



DEMOCRACY IN MOTION

ISSUE 1 - March 2026

Chisholm Voices

Algorithm free media: Produced by the people of Chisholm, for the people of Chisholm

Welcome! Are you a person who enjoys your community, and who is open-minded enough to seek out media beyond usual habits? Maybe you are becoming sceptical about the same old corporate newspapers and TV? Maybe you share concerns that social media have algorithmically tagged you to a tee, so that their clickbait always works – especially for your kids? You'd be likely, then, to have an independent mind that hopes to hear fresh ideas from independent, non-profit sources?

If so, you are doubly welcome! *Chisholm Voices* is a media initiative by people in Chisholm just like you. We hope to engage you in issues that affect us all, and to hear your voices in response to changes you'd most support.

This first pilot edition of *Chisholm Voices* focusses on media in Australia – because the means by which we know and understand issues is key to resolving them. Understanding, rather than reflex thinking, is essential to practical solutions that can be win-win. Otherwise ideas are merely biffed back and forth predictably – by right and left, government and opposition, our side or theirs. We believe better ideas emerge out of conversations and democratic engagement in communities. **'Democracy in Motion!'** is the motto of Voices of Chisholm – our group formed to elect a Community Independent Member of Parliament.

Community Independents are endorsed by their communities to progress the will of those communities for the common good. In our Parliament they are voices uncompromised by donations from billionaires or undue influence of lobbyists and other vested interests.

Legacy media in Australia, despite some good journalists, is presently concentrated within corporate interests. To broaden the diversity, *Chisholm Voices* offers a portal to discover many sound, alternative, independent media sources. Another topic of hot debate is alarm about the influence of digital media, which are achieving unprecedented algorithmic grip on minds and psyches – especially of our children – and the challenges of regulating the foreign interests that control these platforms. This first edition of *Chisholm Voices* broadens discussion on these and other concerns,



Photo: Markus Spiske on pexels.com

while illuminating where progress is happening.

Among other issues currently debated at cafes and barbies in Chisholm are: integrity in politics; growing inequalities, including intergenerationally; affordability and insecurity, and the privilege of home-owning; and the fires, floods and record temperatures warning us again of the grim risks to our environment. These are some of the main issues that matter to us, and on which we aim to achieve

positive government action – with your support.

Are these the main issues for you? We hope you will become a voice for Chisholm too. Join us in democratically shaping community as our shared and loved place, within a truly informed and democratic common good. Welcome and read this whole issue – right to **the back page, where you can find how to connect with us** Voices of Chisholm

Chisholm Voices acknowledges that we are on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung peoples, of the Kulin Nation. We offer respect to all Australia's First Nations, their Elders and their cultures, for caring for country and community.

fix our feeds

The social media feeds that once connected us are now driving us apart. Social media algorithms are flooding young men's feeds with radical misogynistic content, inciting real-world harm.

We're calling on the Australian Government to act, and introduce an opt-in feature for social media algorithms so we can bring affirmative consent to our screens, and turn our feeds on and off at will.

TURN OFF
CLICK ME

Fix Our Feeds: Teaching Consent in the Digital Age

In an era where social media shapes how young people see themselves and others, the content filling our feeds matters more than ever. **Teach Us Consent** campaign's initiative, *Fix Our Feeds*, shines a spotlight on the urgent need for safer, more respectful online spaces especially for children and teenagers.

Social media platforms are powerful tools for connection and creativity, but they can also expose users to harmful content, including misogyny, sexualised material, body shaming, and messages that normalise disrespect and abuse. For young people still forming their values and understanding of relationships, constant exposure

to such content can distort ideas about consent, gender equality, and healthy behaviour.

Fix Our Feeds calls on governments, technology companies, educators, and parents to take collective responsibility for the digital environments young people inhabit. Central to the campaign is the belief that consent education should not stop in the classroom, it must extend into the online world. Algorithms that prioritise engagement over wellbeing often amplify extreme or damaging content, and the campaign urges platforms to redesign these systems with safety, accountability, and respect at their core.

The initiative also emphasises digital literacy, empowering young users to question what they see online, recognise harmful narratives, and understand their right to boundaries—both offline and online. By promoting respectful relationships and challenging harmful norms, *Fix Our Feeds* aims to counter the growing influence of online content that undermines consent and equality. *Fix Our Feeds* is a call to action. It reminds us that social media does not exist in a vacuum; it reflects and shapes our culture. If we want a future built on respect, empathy, and consent, we must start by fixing the feeds that influence young minds every day.

Find out more about what Teach Us Consent is up to and how to support their work via the QR code.



you can click on the QR Codes

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Why We Need to Support Local & Independent Media

Australians are increasingly tuning out the news. A report from the University of Canberra published last year shows that 69 per cent of Australians avoid the news on an occasional or regular basis, on par with a global decline in news readership.

According to the report, the main reasons for this avoidance included the negative influence of news on people's moods, a growing distrust of news sources, and fatigue from information overload.

How did we end up here? Everyone knows the news is important for a functional, informed democracy, but reading it can often feel like a chore.

The first problem is media ownership. Australia had the second-worst media concentration in the world between 2019 and 2022, according to the Global Media and Internet Research Project, a research initiative tracking media ownership and market power. A more recent analysis by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found the 10 largest media networks in the country account for 43 per cent of all news brands.

That means household names – government-owned ABC and SBS, media giants like Nine Entertainment, and billionaire-backed outlets such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and Kerry Stokes' Southern Cross Media Group – decide what we see and hear. What stories become news.

The type of news we read has also changed with its move online. Commercial digital journalism, driven by a profit motive, has resulted in articles being measured by click engagement.

Terms such as 'clickbait' have emerged to describe news stories that are skewed toward the most sensational version possible to drive traffic to their web pages. Journalists are stretched thin to meet the 24/7 news cycle's constant need for content, promoting engagement over explanation.

This is 'churnalism' in action. Low-quality news that paraphrases or, in some cases, copies, pastes and publishes information from third-party sources, skipping steps of original newsgathering. Industry job cuts have also reduced the number of editors and researchers on hand to do the extra steps of fact-checking and verification.

Then there's social media. Younger Australians especially are getting their news from platforms whose algorithms prioritise engagement over accuracy, serving up outrage, division, and AI-generated content designed to keep the user scrolling.

But Australians haven't given up entirely. Interest in local news has risen, with more than half of Australians accessing local news stories in the past week, according to the University of Canberra's 2025 report.

The same report also reveals what Australians want from their news: less bias, greater transparency and accuracy, increased verification, and more independence from commercial and political interests.

