

## Shape the Future

A Guide to Developing  
Political Policies

**Central Coast Conservative Alliance**

[centralcoastconservativealliance.com](http://centralcoastconservativealliance.com)

Concerned Young Australians



## Shape the Future

---

A Guide to Developing Political Policies

Prepared by the Central Coast Conservative Alliance

|"The best way to predict the future is to create it." — Abraham Lincoln





## 2. What Makes a Good Policy?

Not every idea is a policy. A good policy is more than a wish — it's a structured plan that can actually be implemented. Strong policies share these qualities:

1. **Addresses a real problem** — clearly identifies the issue and who is affected
2. **Evidence-based** — grounded in research, data, and real-world examples
3. **Specific and actionable** — says exactly what will happen, who will do it, and when
4. **Feasible** — can realistically be implemented with available resources
5. **Considers consequences** — accounts for side effects, both positive and negative
6. **Fair and inclusive** — considers the impact on different groups of people

**Watch Out:** A common trap is writing a policy that sounds good but can't be implemented. "Ban all pollution" sounds great, but it's not a policy — it's a slogan. A policy explains *how*.

### 4. EVIDENCE

Key statistic: \_\_\_\_\_

Case study: \_\_\_\_\_

Expert source: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. COST AND FUNDING

Estimated cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Funding source: \_\_\_\_\_

Cost of inaction: \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. IMPACT

Who benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

Who disadvantaged: \_\_\_\_\_

Unintended consequences: \_\_\_\_\_

### 7. OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

Likely objection: \_\_\_\_\_

My response: \_\_\_\_\_

### 8. SOURCES

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Final thought:** Every law, every program, and every government initiative started as someone's idea. The policies shaping Australia today were written by people who saw a problem and had the courage to propose a solution. You can do the same. Start small, think big, and back it up with evidence.

## 12. Policy Development Template

Use this template to develop your own policy proposal. Work through each section in order.

**POLICY TITLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. THE PROBLEM

What is happening? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is affected? \_\_\_\_\_

How many people? \_\_\_\_\_

What causes it? \_\_\_\_\_

What if we do nothing? \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. POLICY OBJECTIVE

Policy will achieve: \_\_\_\_\_

Measure of success: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Action 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Timeline: \_\_\_\_\_

Action 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Timeline: \_\_\_\_\_

Action 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

Timeline: \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Identifying the Problem

Every good policy starts with a clearly defined problem. This is the most important step — if you get the problem wrong, your solution won't work.

### How to define the problem

1. **Describe what's happening.** What is the current situation? Be specific.
2. **Identify who is affected.** Which communities, age groups, or regions? How many people?
3. **Explain why it matters.** What are the consequences of not acting?
4. **Understand the root cause.** Don't just describe the symptom — dig deeper. *Why* is this happening?

### Example:

*Weak:* "Young people are stressed."

*Strong:* "One in four Australians aged 16–24 experience a mental health condition each year, yet 75% do not access professional support, often due to cost, stigma, and long wait times in regional areas."

### Questions to test your problem statement

- Can I back this up with data or evidence?
- Is the problem specific enough to solve, or is it too broad?
- Have I identified the root cause, not just a symptom?
- Do the people affected agree this is a real problem?

**Try This:** Think of an issue in your school or community. Write a problem statement using the format: "[Who] is affected by [what], caused by [why], resulting in [consequences]."

## 4. Researching Solutions

Once you've defined the problem, resist the urge to jump straight to your favourite solution. Good policy-makers research what's already been tried.

### What to look for

- **What is currently being done?** Are there existing policies addressing this problem? Why aren't they working?
- **What have other states or countries tried?** Look for case studies, especially from similar contexts (e.g., New Zealand, Canada, UK).
- **What does the research say?** Look for academic studies, government reviews, and expert analysis.
- **What do affected communities want?** The best policies are shaped by the people they're meant to help.

**Tip:** Keep a research log. For each source, note: the key finding, who produced it, when it was published, and whether it supports or challenges your thinking.

