



COMMUNIQUÉ

Integrating NGO Program Data for Research and Evaluation Guidelines Workshop

Data for Policy Workshop | Canberra, 21–22 October 2025

The Life Course Centre Data for Policy Portfolio held a two-day national workshop in Canberra on 21–22 October 2025, convening more than 80 representatives from government, non-government organisations (NGOs), research institutes, and other stakeholder organisations to initiate the development of guidelines for integrating NGO service data into national linked data systems.

The workshop built on outcomes from the 2023 Life Course Centre Data for Policy Summit in Canberra and the 2024 Life Course Centre International Workshop in Chicago. Both events identified linking NGO data into government data systems as a strategic priority for strengthening research and evaluation in Australia and, ultimately, improving outcomes for people living in social disadvantage. The Chicago workshop further highlighted the need to develop best practice guidelines for including NGO service data in government-funded, accessible, secure, linked data systems as one of its six key priority areas.

Purpose

At present, there are no easily accessible, plain-language principles or guidelines for integrating NGO program data into national linked data systems. The Life Course Centre Data for Policy Portfolio seeks to develop and progress these guidelines, in consultation with stakeholders.

The guidelines will provide step-by-step instructions showing how NGO service data can be linked into the Australian Government's administrative data resources to enable high-quality research and impact evaluation. Enabling this linkage capability for Australian NGOs will create a research and evaluation feedback loop that supports continuous improvement in client outcomes and overall service delivery. It also builds on the high-quality linked government administrative research data and infrastructure already well-developed in Australia. Adding NGO data takes these resources to a new level and will help to cement Australia's growing reputation as a world-leader in longitudinal and linked data resources.

The guidelines will focus on quantitative research and evaluation of programs using linked government and NGO data to measure the causal impact of programs on service users and communities.

Summary of Proceedings

The workshop progressed the development of the principles and guidelines through a structured discussion agenda built around daily themes. Participants engaged in sessions featuring presentations and case studies by government and non-government representatives that explored key issues include the Privacy Act, legal mechanisms, funding, minimum data standards, and capacity building.

DAY 1: NGO Data integration principles and guidelines framework

Opening session

This session set the agenda for the two-day workshop, establishing a shared understanding of the purpose, direction and expected outcomes.

- Opening address: Kirsten Hancock, The Smith Family
- Framing the workshop - Guidelines, objectives, and scope: Francis Mitrou, Life Course Centre Data for Policy Portfolio Leader & University of Western Australia

Session 1: Governance

This session explored building community trust while meeting financial, legal, and privacy requirements. Presentations included:

- Privacy Act: Michael Carmody, Mission Australia & Stephen Whelan, The University of Sydney & Life Course Centre
- Finances and Resourcing: Luke Hendrickson, Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Community Inclusion and Consent: Michelle King, The University of Queensland & Life Course Centre Community Advisory Committee
- Indigenous Data Governance: Danielle Armour, The University of Queensland & Wojtek Tomaszewski, The University of Queensland & Life Course Centre

Session 2: Ensuring Data are research and linkage ready

Several speakers shared their experiences and insights into the collection and utilisation of high-quality data. Case study presentations included:

- Myriad moving parts – BEBOLD: Rhiannon Pilkington, The University of Adelaide
- InfoXchange: Marcus Harvey, InfoXchange
- GenV: Jatender Mohal, Murdoch Children's Research Institute & Raghu Lingam, University of New South Wales

Session 3: High-level principles and beyond

This session examined draft high-level principles and generated robust and constructive discussion that will inform the ongoing development of NGO and government data integration. Panel members included:

- Kayelle Drinkwater, Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Louise Gates, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Kaitlyn Griggs, Anglicare WA
- Nick Glozier, The University of Sydney & Life Course Centre

DAY 2: Opportunities for research and evaluation using linked NGO data

The program on day 2 focused on case studies presented by government and non-government organisations, offering valuable and practical insights to inform the development of the guidelines. Case study presentations included examples from:

- Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing: Matthew Short & Hannah Harding
- Brotherhood of St Laurence: Nicole Bieske & Katy Cornwell
- Anglicare WA: Kaitlyn Griggs & Beth Webster
- Foyer Foundation: Corin Moffat & Andrew Wallace
- Neami National: Mathew Ling & Priscilla Ennals
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Anne-Marie Rushby, Daniel Mamic, Sally Mills

[See full program →](#)

Key priorities

Each presentation included dedicated discussion time which fostered vital debate and sharing of valuable insights to support the development of the guidelines. Participants agreed that unlocking and linking of NGO data was crucial for improving programs and research to support better outcomes for people living in social and economic disadvantage in Australia.

Shared priorities emerged in the discussions including the need for clear standards for linking data, adherence to data governance, custodianship and sovereignty principles, established processes for ethics, consent and privacy, and community engagement and inclusion and access.

Participants highlighted several challenges to be addressed to enable the effective linking of NGO data, including appropriate training opportunities for service organisations, standardisation of measures, and resourcing for infrastructure required for data collection, linkage, and evaluation. There is considerable diversity across the NGO sector and levels of readiness or relevance of data linkage.

Next Steps

The Life Course Centre is collecting feedback on the principles and guidelines until Friday 14 November 2025. This feedback is vital for shaping this framework and we welcome feedback via the QR code below.

The feedback will inform a series of smaller, targeted workshops and discussions with NGOs, government departments, accredited data integrating authorities and the Life Course Centre Data for Policy Advisory group over the next 18 months to refine high-level principles and, ultimately, co-development of practical guidelines.



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Participants

The Life Course Centre acknowledges and thanks all participants for their valuable contributions and continued commitment to improving Australia's longitudinal and linked data resources that enhance life course outcomes. More than 80 representatives from the organisations listed below participated in the workshop.

- Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course (Life Course Centre)
- Anglicare WA
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Australian Government Department of Finance
- Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Australian Red Cross
- Australian Research Data Commons
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Families ACT
- Foyer Foundation
- Goodstart Early Learning
- Infoxchange
- Mission Australia
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- National Disability Insurance Agency
- National Emergency Management Agency
- Neami National
- NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
- Paul Ramsay Foundation
- Population Health Research Network
- Research Australia
- Tax and Transfer Policy Institute
- The Productivity Commission
- The Smith Family
- The Treasury
- The University of Queensland
- University of Adelaide
- University of Sydney
- University of Western Australia
- UNSW Sydney

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