This is exactly what independent and local media can deliver, meeting the needs identified by the ACMA to provide Australians with "access to reliable, accurate and independent information on matters that affect them to participate in an open, informed and inclusive society."

Operating without big financial backing or the reach of major corporate outlets, these outlets



Photo RDNE Stock project on pexels.com

are freer to produce slow, meaningful reporting. News that is focused on explaining situations, not just reporting them, sharing sources and engaging with experts to discuss solutions to the many issues facing Australians.

Chisholm Voices is part of this independent media movement, bringing news that informs and empowers its audience through a collection of public-interest stories and publications.

The question isn't whether Australians care about the news,

but rather about whose news they're consuming. Rather than seeing news stories dictated by Sydney or Canberra, browse these pages to read news that directly affects your community.

Want to know more about how we got here? Derek Wilding from University of Technology Sydney's Centre for Media Transition breaks down the three policy shifts that helped create Australia's media concentration.



you can click on the QR Codes

Harcourt Fires Show Need for Disaster Levy

I am no stranger to heat or fires. I grew up on a farm in Wiradjuri Country, Victoria, and then lived for fifteen years in Arrernte Country in Mparntwe, Central Australia. But the heat and fires I grew up with are nothing like what we are seeing now.

As we drove down the Calder Freeway to Melbourne on Friday, I watched the emergency apps show the fire front moving towards our house and listened to reports of devastating loss to Djaara Country in Harcourt. All I could think about was how much the fossil fuel companies owe us. I did mental calculations of just how much disaster preparedness and cleaning up in the aftermath costs – and not just financially.

Research from Oxfam found that, in 2024, 585 of the world's largest and most polluting fossil fuel companies made \$583 billion in profit. In 2024-25, export earnings from Australian fossil fuel companies were \$385 billion. In contrast, the Australian government's disaster fund is worth just \$4.7 billion. Over the weekend Albanese toured Harcourt and announced a \$19.5m support package. But the Australian government is still subsidising the fossil fuel industry that is responsible for worsening climate disasters to the tune of \$14.9 billion a year.

For decades, fossil fuel companies have dug up coal and gas knowing full well that the carbon emissions that they profit from were heating up the planet. They long

suppressed the science on climate change, and are still doing everything they can to prevent the move away from fossil fuels, which is what real action on climate change involves. These fires are not natural – their ferocity is man-made.

To add salt to the wound, the gas industry does not pay its fair share of tax. Instead, our communities are left to crowdfund to cover the cost of rebuilding. My community is so incredible that a snap fundraiser held at Boomtown winery over the weekend raised \$130,000. This is because we all want to help, but it shouldn't be up to us to foot the bill.

How is it just that my friends, my footy captain and my kid's psychologist be out volunteering to protect our homes, sports fields, schools and cafes from these wildly unpredictable ferocious fire storms when the companies responsible for them are let off the hook?

We are going to need vast resources to manage the ongoing, rolling crises that burning fossil fuels has created. The impacts of heat, drought and flood will become more frequent and the costs will mount. Those responsible for the climate crisis must be made to pay for the mess they have made.

We must get off fossil fuels. We need an immediate ban on all new fossil fuel projects and to invest in substantive planning and funding for a rapid transition for workers



Photo via Feepik

and communities currently reliant on these industries. I strongly support calls for a Climate Pollution Levy – a disaster levy – to fund the cost of the training, planning, infrastructure and equipment required to respond to crises of this magnitude as well as the transition. I also want to see actions for compensation as we have seen deployed for asbestos and tobacco companies in the past.

All this is needed so that our SES, firefighters, and local CFAs are properly equipped to deal with the increasing scale and frequency of these disasters. It is also needed to pay for psychologists and trauma counsellors, to pay for emergency food systems and telecommunications services, and better resourced health services. We also need this funding to cover the cost of emergency housing so that people are safe during the immediate aftermath of these crises, as well as during the long tail of recovery. Accessing housing is already a

disaster that needs addressing and until then we know that these emergencies will amplify every existing fault line. The resources for these services and equipment must be fairly and equally distributed.

I'm back home, and our house is still standing. The fire front passed about six kilometres away, and it shifted direction with the cool change on Sunday. But, despite the incredible efforts of the CFA, fifty families and over 85 businesses in the nearby town of Harcourt were less lucky. Countless animals and plants have been killed as well as immeasurable damage caused to Dja Dja Wurrung cultural heritage. Over 3,700 hectares of beautiful Djaara Country already burnt and, at the time of writing, the powerful mountain Leanganook is still on fire. As we settle back in, the whirr of helicopters fighting the fire to our east can be heard. I'm trying not to stress my kids.

I know this isn't the last summer

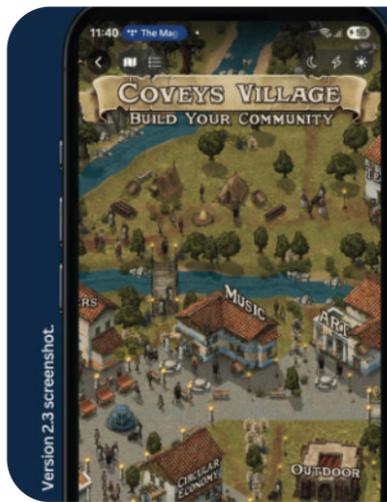
my community will go through this. As we face the ongoing and increasingly devastating impacts of the climate emergency we are going to need to be ready to support each other, year in and year out. I am so humbled by the generosity and ingenuity of my neighbours and friends and our powerfully connected mutual aid networks, but we can't manage these crises on our own.

The infrastructure we need is going to cost an enormous amount of money. We know exactly which companies have enormous amounts of money, and exactly which ones are responsible for the climate crisis. Now we need to make them pay for the damage they have done.

By Alex Kelly
Director of the Economic Media Centre and a filmmaker.
Via: The Point

the point.





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Australian Alternative Media and Its Impact on Australian Public Debate

Alternative media is reshaping Australia's political landscape, challenging traditional narratives and amplifying marginalised voices. As online platforms gain influence, they are shifting public perceptions on issues like China, elections, and political identity.

Australia's recent election, which delivered Anthony Albanese's Labor Party a historic electoral victory, was filtered through a variety of news and entertainment media, ranging from radio, TV, and newspapers, to various sources on the internet. While the poor campaign performance of Opposition Leader Peter Dutton and a notably strong performance by Albanese throughout the campaign drove the electoral outcome, online alternative media (OAM) also played a significant role.

