

Media Release

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IPAA's New Policy Paper on Government Challenges

“Modern government faces risks and opportunities of unprecedented scale and complexity, the solutions to which are very different from those tried in the past,” a new IPAA policy paper argues

“In Australia, this combination of complexity, scale and unpredictability is testing many of the current models and methods of government and the business processes and systems on which they rely.

“Without considerable reform and renewal, public administration will fail to deliver the mix of better policy, improved services and citizen engagement that are the mark of good government in a more open and connected world.” the paper concludes.

The paper's principal author is Martin Stewart-Weeks, a member of IPAA's Submissions Standing Committee, who received input from other members of the Committee.

The National President of IPAA and Chair of the Standing Committee, Percy Allan AM, said the key messages from the paper were:

1. Public sector systems, culture and institutions need considerable reform and renewal to match the complexity and urgency of the tasks they face.
2. IPAA agrees with the UK Public Services 2020 Commission that a combination of long term demand, fiscal constraint and outcome failures have brought public services to a critical moment. The way to create value for citizens through public services is shifting. Many of these are driven by how technology enhances our lives.
3. Enduring attributes of open, accountable, fair and ethical government remain central. They will be served and extended by the new interactive and social technologies of “Web 2.0”, to deliver the mix of better policy, improved services and new levels of citizen engagement and participation that are the hallmarks of good government in a more open and connected world.
4. Some of the changes will confront politicians and bureaucrats with uncomfortable implications for a new culture of government, implying new patterns of power, control and accountability.
5. The next wave of public sector reforms will be formed around distributed systems, rather than centralised structures. The challenge for governments is to deal with complexity not by standardisation and simplification imposed from the centre, but by distributing complexity to the margins. The role of the citizen is already changing from passive recipient to active contributor in the development of policies and improved public services.
6. Increasingly, modern government has to adjust to a world in which power, authority and the ability to get things done will reflect how well people share ideas, knowledge and mutual commitment. Formal organisations and institutions will always be important, but only if they accept the importance of engaging with more informal networks and communities around them.
7. Promoting participation by front line staff and citizens in service design and delivery should be at the heart of a new public services agenda. Participation will unlock better solutions that offer more personalised services that deliver value at lower unit cost than top-down professional approaches..
8. IPAA believes that a legitimate interest in new models of citizen engagement should not detract from the persistent role of government in market economies, including the use of coercive power to address certain public goods or market failures for example

9. Improving public services will balance earlier models of contestability and competition with the use of social media which will unleash more powerful assessments of public service failures. This kind of rapid, networked feedback has the potential to get wide publicity that can embarrass politicians and public servants into action. More broadly, the exclusive franchise model of public services production, which tends to reflect a producer-focused rather than a citizen-centric culture will be steadily undermined by client empowerment fuelled by the new social media.
10. Solving public problems needs new combinations of experience and insight. People want access to convenient and appealing ways to talk, argue about, design and test solutions and new services.
11. Often, the people and the experts who can contribute to better policy and improved service design won't be in large institutions or traditional organisations, private, public or community. They will be in smaller, more distributed networks which come together to solve problems or share ideas.
12. For the most part, more and more public services should be designed, delivered and evaluated with an open invitation for appropriate participation by those experiencing or delivering the service at the coal face.
13. We still want public servants to be impartial, efficient and responsive, striving to achieve the best results for the Australian community. And we will always want them to perform impartially and in the public interest, providing advice that is frank, honest, timely and informed.
14. The exclusive franchise nature of most of the general government sector is fundamental to understanding the often self-serving producer-focused rather than external client oriented culture. Previous reform programs, including the new public management model, tried to solve this by contracting or outsourcing public services to contestable suppliers of which the Job Network a significant example.
15. In the current context, the rapid spread of social media will reinforce the shift to citizens and service users. Social media is likely to be both useful and effective in increasing pressure on agencies to better structure their surveying of client needs and satisfactions.
16. Among other proposals, IPAA recommends that the federal Government adopts the initiatives outlined in the Government 2.0 Task Force Report, that agencies should experiment with "crowd-sourced" methods for better input by staff and service users for service design and policy innovation and explore new models of accountability for more open and networked model of government and public policy.

The full paper can be downloaded from the Submissions section of IPAA's national website:
http://www.ipaa.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=275

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