## 11. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Pitfall	What to Do Instead
Describing the problem but offering no solution	Always pair your problem statement with specific, actionable proposals
Proposing solutions with no evidence	Support every proposal with data, case studies, or expert opinion
Ignoring the cost	Include at least a rough estimate and identify potential funding
Being too vague ("improve education")	Be specific about what, who, when, and how
Only considering people like yourself	Consider diverse impacts across communities, regions, and backgrounds
Dismissing all opposing views	Acknowledge objections and explain how your policy addresses them
Trying to solve everything at once	Focus on one clear problem with a targeted, achievable solution

## 10. Presenting Your Policy

A brilliant policy is useless if no one hears about it. How you present your work determines whether people take it seriously.

### The one-page summary

Decision-makers are busy. Prepare a one-page summary that covers:

- **The problem** (2–3 sentences)
- **Your solution** (3–5 dot points)
- **Key evidence** (2–3 compelling facts)
- **Cost and funding** (1–2 sentences)
- **Call to action** — what do you want them to do?

### Where to present your policy

- **School councils and student representative bodies**
- **Local council youth advisory committees**
- **Community forums and town halls**
- **Letters or emails to your local MP**
- **Youth parliaments** (e.g., YMCA Youth Parliament)
- **Social media and blogs** — to build public support
- **Submissions to government inquiries** — open to everyone

**Tip:** Adapt your presentation for the audience. A school assembly needs a different approach than a letter to a minister. Use your public speaking skills from *Your Voice Matters* when presenting in person.

## Where to research Australian policy

Source	What You'll Find
aph.gov.au	Parliamentary inquiries, committee reports, Hansard debates
abs.gov.au	Statistics on population, health, economy, education
pc.gov.au	Productivity Commission — independent policy research and reviews
Grattan Institute	Independent think tank with detailed policy reports
The Conversation	Expert analysis written in plain language
AIHW (aihw.gov.au)	Health and welfare data and reports

### Learning from other places

Some of Australia's best policies were inspired by what worked overseas. When looking at examples from other countries, ask:

- Is the context similar enough to Australia?
- What were the actual results — not just the promises?
- What would need to change for it to work here?

## 5. Drafting Your Policy

Now it's time to put your ideas into a structured format. A well-drafted policy has clear components that anyone can follow.

### The essential parts of a policy proposal

#### A. Title

Keep it clear and descriptive. Avoid clever puns — people should know what your policy is about from the title alone.

*Example: "Expanding Free Mental Health Services for Young Australians in Regional Areas"*

#### B. Problem Statement

Your clear, evidence-backed description of the problem (from Section 3).

#### C. Policy Objective

What does your policy aim to achieve? Be specific and measurable where possible.

*Example: "Reduce average wait times for youth mental health appointments in regional NSW from 8 weeks to 2 weeks within 3 years."*

## 9. Testing and Refining Your Policy

A first draft is never the final version. The best policies are tested, challenged, and improved before they're presented.

### Ways to test your policy

- **Peer review.** Ask friends, classmates, or mentors to read your policy and challenge it. Where are the gaps?
- **Devil's advocate.** Try to argue *against* your own policy. If you can poke holes in it, so will others — fix them now.
- **Stakeholder feedback.** Show your draft to people who would be affected. Does it address their real needs?
- **The "So what?" test.** After each point, ask yourself "So what?" If you can't explain why it matters, cut it or strengthen it.

### Refining checklist

- Is the problem clearly defined with evidence?
- Are the proposed actions specific and actionable?
- Is every major claim supported by evidence?
- Have I considered who benefits and who might be disadvantaged?
- Have I addressed potential objections?
- Is the costing reasonable and explained?
- Could someone with no background understand this?
- Have I asked at least one other person for feedback?

**Try This:** Swap policy drafts with a friend. Each of you tries to find three weaknesses in the other's proposal. Then help each other strengthen those areas.