Alternative media is defined as any media that is sufficiently subversive in content compared to mainstream media messaging. It is often defined by a "bottom-up" approach, with average citizens taking part in political debate and playing what can be regarded as an activist role on certain topics. Typically, alternative media is defined by a wish to challenge and change the political status quo, with alternative media commentators and audiences often seeing ideals of "journalistic objectivity" as false, and perceiving mainstream media organisations as defined by a desire to perpetuate the existing social/political order.

In Hong Kong, for instance, alternative media were instrumental in starting and propagating protests against the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government in the 2010s. In the US, alternative media have contributed to activism against the perceived "leftist" control of mainstream media in the country, contributing to a backlash at the polls.

From the late 2010s to the early 2020s, with high-speed internet use becoming more widely available in Australia, the spread of an activist political message has also grown. As stated in our research, media outlets and commentators, including Jordan Shanks (FriendlyJordies), Guardian Australia, Michael West Media, Independent Australia, and others, have audiences

ranging anywhere from 500,000 to well into the millions. The presence and significance of online alternative media outlets and commentators within Australia cannot, therefore, be understated or ignored.

Over the last few years, with social media expanding, more alternative media voices have emerged. Instagram/YouTube celebrity Abbie Chatfield, for instance, uses her social media presence to spread left-wing political messages, with an Instagram following numbering 563,000. Fellow Instagram/YouTube commentator "Punters Politics" also boasts a large following of 419,000, where he criticises numerous Australian political parties, most notably the right.

Where traditionally media scholars acknowledge the dominance of the right in Australian mainstream/legacy media, it is the left that has surged ahead and adapted in the new age media of the Internet. As our research demonstrates, this shift in media access has translated into a growing influence of alternative messaging (particularly on views of foreign affairs like Australia-China relations and the rise of China), while also having an observable impact on domestic

political issues. This has also resulted in the growth and then explosion of various outlets and commentators engaging in anything from straight journalism to opinion-based commentary.

Despite differences in approach and style, the commentators and outlets we examined are united by their generally left-leaning messaging. Though the level at which these sources can be considered "journalism" in the traditional sense is questionable, and despite the relatively unregulated environment of online alternative media (increasing the potential for mis- and disinformation), these online sources do provide value.

Specifically, they allow voices who have been previously marginalised in public political debate to have a platform. This limits what Noam Chomsky terms the "agenda-setting effect" of mainstream/legacy media, allowing for a wider spectrum of opinion within public debate.

The impact of Australian alternative media on foreign affairs and domestic political debate

How exactly has Australian independent media influenced views towards China? In light of US-China tensions and the anti-China rhetoric of the former Morrison government, placing the Chinese state and Australia-China relations at the forefront of Australian public debate around 2020-2021, at least four observations can be documented:

In our data set, a noteworthy number of audience members developed a more positive view of the People's Republic of China

after accessing Australian alternative media, with an overwhelming majority developing a more critical view of Australian mainstream media reporting on China. This was determined through asking interviewees whether they had shifted their opinions on China. Interviewees were also asked specific questions regarding their changing opinions of Australian mainstream media reporting on the Chinese state.

Many in the alternative media audience believe that Australian mainstream media reporting on China is a form of fake news, driven by a combination of political, commercial, and ideological motivations (rather than just straight reporting of facts).

There was a significant increase in levels of political engagement with China and related political issues due to accessing OAM. For instance, eighteen of the twenty interviewees expressed an increased interest in China-related political issues after accessing Australian OAM, encouraging them to investigate issues further.

A significant shift in alternative media users' political opinions occurred, including a shift from far right-wing to centre-left perspectives, and a shift from a far left to center-left perspectives (shifts in opinions on domestic politics affects international political outcomes as parties like Labor, The Greens, and the Liberals have observably different diplomatic approaches to China, and different approaches to US-China competition). These shifts reflected voting patterns during

the 2025 Federal Election, with movement away from the Liberal Party and The Greens back towards Labor.

Conclusion

Extensive research is needed to verify OAM's impact on Australians' political preferences. What matters from a policy-making standpoint is that some interesting shifts in public opinion do happen due to people accessing alternative media. And these changes are likely to be reflected in the shifts in voting behaviour seen nationally.

In the 2022 Federal Election campaign, anti-China rhetoric was a significant part of the discourse prior to the official campaign, with Scott Morrison frequently issuing anti-CCP statements. In 2025, Peter Dutton followed suit and tried to stir up a 2022 style China scare in the weeks just preceding the onset of the official campaign, accusing Anthony Albanese, for instance, of being "limp-wristed" regarding the emergence of Chinese warships just outside Australia's territorial waters. The effect of this was notably muted, with Dutton's China rhetoric having no observable impact on the campaign at large or the electoral result. This stood in stark contrast to the 2022 campaign, where anti-China rhetoric on behalf of the Liberal Party was prominent.

Perhaps this is a sign of things to come. Australians now seem ready for a more nuanced debate on China and Australia-China relations, and it's very likely Australian alternative media is playing an important role in the changing nature of Australian public discourse concerning both China and Australia-China relations.

This article was adapted from a larger study titled "Australian Alternative Media and its Impact on Australian Views of China," published in *The Journal of Australian Studies*.

By Lewis Taylor

Lewis Taylor is a researcher with a strong interest in media and international affairs, as well as the convergence between the two.



Photo by RDNE Stock project: pexels.com



How AI agents could supercharge disinformation

The arrival of Moltbook, a new bots-only social media site where AI agents can post and interact with each other, caused quite the stir this month, not least because it revealed a group of them plotting our extinction.

AI agents are essentially digital assistants that can perform complex tasks by collecting data, interacting with their environment and making autonomous decisions to achieve their goals.

Moltbook's agent-to-agent discussions looked intelligent enough to worry some people that the "singularity" had arrived, a declaration that might be premature, given how easily a (human) hacker was able to manipulate the site.

Programming experts told the New York Times that much of the chatter looked impressive but was meaningless, adding that the agents' scheming was merely a reflection of the dystopian sci-fi novels that populate AI training datasets.

Importantly, AI agents follow rules and goals set by humans. So perhaps the key takeaway from Moltbook is, as DFR Lab's Esteban Ponce de León has argued, how

easily human intentions and narratives can be "passed through AI systems in a way that obscures their human origin".

According to Mr Ponce de León, this breaking of the "attribution chain" — where a human programs an agent, the agent posts something and the output is read as autonomous AI behaviour — creates a new kind of "deniability shield" for malicious actors engaged in scams and disinformation. That amounts to "a fresh iteration of the liar's dividend, where ... human actors disclaim responsibility for what their agents produce," he said.

