

COMMUNITIES IN CONTROL

**An open love letter from the
Australian community sector
to all Australian politicians,
ministerial advisers and
every public servant.**



Communities in Control
The Conference. The Movement.



an enterprise of
ourcommunity.com.au
Where not-for-profits go for help

What would it look like if a government loved its citizens?

This was the electrifying moment that Communities in Control 2022 keynote speaker journalist Rick Morton made a remark that shook the audience. And shook me.

What would it look like if a government loved its citizens?

I had once been a senior public servant. The very theme of the conference I was chairing revolved around love. And yet, it had never occurred to me to think about the delivery of government services in this way.

“Can a government love its people? I think it should,” Rick told the conference.

“Not, you know, sending an 18th or 21st birthday card from the MP’s office. But actually building systems that carefully support people and do not, actively or otherwise, make their lives worse.

“You will save a bucket load of money by loving your population. You will save in the justice system. You will save in mental health. You will stop having to park ambulances at the bottom of the cliff waiting for people to jump.

“We’re breaking people down. We are. We are actually wearing them down.

“When a government loves its people it doesn’t punish them. It doesn’t make life hard for them. It sees people as people who are trying very hard and helps them to try.”

Rick has spent many years documenting some of the dismal and miserable failures of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, a program that once held so much promise, and other welfare programs, along with investigations into RoboDebt. He told the conference he was starting (reluctantly) to think we might as well throw it out and start again; reimagine it with a new lens, a new set of metrics – even simple things like answering phones instead of referring people to obtuse websites.

What would it look like if our government loved those people it was sent to serve?

It was a penny-drop moment that topped a series of preceding events that together have led to the production of this love letter. Some months earlier I had gone to Thea Snow, CEO of the Centre for Public Impact (a Boston Consulting Group Foundation), to ask for speaker suggestions for the upcoming conference. A former public servant, Thea spends every minute of her working life (and more) thinking about how to “reimagine government”. She gave me some good tips on the movers and shakers in that arena. We made the connections and booked in the keynote. (Thea later alerted me to the fact that another brilliant scholar, Girol Karacaoglu, Head of the School of Government at Victoria University of Wellington, former Chief Economist at Treasury, had just released a book called Love you: public policy for intergenerational wellbeing. This love thing. It’s a thing!)

It’s the week before the conference, and our speaker, the person who was going to help us start the revolution in reinventing community-government relations, emails to say that sadly, she has covid. These are the days of our lives.

What to do?

This is a conference that attracts 800 delegates each day. We need a stellar stand in.

Enter Daniel Teitelbaum, Lead Facilitator at Playful Thinking. Daniel knows just what to do.

“We know the answers,” he tells me. “It’s Communities in Control. The 800 people from the community sector attending the conference, from all parts of Australia, working on all sorts of problems, they know the answers.”

Daniel designs a conference session designed to tap into all that knowledge.

"We'll work on a list of grievances of government," he says.

It's the day of the conference. Eight hundred delegates begin workshopping alternatives to static misalignment. "What you want from your governments? How can we work together better?" we ask them. Passionate debates erupted across the conference room. People who've spent their lives struggling with practical remedies for Australians in need – the best free market research any government has ever had – come together to search for solutions.

Fast forward three months and we have our list of grievances but better than that, we're ready to tell government how to address that big list; we're ready to show government what it would look like if they truly loved the community sector, and the citizens that sector loves, and represents.

There's a lot to be done, but what it boils down to is this. Governments – all of them: federal, state and local; left-leaning or right-leaning – need to stop hiring consultants to tell them how to reinvent their systems (reinvent our systems). They need to send a simple message to every public servant across the land:

What would it look like if a government loved its citizens? Show us what that looks like.

This is the secret to solving every government's problem, and to turning around the nightmare situation for many community groups, and too many citizens, who have the misfortune of needing support from a system that does not look upon them with love. Love us! Show us how it's done.

If you're part of a government, use the list that follows as your inspiration. If you're a community group or disgruntled citizen, tell us what we're missing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Denis Moriarty', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Denis Moriarty
Group Managing Director, Our Community
Founder and Convenor, Communities in Control

We, the people of the community sector, and on behalf of the people we work for and represent, demand to be loved.

We demand to be seen as partners, collaborating with government.

We demand recognition for our work and our impact.

We want leadership that respects our knowledge and experience gained from working on the ground to support the full range of human needs.

We need to trust our leaders. Trust in government has fallen almost 30% in 15 years. Rightfully so.

We need a place to live. The proportion of dwellings that are social housing has halved in two decades, to just 3%. Social housing waiting times are frequently estimated to be five to 10 years. Tens of thousands of us are waiting for homes.

We need an economy that works for us. The bottom 60% of us hold less than a fifth of wealth. More than 3 million people live below the poverty line. More than a million of these are children and young people. (Do we really need those tax cuts?)

We deserve quality education for all. By year nine, disadvantaged students are 2.5 years behind their peers, and 85% of teachers in disadvantaged schools feel the system is not working.

We need to give proper respect and recognition for Australia's first people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have waited long enough for justice.

We need you to help us live dignified lives. When we live with disability, we face systemic hurdles in a world not built for us. And too many children, teenagers, people of colour and women are abused and silenced, vulnerable at home and in the workplace.