## 8. Costing and Feasibility

One of the quickest ways to have a policy dismissed is to ignore what it will cost. Decision-makers want to know: **how much, and where does the money come from?**

### How to approach costing

1. **Estimate the costs.** What will each action require? Staff, equipment, infrastructure, administration?
2. **Identify funding sources.** Could it come from existing budgets, new revenue, grants, or reallocation?
3. **Consider the cost of inaction.** What is the current problem costing society? Sometimes spending money now saves more later.
4. **Compare with alternatives.** Is your approach cost-effective compared to other solutions?

**Example:** "This proposal would cost approximately \$120 million over 3 years. For context, untreated youth mental illness currently costs the Australian economy an estimated \$15.9 billion annually. Early intervention is significantly cheaper than crisis response."

### Feasibility questions

- Does the infrastructure exist, or does it need to be built?
- Are there enough trained people to deliver this?
- Is the timeline realistic?
- Does it require new laws, or can it work within existing frameworks?
- Is there political will to make this happen?

**Be Honest:** You don't need exact dollar figures. Rough estimates with clear reasoning are far better than no costing at all.

## D. Proposed Actions

This is the heart of your policy. List the specific steps that need to happen:

- **What** will be done?
- **Who** is responsible for doing it?
- **When** will it happen? (timeline)
- **How** will it be funded?

### Example actions:

1. Fund 200 additional mental health professionals in regional Medicare-funded clinics over 3 years
2. Establish a telehealth counselling service specifically for 12–25 year olds, available 7 days a week
3. Partner with universities to create rural placement incentives for psychology graduates

## E. Evidence and Justification

Explain *why* these actions will work, supported by your research.

## F. Expected Outcomes

What will change if this policy is adopted? How will you measure success?

## G. Potential Risks and Mitigation

What could go wrong, and how would you address it?

**Tip:** Write your policy so that someone with no background knowledge could read it and understand exactly what you're proposing and why. Clarity beats complexity every time.

## 6. Building Your Evidence Base

Evidence is what separates a serious policy proposal from a wish list. The stronger your evidence, the harder it is for anyone to dismiss your idea.

### Types of evidence

- **Statistics and data** — numbers that show the scale of the problem
- **Case studies** — real examples of similar policies that worked (or didn't) elsewhere
- **Expert opinions** — what do researchers, professionals, and practitioners say?
- **Lived experience** — stories from people directly affected (with their permission)
- **Government reports** — findings from inquiries, reviews, and audits

### Making your evidence persuasive

- **Use recent data.** A statistic from 2015 is less convincing than one from 2024.
- **Cite your sources.** Always say where your information came from.
- **Use a mix.** Combine hard data with human stories for maximum impact.
- **Be honest about limitations.** If the evidence is mixed, say so — this builds credibility.

**Watch Out:** Cherry-picking only the evidence that supports your position is tempting, but it weakens your policy. If there's evidence against your approach, address it directly and explain why your proposal is still the best option.

## 7. Thinking About Impact

Every policy creates ripple effects. A strong policy-maker thinks beyond the intended outcome and considers who else might be affected — and how.

### The impact checklist

For each proposed action, ask:

- **Who benefits directly?** Is this the group you intended to help?
- **Who might be disadvantaged?** Could your policy create new problems for other groups?
- **Are there unintended consequences?** What might happen that you didn't plan for?
- **Is it equitable?** Does it affect people fairly across different backgrounds, locations, and incomes?
- **What happens if it doesn't work?** Can it be reversed or adjusted?

**Example:** A policy to make public transport free for under-18s would benefit young people. But it could also lead to overcrowding, reduced revenue for transport agencies, or resentment from older commuters. A good policy anticipates these issues and includes solutions.

### Stakeholder mapping

Identify everyone who has a stake in your policy:

- **Primary stakeholders** — people directly affected
- **Secondary stakeholders** — people indirectly affected
- **Decision-makers** — people with the power to adopt your policy
- **Opponents** — people or groups who might resist, and why

**Tip:** Talk to stakeholders early. Their input will make your policy stronger and build support before you even present it.