Which brings us to a new paper published in Science, in which an international team of AI and misinformation experts have warned that democracies could soon be threatened by "swarms" of AI agents working covertly to manipulate beliefs and behaviours at massive scale.

AI swarms could work with minimal human oversight, maintain persistent online identities, work across platforms, coordinate to pursue shared goals while varying tone and content, and adapt in real time to clues and human responses, the authors wrote.

Swarms and the actors behind them would become increasingly difficult to detect, able to not only infiltrate all manner of online forums but also poison the data on which other AI models are trained, with knock-on effects for future tools and people's ability to access accurate information.

Agents could — and theoretically already can — help sway elections, and at least one cybersecurity firm has argued that swarms are already here.

Italian police pursue clicks and lose trust

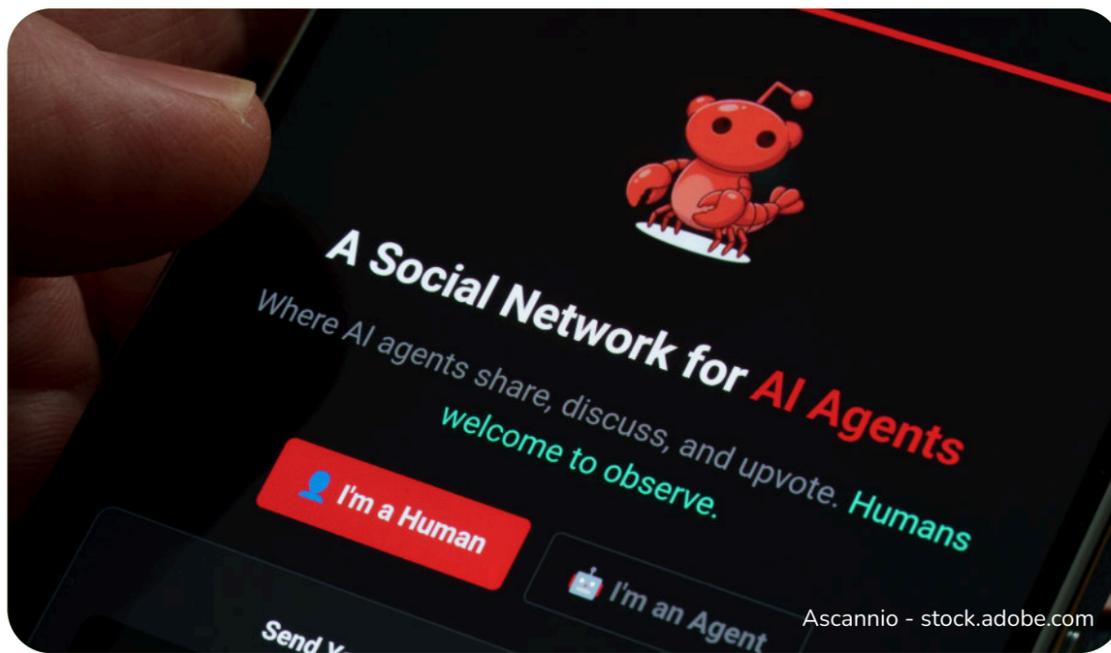
Photos shared by Italian police showing two officers being attacked during violent clashes in the city of Turin have kicked off conspiracy theories that the officers were not hurt at all, after a key image was found to have been altered using AI.

A spokesperson for the police said they did not make any edits but admitted they had simply shared the most "viral" photo they had found online. An analysis by Italy's Facta details how that image evolved from a grainy video still into a crisp photo — and how social media users were quick to spot missing details and inconsistencies in the evidence, even down to the varying degrees to which an officer had shaved his neck.

Continue reading this article on the RMIT website.



This article was produced by the RMIT Information Integrity Hub, an initiative to combat harmful misinformation by empowering people to be critical media consumers and producers.



Podcasts we are listening to

Crikey - Cut Through



Meet Big Brother: Palantir's Australian expansion

Why does the Australian Future Fund hold a \$100 million stake in Palantir? And how has the company secured multimillion-dollar government contracts?

Lamestream



How Australia is Ignoring the Housing Crisis

Os and Scott discuss the growing housing and economic crises in Australia and why they seem to have dropped off the political agenda.

Women's Agenda Pod



How to be brave, with Senator Fatima Payman

Senator Fatima Payman is not only one of the most productive members of parliament, but also courageous. As such, this conversation is all about how to be brave and courageous.

Tech wont save us



How Effective is Australia's Social Media Age Limit?

Cam Wilson discusses the new social media age limit including how successful the rollout has been so far and the missed opportunities.

The Australia Institute



A broken university system is letting Australia down

Poor governance, poor policy and decades of neoliberalism have broken Australia's Uni sector, with devastating consequences for students and the country.

A few more political podcasts from independent media orgs

We love podcasts because they can be 100% independent, untethered from any single platform or tech. 'Available wherever you get your podcasts' embodies true freedom, choice, and limitless listening!



7am podcast

A daily news show from the publisher of *The Monthly* and *The Saturday Paper*. Hear from the country's best reporters, covering the news.



Guardian Australia's daily news podcast.

Every weekday, join Guardian journalists for a deeper understanding of the news in Australia and beyond.



Truth, Lies and Media

A unique take on Australia's media. Your hosts Nicole and Denis cut through to the politics driving the media and expose the latest spin and cock-ups.



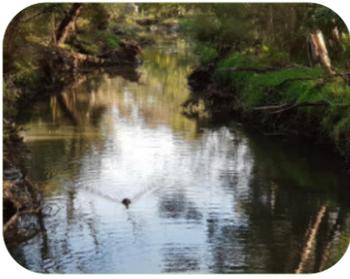
Cheek Media Podcast

Is a trio of podcasts created to make the news engaging, develop media literacy and interrogate the 'why' behind the social conversations we daily face.

you can click on the QR Codes

Community is life

In times of growing fear, division, and loneliness, community connection is more important than ever. Local councils in Chisholm, alongside community groups, play a vital role in bringing people together and fostering belonging. From men's sheds and neighbourhood houses to sporting clubs and volunteer groups, these spaces offer connection, purpose, and support. We invite community groups to share their stories and be featured in the next issue. Celebrating connection strengthens us all and reminds us that together, we are stronger.



Friends of Scotchmans Creek and Valley Reserve Inc

A passionate community group dedicated to protecting and restoring this vital local waterway and green corridor. Through hands-on conservation, advocacy, and community involvement, they enhance biodiversity and care for the reserve. Find out more via the QR code.



