![Pathways in Place — Co-Creating Community Capabilities]

Review of the evidence about place-based approaches

Place-based approaches are increasingly popular in policy and practice. The aim of this Findings Snapshot is to summarise the findings from our review of the literature on place-based approaches.

Want to learn more about Pathways in Place?

Why does it matter?

Where children and young people live shapes their opportunities in life. Research tells us that children and young people's wellbeing, employment, and education outcomes are connected to where they live.[1-3] Place-based approaches, often referred to as comprehensive community initiatives, localised initiatives, or area-based approaches, are increasingly popular in policy and practice.

They are collaborative initiatives implemented in a specific geographic area and are often applied in attempts to address complex problems such as disadvantage.[4-6]

Place-based approaches recognise that place matters and that local solutions are needed to address the linked, underlying causes of disadvantage.[4,5] A key focus of place-based approaches is the importance of working alongside the community to develop and test solutions.[7]

What did we do?

We conducted a review of both academic and non-academic (i.e. 'grey') literature. To locate relevant literature, we used search terms such as 'place-based', 'local area-based', and 'comprehensive community' approaches, initiatives, or interventions.

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What were our findings?

Although many place-based initiatives have been carried out, few have been evaluated. Those evaluations that exist tend to focus on how well the place-based initiative was carried out, rather than their effect on children and youth.

Evaluations that have been conducted on the effectiveness impact of place-based approaches show mixed findings – some show a positive effect; others show no effect.

There is, however, general agreement about the key ingredients to successfully carry out place-based approaches, and their challenges.[8]

Key ingredients include:

- Meaningful community engagement
- Effective collaboration across groups and sectors
- Strong leadership and governance
- Long-term commitment from all parties, including funders
- Adequate capacity and skills to implement place-based approaches
- Use of data and evidence to inform initiatives

Challenges include:

- Constant organisational change
- Organisations have different priorities, cultures, systems, and beliefs
- Identification and engagement of appropriate partners
- Lack of local capacity to develop own solutions
- Resource-intensive and sometimes not effective
- Tend to focus mostly on service enhancement, rather than other aspects such as community norms

Based on the findings of the review, there is a need to:

Expand the evidence base on place-based approaches

One of the best ways to improve the evidence is to evaluate these initiatives. However, evaluating place-based initiatives is challenging, and innovative designs and methods are needed to produce quality and actionable evidence that researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers can use.

Develop sustainable relationships and partnerships built on mutual trust and respect

Forging sustainable relationships with multiple partners and across sectors can advance the work of place-based initiatives, extending influence and effect.

Help practitioners and decision-makers use data and evidence to inform decision-making and practice

Use of data and evidence is important to the success of place-based approaches. However, many practitioners and decision-makers may not have the skills or support to use and build data and evidence to its full benefit. Therefore, capacity building that further develops existing skills is needed.

Develop the role of System Intermediaries

Practitioners, decision-makers, and researchers must be encouraged to think and act outside of their area of expertise and practice to encompass the broader issues to successfully deliver place-based. System Intermediaries, who act as a bridge between researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers [7] could perform the role of connector and translator.

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About Pathways in Place

Pathways in Place: Co-Creating Community Capabilities is an innovative program of research and action that supports flourishing of children and young people. This Program is jointly delivered by Victoria University (Victoria, Australia) and Griffith University (Queensland, Australia) with funding generously provided by the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

The Program teams are each leading one of two complementary streams:

1. Early learning and development pathways (children and youth 0-15 y.o.), led by Griffith University in Logan (Queensland, Australia).
2. Pathways through education to employment (youth 15-24 y.o.), led by Victoria University in Brimbank (Victoria, Australia).

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