Editorial Introduction

We are entering a new era in Australia as we envision a new disability strategy to replace the current national disability strategy (2010–2020). During this transition, we can reflect on and recognise the changing disability landscape in Australia and ensure that we create a just and inclusive Australian society. Recent consultations and reports have called for people with a disability to directly engage in designing the new disability strategy in Australia, but what does that entail, and how will the rights of people with disabilities be upheld throughout this process? This brief describes public sector co-designing practice—an emerging practice aiming to open up new trajectories for policy development through a co-design process and to provide best practice recommendations for the next disability strategy in Australia.

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Right to Participate: Co-designing Disability Policies in Australia

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Introduction

The current national disability strategy (2010–2020) is coming to an end, and it is time to consider where to go from here as we envisage a new disability strategy for Australia. The national disability strategy is currently open for public feedback and has captured the attention of people with disabilities, their advocates and the disability service system. The *Right to opportunity: Consultation report to help shape the next national disability strategy* (hereafter, the consultation report) recognises the need to co-design the next disability strategy with people with disabilities (Department of Social Services, 2019) . This consultation process offers a unique opportunity to bring co-design, as a rights issue, to the fore. Building upon the recommendations in the consultation report (Department of Social Services, 2019) I provide three recommendations for co-designing in practice that can guide the development of the next national disability strategy. These recommendations include focusing on abilities, not disabilities; employing expertise; and the value and importance of creative practice. Co-designing the new national strategy will enable a society-level approach to create a culture of inclusion in Australia. This approach will support Australia's obligations under the United Nations' convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2006).

Paradoxes of Participation: From a Person-centric Approach to Co-designing Disability Policy

The national disability strategy position paper states that the new strategy will be 'person-centric in that the policy architecture should revolve around creating the structures and practices through which people with disability can understand and exercise their rights across all domains' (Department of Social Services, 2020, p. 5). By not defining what a 'person-centric' approach is, nor outlining the strategy's architecture and how people with disabilities rights will be recognised and upheld, the new national disability strategy engagement approach risks becoming tokenistic. People with disabilities *may* have the opportunity to share their stories or lived experiences, but without a clear definition of 'person-centric', it is unclear how people with disabilities will be included (Jones, 2014; Rieger & Strickfaden, 2016).

Co-design is considered a step forward from person-centred and participatory design. Co-design shares many of the tenets and methods of participatory design, but often involves engagement throughout the entire design process, which continues even after the design or policy is created. Adapted from Elizabeth Sanders' articulation of co-design as a *method, mindset, and tools* (Sanders, 2014) Emma Blomkamp created a similar definition of co-design, with *process, principles and practical tools* in the context of public administration (see Table 1) (Blomkamp, 2018).

Table 1
Blomkamp's definition of co-design

Component	Details
Process	Iterative stages of design thinking, oriented towards innovation.
Principles	People are creative; people are experts in their own lives, and policy should be designed by people with relevant lived experience.
Practical tools	Creative and tangible methods for telling, enacting and making.

Blomkamp's components of co-design for policy are inclusive of creative methods, an iterative process and come from the lived experience of the stakeholders, which is essential for a co-design approach (Blomkamp, 2018).

It is often clear that disability policies have been based on some human consideration, but it is less clear whether people with disabilities have participated, or whether decisions are made by committees that somehow *speak for* disability (Rieger & Strickfaden, 2016). Either way, there is a fixing that occurs when these policies are completed (Jones, 2014; Rieger & Strickfaden, 2016). De Carlo (2005, p.13) argues that the politics of participation become too settled and unquestioned, which suggests that 'when we plan "for" people … we tend, once consensus is reached, to freeze it into permanent fact'. When policies are taken for granted, they are left unchallenged and kept at a distance, much like disability itself is often marginalised and kept at a distance (Rieger & Strickfaden, 2016). This is not just an issue of access and representation, but a rights and justice issue, as people with disabilities have the right to co-design the policies and programs that will affect their daily lives.