Power Neighbourhood House

Power Neighbourhood House, Ashwood, is a vibrant community hub offering programs, learning opportunities, and support services for people of all ages. By fostering connection, inclusion, and skill-building, it strengthens community wellbeing and brings neighbours together. Find out more via the QR code.



Monash Men's shed

A welcoming community space where men connect, share skills, and support one another. By working on projects together, members build friendships, improve wellbeing, and reduce isolation while contributing positively to the local community. Find out more via the QR code.



Ashwood High School Community Garden

We are a community gardening group who come together to garden the space at the bottom of Ashwood High School, sharing seasonal produce. We welcome all people, you don't need to have any gardening knowledge or tools to join us. Find out more via the QR code.



Beware the wages bogeyman – it's the housing, stupid

As predictable as Pauline Hanson's racism, the commentariat leapt on [recent] labour market figures as more evidence of fiscal doom and monetary policy gloom. Michael Pascoe worries that the RBA will too.

Isn't it great to have an economy where unemployment is low without causing an inflationary wages breakout?

Apparently not, according to the main fishwrappers that greeted the unemployment rate remaining steady at 4.1 per cent in January as a bad

"bad thing requiring higher interest rates forthwith."

The Reserve Bank monetary policy board three weeks ago wasn't waiting for more figures, happy to wish for higher unemployment on the back of the rate falling to 4.1 in December. The minutes of the February 3 meeting, released on Wednesday, showed the board wasn't pussyfooting about labour market tightness the way the bank's staff and Governor tended to do.

It's been a feature of the past year or so for the RBA to call the labour market "a bit tight" without ever quite spelling out if it was "too tight".

Being "a bit tight" is actually a good thing as it encourages lazy management to seek productivity improvements instead of just hiring another body. It's "too tight" when the laws of supply and demand have their way, pushing up wages to fuel an inflationary spiral.

When is tight too tight?

According to the board minutes: "The staff's overall assessment was that the labour market was a little tighter than consistent with full employment."

"Full employment" is the euphemism the RBA uses for the rate of unemployment that doesn't push up inflation. It is a little nonsense of the bank having "twin mandates" of targeting 2.5 per cent inflation and "full

employment" when "full employment" is merely whatever the unemployment rate is when inflation is in the zone.

Thus we don't have "full employment" now with a 4.1 per cent unemployment rate, we have overfull employment with the RBA board looking forward to unemployment rising to 4.5 per cent in the bank's forecasts after another couple of interest rate rises.

The monetary hawks cherry pick various numbers to make their case, especially unit labour costs that reflect slack management as much as labour demand and pricing.

What they prefer to ignore or downplay is the headline figure and achievement of this economic cycle, the wage price index showing wages growth is consistent with the inflationary target range, not galloping out of control.

The December quarter wage price index release was mainly greeted with the headline that real wages had again turned negative, CPI inflation for 2025 being 3.8 per cent while the WPI grew by 3.4 per cent.

The tax impact

This wasn't really news, as regular MWM readers would have read back in December. Readers also know it's actually worse than the rest of the commentariat ever report as everybody else ignores

the tax impact.

For example, to repeat myself repeating myself, someone on a median full-time wage this year of \$90,000 before tax who gets a 3 per cent pre-tax raise will only receive a 2.6 per cent increase in their after-tax pay packet.

But I digress. The important part of the December quarter WPI was confirmation that private sector wages, the area that best reflects market forces, grew by a steady 0.8 per cent. Annualise the past two quarters and private wages growth is running at a healthy 3.2 per cent, a figure in keeping with the RBA's inflation target as the workers are supposed to share a little of our productivity growth.

That's not what we keep being told though by the lobby most interested in minimising wages and maximising profits.

The tradies wind

Instead, the example most often cited as representing our "too tight" labour market is the cost and availability of tradies. Construction workers "on the tools" make up only about six per cent of the workforce, but that six per cent wags the policy and commentariat dog.

In November when asked about who was to blame for the uptick in inflation, RBA Governor Bullock went straight for the ute drivers:

"Well, I guess there's a couple of things. The first is that it's possibly telling us that there's a little more excess demand in the economy than we had thought, and it's sometimes hard for people to understand that, but if you take just a very – a microcosm, a very sort of simple example, I don't know how many people have tried to get a tradie, perhaps, to work on their house. It's difficult.

"What that's telling you is that in that particular microcosm of the Australian economy that the demand for these services is above the ability of this to supply it."

Bullock right on housing

And Ms Bullock is right, our core inflation problem comes back to housing which just happens to also be our core political problem when we're not distracted by parties imploding and racist grandstanding and/or dog whistling.

"It's the housing, stupid."

Three decades of both parties and all levels of government thinking "the market" could look after providing adequate shelter for the population have landed us in our current crisis of both affordability and availability.

And policy overwhelmingly promises to at best maintain the present unsatisfactory status quo, as explained two years ago,

and, more likely, worsen it.

This month's board minutes allude to it:

"The staff judged that the larger part of the increase had reflected less-persistent factors, including price volatility in categories such as electricity, travel and groceries, and some sector-specific demand and price pressures that had affected prices of new dwellings and durable goods. Inflation in administered prices (excluding electricity) was only a little above its historical average and had picked up only modestly."

Housing and the cost of living

It was the area that showed the biggest growth in the CPI over 2025, 5.5 per cent, and that's without the ABS even measuring all housing inflation as it underplays what rent is doing.

It's housing that is the key factor in our "cost of living" crisis, the cost of renting, buying and building. It's housing that is at the root of much of our social division, giving rise to One Hanson.

To help both the RBA and Australia, much more is needed than fiddling with capital gains tax in the May budget, if Albanese is game enough to do even that.

We need to much more seriously target the building trades in our immigration policy and we need governments to commit to doubling the percentage of housing stock that is social/public. We have created a swathe of Australians who will never be able to afford their own home and cannot be adequately cared for by private landlords.

Otherwise, interest rates and unemployment will rise, the population will become more disgusted with both mainstream parties and living standards will continue to go backwards.

By Michael Pascoe
Via
Michael West Media

MichaelWestMedia
Independent Journalists



Photo by Break Media on Pexels.com

Every Solution Begins with a Conversation Who Do We Trust to Tell Us the Truth?

For decades, we were told a story about Australian media. It was called the "Fourth Estate."

The term emerged in the 18th century, recognising journalism as democracy's fourth pillar alongside the legislature, executive, and judiciary. A free press serving as democracy's watchdog: holding power to account through truth-seeking, independence from political and commercial control, transparency in sources and conflicts, and unwavering commitment to public interest over vested interests.

