

# Preface

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia has long had an interest in promoting more evidence-based public policy and has frequently drawn on its membership and the wider expert community to actively engage with public policy practitioners in government.

Intergenerational reports (IGRs) offer the opportunity to examine longer-term issues and trends, beyond short-term political agendas, and to identify the areas that deserve serious attention for long-term structural reform. Their very nature should also facilitate closer interaction between governments and external experts.

With that in mind, the academy hosted a workshop in September 2021 of both practitioners involved with the preparation of the 2021 IGR and external experts to assess the report and to advise on how future IGRs might be improved in light of this assessment.

This book is based upon the papers presented by the external experts at the workshop, revised following discussion and further analysis. They do not purport to represent the views expressed by the government practitioners who participated, as their involvement was strictly based on the Chatham House Rule. The views expressed by the authors are their own and, in some cases, differ from those of other authors.

Drawing on the material from the experts, the final chapter of the book has been written by the president of the academy, Richard Holden, and summarises the academy's conclusion about the 2021 IGR and recommendations for future IGRs. The academy concluded that the 2021 IGR represented a substantial improvement on the previous 2015 IGR but still has significant shortcomings.

There is a danger that IGRs have become too mechanical, too narrow and too subject to the views of the government of the day. They don't shed enough light on the future or provide the wake-up call for public understanding of looming issues that such reports were intended to foster. Nor, in all the focus on expenditure, do they consider the benefits of that expenditure.

It is recommended that future IGRs be prepared with greater independence from politics, that they cover all Australian governments (not just the Commonwealth), that the analysis be more open and include sensitivity analyses and scenario assessments, and that there be a much wider 'wellbeing' approach to long-term 'sustainability' rather than focus only on fiscal sustainability. Such an approach should highlight the long-term issues the Australian public needs to address.

The academy's assessment of the 2021 IGR identified several fiscal and broader policy issues not highlighted in the report that warrant greater attention over the next few years. They include the need to consider revenues as well as expenditures as avenues for addressing fiscal sustainability and the danger of increasing inequality. While productivity and workforce participation are highlighted, there is little discussion of options for improvement, nor advice on the future direction of Australia's migration program or on building capacity for economic resilience to respond to future shocks.

We hope the book attracts close attention from public officials and politicians, and generates constructive debate in the community.

**Andrew Podger, Jane Hall and Mike Woods**

This text is taken from *More Than Fiscal: The Intergenerational Report, Sustainability and Public Policy in Australia*, edited by Andrew Podger, Jane Hall and Mike Woods, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.