From Product to Process

The meaning of co-design lacks a shared understanding, especially in policymaking, where it has become taken for granted and given an influential role as little more than a toolkit (Blomkamp, 2018; Durose et al., 2017). Conversely, understanding co-design as a process and not a product recognises that 'the process is continuous and ever changing', which has implications for policy designers whose job is 'no longer to produce finished and unalterable solutions' but to continuously co-

design and negotiate solutions with people affected by policy issues (Blomkamp, 2018; Sanoff, 1990). The consultation report (Department of Social Services, 2019) emphasises the need to co-design the next disability strategy with people with disabilities from the very beginning and gives six recommendations on how to achieve this engagement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Co-designing the strategy

Source: (Department of Social Services, 2019, p. 83)

Although the publication of this co-design strategy is an important step forward for inclusive policy development, these six recommendations fail to address long-term engagement, including the sustainability of relationships, constant evaluation and an iterative approach, which is at the heart of the co-designing process. Further, the co-designing strategy from the consultation report (Department of Social Services, 2019) is not inclusive of creative practice and a multisensorial 'making'. It is primarily focused on the *telling* or *discussing* aspect of other engagement strategies like participatory design (Sanders, 2014). A multisensorial making is about *how* we interact with others and create new modes of knowledge through a more holistic experience by not privileging one sense (usually vision and text-based communication) over others. This emphasis on the telling rather than making does not encourage active participation from all stakeholders or give them a choice in how they would like to participate.

To create social justice for people with disabilities, their right to participate in this disability strategy needs to be recognised. The engagement approach needs to be made explicit and should include Blomkamp's definition of co-design, with *process, principles and practical tools* (Blomkamp, 2018).

Recommendations: Co-designing in Practice
Here, I provide three recommendations for creating an inclusive co-design process for policy, program and

service development with people with disabilities. The recommendations illustrate the effectiveness of a co-design process and the specific creative practices that facilitate design *with* rather than *for* those with disabilities. These recommendations also incorporate illustrative examples of co-designing in practice.

1. Abilities not Disabilities Focus

Some of the challenges when creating inclusive co-design processes for policy and program development are trying to understand the lived experience and abilities of all the participants and actively engage everyone in co-design activities. These challenges are often managed through workshops. The challenge of creating inclusive workshop activities that do not rely on able-bodiedness becomes a social justice issue and a design challenge. Studies that document co-designing with people with disabilities have often focused on the person's disability, their impairments and their *inability* to contribute to the co-designing process (Cober, Au & Son, 2012; Metatla et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2015; Salgado & Botero, 2008). However, Rieger, Herssens and Strickfaden instead concentrate on the abilities of the participants and recognise their expertise when describing their co-design process using multisensorial making (Rieger, Herssens & Strickfaden, 2018; Rieger, 2020a). Rieger and colleagues showed that multisensorial activities must be designed with choice so that people can have agency and be empowered to share their expertise through their preferred activity choice, regardless of their abilities (Rieger, Herssens & Strickfaden, 2018; Rieger, 2020a).

2. Employing Expertise

Co-designing can be applied beyond policy and program development—it can also influence employment opportunities and attitudinal changes. For example, through a co-design process with disability communities, we created the *Vis-ability* exhibition at Queensland University of Technology Art Museum in 2019, bringing together a team of 35 participants to co-create 15 research outputs and initiate new local, national and international partnerships (QUT Art Museum, 2019) Through this co-designing process, new employment opportunities were created for people with disabilities because of the strong relationship building that happened throughout the co-designing process (Kavanagh et al., 2018). When stakeholders are brought together in a co-design process, an attitudinal change often occurs. Respect for the expertise and lived experience of those with disabilities is realised, sometimes for the first time, as being essential to creating social justice and inclusion. Co-designing that employs the expertise of all stakeholders creates sustainability and 'the ability of a project or intervention to continue in existence after the implementing agency has departed' (David, Sabiescu & Cantoni, 2013, p. 2) Co-design can be instrumental in creating and sustaining social justice and eliminating biases through its process of continuous engagement (Harris, Kumar & Balaji, 2003).