This was the story. An independent Fourth Estate protecting citizens from corruption, exposing wrongdoing, giving voice to the marginalised, and enabling informed democratic participation.

This story is now a fiction.

Since the rise of the internet, mainstream media has been in systemic decline - haemorrhaging readers, slashing journalism jobs, watching revenue collapse. Desperate to stay afloat, media organisations made a Faustian bargain: they traded their watchdog role for survival. Investigative journalism - expensive, time-consuming, relationship-damaging - gave way to something cheaper and safer.

The Managed Public Relations Pipeline.

Instead of investigating power, they amplify it. Instead of following evidence wherever it leads, they repackage press releases. Instead of challenging vested interests, they platform them.

The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism found that in some outlets, up to 55% of stories are largely PR-driven.

This isn't journalism. It's churnalism.

In 2026, we must begin with a more honest conversation. We are not served by a Fourth Estate holding power to account. **We are fed by a Managed Public Relations Pipeline serving those in power.**

The consequences are a profound truth deficit and a collapse in public trust. Only 43% of Australians trust news sources, while 69% actively avoid it. This is not a public failing. It is an institutional one.

Our first conversation for 2026 must be about how we move from being on the menu in a

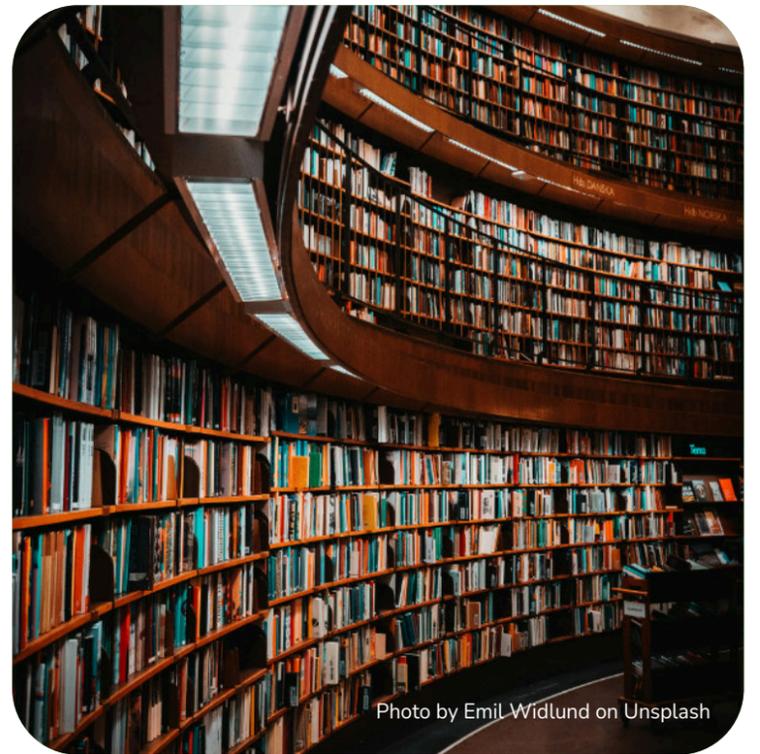


Photo by Emil Widlund on Unsplash

system rigged by this pipeline, to demanding our seats at the table of public discourse. It begins by understanding the rigged game and then building a new one.

Read the rest of the article on: www.suebarrett.substack.com



The NACC's exceptional challenge: Integrity is not achieved by secrecy, but by trust earned in the light

Few issues unite progressive and conservative voters. Ending corruption is one of the few exceptions.

Polling from the Australia Institute in 2023 found that 85 per cent of One Nation voters and 69 per cent of Greens voters reached the same conclusion - Australia has a corruption problem.

At the 2022 federal election, Australians across the political spectrum agreed that politics had issues with integrity. Secret ministries, carpark rorts and Robodebt left voters with a songbook of scandals and secrecy.

Public trust was badly eroded.

When the Coalition was booted from government, and the crossbench grew to historic heights, the message from voters was damning. They wanted the headlines of wrongdoing to end and integrity to be restored.

The Albanese Labor Party promised to legislate a National Anti-Corruption Commission. Before coming to government, Labor spoke forcefully about restoring integrity and strengthening Australia's accountability framework. To its credit, it prioritised the creation of the NACC and delivered on that promise.

But integrity reform does not end with legislation. It lives or dies in how an institution operates - and whether it earns and keeps public trust. And since its inception the NACC has fallen short.

The parliamentary joint committee on the National Anti-Corruption Commission provides one of the few opportunities to scrutinise how the NACC is functioning. As deputy chair of that committee, I take my oversight role seriously. Parliamentary scrutiny matters, particularly for a powerful integrity body whose work is largely hidden from view.

Australians expected the NACC to hold those responsible for corruption to public account.

Instead, many are asking why so much of its work happens behind closed doors, why decisions are delayed and poorly explained, and why transparency appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

Visibility over the NACC's operations is hampered, in part, because the commission has not held a single public hearing since it was established. That fact alone should give pause.

My concerns are not new. When the NACC legislation was debated, I hesitated over one critical feature - the inclusion of an "exceptional circumstances" test that must be met before a public hearing can be held.

I feared that without a clear definition, "exceptional" would become a barrier to transparency rather than a safeguard against harm. That fear has proven well-founded.

Under the NACC Act, hearings are generally private. To hold a public hearing, the commission must clear two hurdles. First, it must be satisfied that a public

hearing is in the public interest, and then that exceptional circumstances justify holding it in public. It is this second hurdle, the exceptional circumstances test, that is the real problem.

No one knows what constitutes "exceptional" - not even Commissioner Paul Brereton himself. I pressed him on this point a year ago, and he said he will "know it when [he] sees it".

Since its establishment, the NACC has conducted more than two dozen private hearings with witnesses, yet not a single public hearing. For a National Anti-Corruption Commission that has completed inquiries such as Operation Kingscliff, which found a Department of Home Affairs official engaged in corrupt conduct involving nepotism, it is difficult to accept that no matter has met the public interest threshold for a public hearing.

As the saying goes: You can't believe what you can't see.

Last week, one year on from my first inquiry, I repeated my question to Brereton at the oversight committee hearing. He confirmed he still hadn't seen the "exceptional circumstances" that would warrant a public hearing, nor could he define what exceptional circumstances might be:

"I'm pretty keen to have [a public hearing], and say 'right we've done one', but I've got to do that responsibly and lawfully, and not just to get the issue off my back. I've got



Photo via: www.helenhaines.org

to have a case that ticks the boxes and which it will be appropriate to do it."