We need a government that acts as though it loves us.



Leadership

1. We demand longer-term thinking that extends well beyond an election cycle and the lifetimes of the decision makers.
2. We demand an end to parliamentary privileges that conceal corruption.
3. We demand a cultural change in the behaviour of our leaders and in the respect they pay each other and our nation inside and outside of parliament.
4. We demand a transparent government that makes itself accountable to the public for its decisions, including transparency on donations, data and information that lead to decisions.
5. We demand integrity in the individuals who represent us, and an integrity organisation with the commitment and capability to hold accountable those who fail in this responsibility.
6. We demand a holistic perspective from government, where systems are integrated rather than divided between an administrative web of departments that pass the buck and work in silos without an appreciation of context.



Representation

7. We demand representation of all people at all levels of government. We are united in our belief that our different voices need to be heard.
 8. We demand that decisions involve the people affected by them. That all programs and policies include an authentic process of co-design from conception to ongoing feedback. We demand a system of dialogue.
 9. We demand the inclusion of citizen-led decision-making bodies in our government.
 10. We demand that young people and those in need of social security be represented in government decision making.
 11. We demand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty is acknowledged and enshrined within our national, state and federal laws, institutions and systems.
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Economy

12. We demand that the welfare of the community drive economic decision making.
 13. We demand employment, fair wages and decent working conditions for all.
 14. We demand equitable taxes: tax relief for low wage earners and increased taxes for high earners and corporations.
 15. We demand a review of criminal records as a barrier to employment.
 16. We demand an economy that rewards the community sector for its hard work in alleviating suffering.
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Justice

17. We demand fairer and more compassionate treatment of young people in our justice system.
18. We demand sufficient funding for family violence prevention, consent education and protection for victims.
19. We demand an overhaul of the prison system, private and public, to incorporate better training to reduce rates of recidivism.
20. We demand a diversion-based, prevention-focused justice system that practises rehabilitation over punishment.
21. We demand a safe, transparent, and well-resourced child protection system that ensures the best outcomes for vulnerable children.
22. We demand protection, care and support for people seeking asylum, provided with the same love and concern we give to our children.



Welfare

23. We demand free, universal essential services.
 24. We demand a thorough and ongoing commitment to provision of housing affordability and social housing for financially and socially challenged people.
 25. We demand emergency long-term housing constructed now in rural and metropolitan regions for homeless people and people with low socio-economic status.
 26. We demand easier access to government assistance and increased government assistance payments.
 27. We demand improved access to door-to-door transport for older people experiencing transport disadvantage.
 28. We demand a complete overhaul of Centrelink services, an increase in payments, a change in attitudes towards service users, and clear, simple processes for accessing services, where citizens deal with real people, and those real people act as if they love them.
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Health

29. We demand free universal healthcare for all people, including mental health care.
 30. We demand equal access to support for people with disability excluded from the NDIS.
 31. We demand an NDIS that isn't prohibitively complicated in its administration.
 32. We demand peer-led grassroots support organisations that are diagnosis-specific for all mental health disorders.
 33. We demand that dental care be included in Medicare.
 34. We demand an NDIS that serves its purpose in providing access to appropriate funding that fully provides for those in need.
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Education

35. We demand free education for all, from birth to university.
36. We demand significant investment in the quality of education, with the highest quality teachers in the most disadvantaged areas.
37. We demand greater funding to public libraries to support non-traditional education within communities.
38. We demand that all obstacles to education, including wealth inequality, distance, ability, and cultural background, are proactively alleviated.
39. We demand an aged care system that treats the elderly with the dignity every human being deserves.



Funding

40. We demand that the process to acquire government funding be made easier, with less onerous application processes and fewer barriers to access, including language and literacy barriers.
 41. We demand that funding goes further, to more places and to smaller organisations whose work goes unnoticed.
 42. We demand funding for longer periods, to allow programs to take hold, grow and develop, without abandoning those in need.
 43. We demand funding for artists to create inspiration in all art forms to help us change as a nation into a fairer and more egalitarian society.
 44. We demand that government provide support to the community sector to enable it to hire top talent that is being taken by other industries and sectors.
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Climate

45. We demand clear and vocal leadership on climate change, taking Australia to the forefront of identifying and acting on climate change within the global community.
46. We demand swift policy action on climate change... now.
47. We demand a commitment to protecting the disadvantaged from the impact of climate change.
48. We demand a corporate sector that takes responsibility for its environmental impact.

What comes next?

We make our appeal to a new federal government (and every other government), one that comes to power with a commitment to rethinking the bureaucratic and ideological distortions introduced into government's relations with the community sector.

We are encouraged by the broad sweep of reform and reconsideration expressed in such statements as that **by Minister Bill Shorten on the NDIS**, stressing the importance of "valuing people with disability, not measuring their price in a budget" and "seeing the whole person, not just their impairment". It is just that emphasis on the importance of participation and the practicality of humanity that we call for as a fundamental principle of governments' relationships with the community sector. In addition, the impressive **Dr Andrew Leigh**, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, is working on catalysing charities and the sector along with the proposed well-being budget.

We extend this invitation, **to show us what it looks like when we are loved**, to all governments, in all tiers, of all stripes, right across the nation.

We look forward to working together for a better Australia.

Theory of Change

