reimagined to address issues as diverse as environmental sustainability (Geraldton, WA) and energy reform (Parliament of NSW). A growing body of evidence suggests that greater democratic participation is proving to be effective in finding impactful, long-term policy solutions.

Results

Other improvements

- This process has demonstrated that citizens' juries are an effective mechanism for collaboratively working with citizens in public policy development. Of the stakeholders surveyed, 69 per cent saw citizens' juries as an effective way to involve everyday Victorians in public decision making. However, we recognise it will take more time, advocacy and increased public accountability to determine the enduring impact of a citizens' jury process on driving multisector action to address complex public health issues such as obesity. Over the coming year, VicHealth will continue to monitor progress against the asks. We will actively work with policy makers, public health and consumer advocates and industry to promote the jury's asks.

Development

Design

VicHealth generated the idea for a Citizens' Jury on Obesity with the leadership of its first resident Leading Thinker, Dr David Halpern, from the UK's Behavioural Insights Team. VicHealth embraced the opportunity to explore the central role food plays in our lives from a social and psychological perspective, and to consider the range of influences (many of them unconscious) on our food choices. As a strong proponent of grassroots community engagement, we also saw the potential for meaningful engagement by asking jurors to consider the obesity problem in the context of their own lives and communities. This enabled VicHealth to present policymakers with a transparent community-driven evidence base for action. We sought the advice of NewDemocracy Foundation – Australia's leading independent agency committed to improving democracy – on how to stage a robust, credible Citizens' Jury on Obesity and on who to involve in its delivery. Design time: 6 month(s)

Testing

- We recruited and worked closely with suppliers experienced in the methodology regarding random selection, facilitation, development of an appropriate questions, and transparency of process to ensure an open and democratic approach. These suppliers provided a set of learning to leverage our knowledge base on commencement of the project. An essential aspect of the process design was building broader awareness of this initiative among the wider Victorian population. We leveraged the 'human element' so that the wider community had an opportunity to see and identify with the people involved. It was clear that the jurors were not merely interested activists but represented the bell curve of views within the community at large. A partnership was established with The Herald and Weekly Times, a major newspaper, to promote the initiative through a series of news articles, profiles of jurors, opinion editorials and a poll that elicited the views of its readership.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- Three phase implementation: Stakeholder tier: NewDemocracy Foundation asked public health experts, food retailers, community groups and consumer advocates to provide jurors with evidence responding to the Jury question. Online experience: Jurors were provided with 64 submissions gathered through Phase 1, which encompassed a broad range of views. After six weeks reviewing and discussing this evidence online, the Jury was asked to identify any gaps and to select experts they wanted to hear further evidence from in person. Jury tier: On 17 and 18 October 2015, 78 people* came together as citizen jurors to consider the additional evidence, consolidate their views and develop asks. An 'ask' is the Jury's perspective, after considering all the evidence, on what needs to be done to address the issue. The Jury presented 20 asks to a Steering Group. *This number was the final count of attendees at the 'live' event.

Resources used:

- The process was intensive requiring the following resource allocation: • Staffing o VicHealth staff (approx. 2 full time staff for a period of 6 months) o Portion of Leading Thinker's Time (approx. 5 days consultancy) • Hiring of key suppliers □ Mosaic Lab (specialist facilitators: 193 hours) □ newDemocracy Foundation (Jury recruitment/design methodology) □ WildWon (engagement and event management) • Development of Software platform (this cost could be mitigated by existing suitable online platform) • Other costs Nominal fee for Jurors (\$250 AUD per Juror) Publishing of report

Implementation time: 11 month(s)

Diffusion

- Post the Jury, neither the jury, VicHealth nor the Steering Group were positioned to implement the asks in a straightforward manner. To extend the jury's influence, it may be possible to strengthen the jury asks through social movement-building strategies such as amplification via media channels or an extension of the jury's remit to include advocacy actions. VicHealth developed the Insights Report that presents some of the key insights and learnings from the journey.
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Challenges and solutions

- Scope: Tackling the full range of factors that influence obesity was deemed too large for a citizens' jury process, hence our method focused on a singular question around eating behaviour.
- Scale: The scale of the Jury required extra facilitators and forum planning.
- Juror equity: A small honorarium was provided to avoid excluding participants who may have found participation a hardship
- Juror convenience: Jurors needed to consider a large volume of expert papers so we developed an online portal via which they could access, download and read materials in their own time and place.
- Juror factions: Jurors were arranged into small groups and regularly mixed into new groups to avoid factions.
- Divergent learning styles: Facilitators used a blend of learning approaches during the six weeks of online deliberation.

Partnerships

Behavioural Insights Team, UK; NewDemocracy Foundation; MosaicLab; Wildwon; Jurors/people of Victoria; Kinship Digital; Herald Sun newspaper; Steering Committee members

Academics and Research Bodies, Other Public Sector, Private sector

A multidisciplinary consortium of suppliers provided expertise in democratic research, large-scale deliberative facilitation, user experience design and social technologies. • Dr David Halpern, brought the insights of the UK Behavioural Insights Team to the conceptualisation, development and implementation of the Citizens' Jury. • NewDemocracy Foundation, Australia's leading and independent democracy institute, designed the process, managed the recruitment and selection of jurors, and oversaw submissions • MosaicLab designed and facilitated the Jury's face-to-face and online discussions and activities • Wildwon advised on user experience, design and event production • The Steering Committee of government, industry, public health and community decisionmakers and influencers guided planning of the Jury and responded to its 20 asks • The Herald Sun partnership gave visibility to the Jury, and started a constructive, broader public conversation about solutions to the obesity problem.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The focus on food and obesity strongly resonated with the Jury
- Independent organisations have a unique role in catalysing civic participation
- Credibility, transparency, and permission are the essential principles for a citizens' jury process.
- Critical success factor: no censorship
- Citizens' Juries harness the power of collective intelligence to produce credible recommendations
- Concrete and timely action is essential to ensure government, industry and community take the public's view seriously
- Citizens' Juries promote community collaboration. Getting to community empowerment would require additional social movement strategies.

Conditions for success

- Leadership was the most important precondition for success. This was achieved through:
- The CEO of VicHealth drove organisational commitment to delivery of the project, securing high level participation on the Obesity Expert Reference Panel and the Steering Committee, and in advocating for policy-makers to consider the 20 asks.
- VicHealth's existing role as a world leader in health promotion, which means we have the credibility and know-how as an organisation to engage and bring policy-makers, the community, media and industry interests on the Jury journey
- The behavioural insights expertise of resident Leading Thinker Dr David Halpern, who advised on how a Citizens' Jury on Obesity could support behavioural and regulatory change.

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