This was a recommendation for the new national disability strategy and one that I argue is achievable through co-designing disability policies and strategy (Department of Social Services, 2020).

3. The Value and Importance of Creative Practice

Co-designing with people with disabilities and engaging in creative methods encourages the innovation of new tools to educate and influence inclusive policy and practice (Rieger, 2020b). Co-design can be used beyond workshops, which are often the only co-design activity employed for developing inclusive policies, programs and services. Other creative formats like videos can be co-created to encourage detailed and rich embodied knowledge that captures the lived experiences of people with disabilities (Rieger, 2020b). Videos can excavate personalised knowledge of those with different abilities to uncover systems of exclusion that are often hidden, and thus rendered invisible through codes and policies (Rieger, 2020b). For example, the video *Wandering on the Braille Trail, 2018* (https://vimeo.com/user104713043/review/393821853/fd1edba92b) was co-created with people with disabilities to document the experience of trying to navigate an urban public space by way of the Braille Trail in Brisbane, Australia. This co-designed video has transcended different audiences, raising awareness of the diverse navigational needs of those who are blind or vision impaired.

In addition to being a creative work and being presented in three juried exhibitions, *Wandering on the Braille* has been instrumental in affecting changes to policy and practice within statewide profit and non-profit organisations (national urban development companies, statewide service organisations and museums and galleries) (Rieger, 2020b). It has also had attitudinal or cultural influence by increasing the willingness of stakeholders to engage in new creative collaborations with people with disabilities (Rieger, 2020b). Finally, it has brought enduring connectivity through follow-up interactions such as new consultancies, presentations, advisory groups and new employment opportunities Rieger, 2020b).

New creations such as workshops, exhibitions and videos are also proving to be sustainable by facilitating new relationships. People with disabilities, who were not having their voices heard, are now being invited to join local and statewide boards and councils to assist in making policies and programs inclusive (Rieger, 2020b). These examples of co-designing can contribute to best practice in policy and program development and also contribute to creating inclusive and thriving communities.

Conclusion

As an emerging field, public sector co-designing practice is beginning to mature and become more than just a buzzword in the public sector (Blomkamp, 2018). As a novel means for creatively engaging citizens and stakeholders to find solutions to complex problems, co-design holds great promise for policy. It may help to generate more innovative ideas, achieve economic efficiencies by improving responsiveness, foster cooperation between different groups, reinvigorate trust between citizens and public servants, and have transformative effects on participants' agency and wellbeing. If a co-design approach can achieve even some of these benefits, then governmental organisations and policy workers should be exploring ways to adopt and embed this practice (Blomkamp, 2018, p. 739).

By reframing participatory engagement through a social justice lens, a shift occurs towards a co-designing process. Co-design has the potential to build social capital and address disengagement and low trust in government (Sanders, 2014). It has been suggested that co-design 'creates a feeling of involvement and ownership' (Bradwell & Marr, 2008, p. 15). It also generates a shared understanding and shared language between participants and designers (Hagen & Rowland, 2011). As evidenced by the examples in this briefing paper, co-design offers social value and increased engagement from all stakeholders to create a culture of inclusion.

Co-designing within the new national disability strategy has the potential to deliver better outcomes from a targeted action plan for housing design, inclusive education and employment opportunities within the public service. I have provided three recommendations for co-designing strategies, including a focus on abilities, not disabilities; employing expertise; and the value and importance of creative practice. These recommendations are intended to provide guidance for the development of the next national disability strategy. By co-designing policy, programs and services *with* people with disabilities rather than *for* people with disabilities, the asymmetrical relationship of policy development is shifted towards social justice—giving agency to people with disabilities and upholding their right to not only participate, but to co-design the policies, programs and services that affect their daily lives.

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