To be clear, public hearings should not be the default. Any anti-corruption body must be able to investigate sensitive matters, protect confidential information, and shield innocent witnesses. But public hearings also play a vital role. They build confidence that wrongdoing is being addressed, demonstrate that no one is above scrutiny, and reinforce the integrity of public institutions.

Public hearings are not about spectacle or trial by media. When used carefully, with appropriate safeguards, they are a cornerstone of accountability.

Without sufficient transparency, public confidence will continue to erode. An integrity body that operates largely in the dark risks becoming disconnected from the very public it exists to serve.

Australians were promised a new era of transparency and accountability. The NACC can still deliver on that promise, but only if we are willing to confront its shortcomings, remove unnecessary barriers to openness, and recognise that integrity is not achieved by secrecy, but by trust

earned in the light.

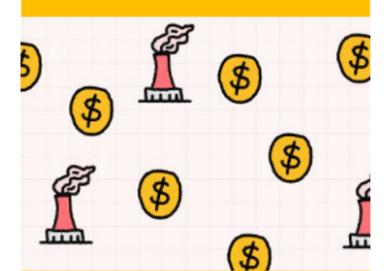
A good first step is to scrap the 'exceptional circumstances' test.

Helen Haines is the independent member for Indi and deputy chair of the parliamentary joint committee on the National Anti-Corruption Commission



the point.

Media Bites



Should Australia Introduce a "Polluter Pays Levy"

Read about this new initiative from the Super Power Institute via the QR code.



Videos we are watching

Punters Politics



The Housing Solution Australia Doesn't Want You to Remember

Australia solved housing in the 1960s with \$5 deposits and government-built homes, then deliberately dismantled the system to make banks billions while locking out entire generations.



The Juice Media



Honest Government Ad Minority Government

The 'Australien' Government and the Opposition have made an ad about minority governments, and it's surprisingly honest and informative.

Authorised by G. Nanni, The Juice Media, Melbourne, Australia.



6 News Australia



New push to Close the Gap with new bill in Canberra

Thomas Emerson has renewed a push to Close the Gap in the ACT, telling 6 News he wants to see a "massive increase" in government accountability for its commitments around outcomes for Indigenous people.



The Sunday Shot



Fact Migration - Jana Favero and Greg Jericho

Jo tries to inject facts into the dangerously escalating debate about immigration while Dave questions whether even having this discussion allows the Right to set the terms of the debate.



The Struggle



The Struggle

A news satire show produced by Monash University students that airs weekly on Channel 31 and CTV+. Each episode throws traditional TV News to the wind and impersonates the format's, headlines and correspondents. The Struggle is here to bring you (most of) the facts.



The Australia Institute



OECD says Australia's housing market is broken

Even the Mathias Cormann-led OECD says the capital gains tax discount and negative gearing are a problem. Greg and Elinor discuss why the Radical Left Lunatics at the OECD think Australia's property investor tax concessions are busted.



ABC iview



Always Was Tonight

Proud Gamilaroi man Tony Armstrong and a stellar line-up of First Nations talent are set to decolonise the news - one headline at a time. This fast, funny and unflinching special has an agenda to go where no other show dares.



Guardian Australia



WA reefs experiencing 'worst coral bleaching event' ever to hit state.

From the World Heritage-listed Ningaloo all the way to Ashmore Reef about 1,500 km north-east, Western Australia's reefs are turning white with scientists reporting widespread coral deaths.



The West Report



THE DARK money of the Election

Newly released Australian Electoral Commission disclosures show the major parties reported \$417.2 million in donations and other receipts in 2024 to 25, with 31 percent coming from undisclosed "dark money" sources.



Media Watch



How a fake mosque proposal duped the media

A fake mosque proposal in Sydney's Southwest duped commercial media, and exposed just how little fact-checking is done by them. Another case of churnalism and sensationalism triumphing over real journalism.



If you come across a good video on Australian Politics, preferably from an Independent source, then send us a link - hello@voicesofchisholm.org

David Pocock's "A Duty of Care Act" Raising the Bar for Political Responsibility

Independent Senator David Pocock's proposed Duty of Care Act is a reform initiative aimed at reshaping how political decisions are made in Australia, particularly when those decisions carry long-term risks for the public. At its core, the proposal argues that governments and decision-makers should be legally required to consider the foreseeable harm their actions — or inaction — may cause to citizens, especially future generations.

The initiative draws on the long-standing legal concept of a "duty of care," a principle already central to professions such as medicine, engineering, and workplace safety. Senator Pocock's case is both clear and ambitious: if individuals and organisations are expected to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm, governments should be held to a comparable standard when making decisions that affect the public. The Duty of Care Act is most often discussed in relation to climate change, where policy choices made today are expected to shape environmental conditions,

economic stability, and public health for decades to come.

Under the proposed framework, the Act would require decision-makers to carefully assess risks and long-term impacts before approving major policies or projects. Rather than prescribing specific outcomes, it establishes a responsibility to demonstrate that decisions are informed, evidence-based, and aligned with the public interest. Supporters argue that this approach would promote transparency and encourage governments to prioritise long-term wellbeing over short-term political pressures.

Pocock has consistently described the Duty of Care Act as a safeguard for both citizens and democratic institutions. He emphasises that the initiative is not designed to punish governments, but to clarify expectations and strengthen standards of responsibility. By embedding a duty of care into decision-making, the proposal aims to rebuild public trust and reinforce the idea that leadership carries meaningful obligations.

In a time when confidence in politics is being tested, the Duty Of Care Act presents a framework for accountability, ethics, and forward-thinking governance. Regardless of its legislative future, the initiative has already contributed to a broader national conversation about how power should be exercised and for whose benefit.

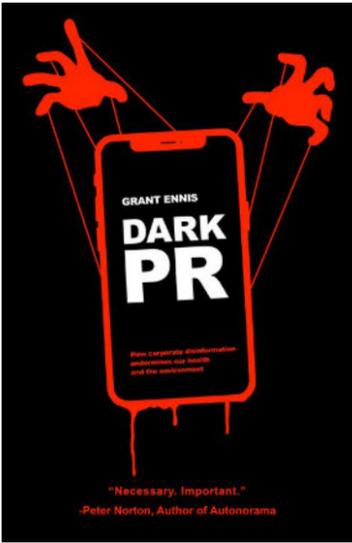
You can find out more about David Pocock's Duty of Care Act via the QR code



Photo via: adutyofcare.davidpocock.com.au

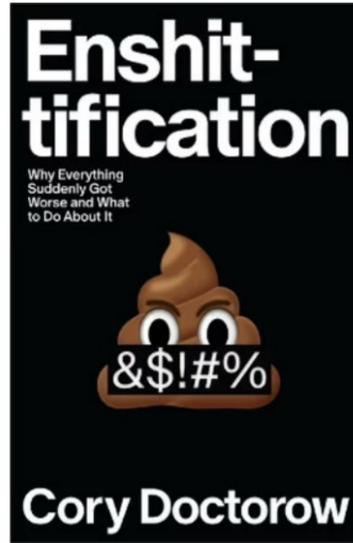
Books we are reading

If you are reading any good books related to politics and the media, then please share them. Every issue we will feature a couple of the best with a super short overview.



Dark PR - Grant Ennis

Ever wondered why we don't appear to be able to fix those big issues like climate change, food waste and plastic pollution? Dark PR by Grant Ennis exposes how sophisticated public relations campaigns delay action, distort science, and protect profits. Dark PR connects historical case studies with modern crises, showing how narratives are engineered and the actual solutions are avoided. Ennis helps readers to spot manipulation, when we think we are helping but in reality we are not, and rethink who benefits from inaction. Dark PR is essential reading for anyone interested in social justice, media literacy, and the hidden forces shaping public debate today. Ennis concludes with advice on the sorts of actions that we can all take that will lead to the desired outcomes for people and planet.



Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About It - Cory Doctorow

Cory explains why digital services and platforms, from social media to online marketplaces, have progressively degraded in quality over time. Doctorow argues that companies lure users with great experiences, then prioritise business customers and profits, ultimately making things worse for everyone. He diagnoses this pattern across tech giants and proposes fixes like breaking up monopolies, stronger regulation, privacy protections, interoperability, and union-power to reclaim better online ecosystems.



www.doctorow.medium.com

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Have we inspired you to follow more Independent Journalism? We hope so! Visit our Independent News Sources page to see a complete list of independent news sources that are holding truth to power.

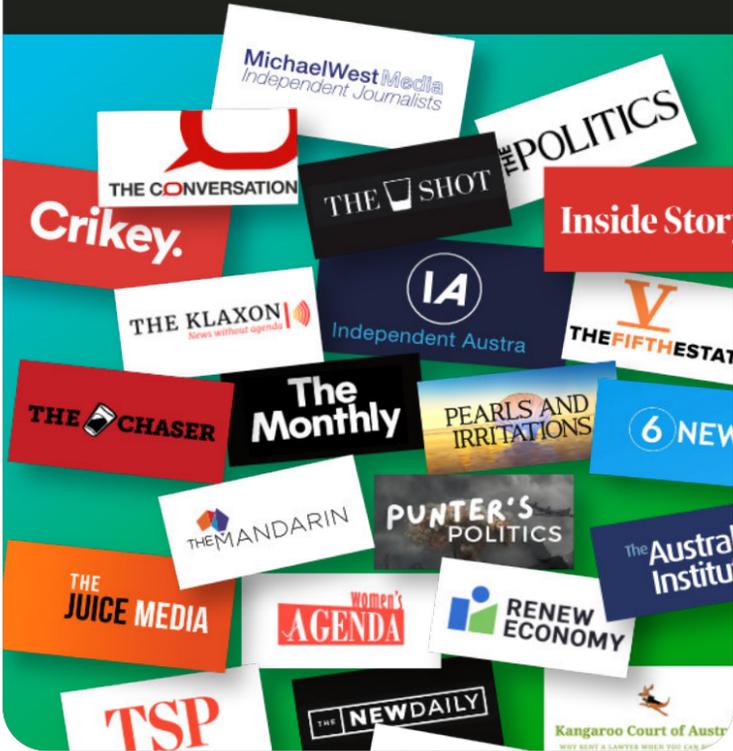
www.voicesofchisholm.org/indynews

TrueNorth Daily Independent News Update does an excellent daily round up of the best news stories from



Independent Media sources.

Independent media organisations play a vital role in a healthy democracy, but they often operate without the financial backing and reach of major corporate outlets. They rely on readers, subscribers, and communities who value credible, fearless journalism. By following, sharing, and supporting independent news, we help ensure diverse voices are heard and that investigative reporting continues to thrive.



Did you enjoy reading this?

Share with friends and family This was our very first issue. We wanted to see if it was even possible to do this! We hope to learn, iterate and

make this paper even better in the future. Download a PDF and share it with all your friends...



The Community Independents Project

People Powered Politics



The Community Independents Project (CIP) is reshaping Australia's political landscape by supporting community-driven independent candidates to stand for election. Built on the belief that politics should reflect local priorities, the project empowers citizens to participate in democracy outside traditional party structures.

At its core, CIP focuses on grassroots engagement. Rather than promoting a single ideology, it helps communities identify shared concerns such as integrity in politics, climate action, cost of living pressures, and inclusive decision-making. Candidates supported through the project remain accountable to their communities, not party factions or major donors.

CIP provides training, mentoring, and practical resources to volunteers and candidates, enabling campaigns grounded in consultation and collaboration. This model encourages respectful political debate and strengthens trust between representatives and voters. Recent electoral successes by community

independents highlight a growing public appetite for transparency and cooperation over partisan conflict.

By broadening political participation and amplifying local voices, the Community Independents Project is revitalising democratic engagement. It offers communities an alternative when they feel unheard, demonstrating that citizens can drive change and influence Australia's future.



We want to hear from you

To help us understand what Chisholm residents really care about and what stories we should share in the future, we want to hear from you. Listening is at the heart of everything we do, because strong communities are

built on shared experiences and diverse voices. Through initiatives like Kitchen Table Conversations, we create spaces for respectful listening and meaningful dialogue.

Send us article suggestions for Issue 2, including stories, books,

videos, and other ideas you think matter. Share what inspires, challenges, or informs you. Email hello@voicesofchisholm.org to share your thoughts and suggestions to help shape the future of Chisholm Voices.

Volunteer - Donate - Support/Join

"Democracy is not a spectator sport."

At a time when trust in democracy is under strain, it's easy to feel helpless. Grassroots democracy offers a powerful alternative. Joining a Voices Of group is a practical way to get involved, have meaningful conversations, and help shape decisions that affect your community. It turns concern into action and replaces frustration with purpose. It's also a great way to meet passionate, thoughtful people who care about fairness, integrity, and the future of our democracy.

1: Come to an Event We will be running events throughout the year. Visit our events page to see what is coming up next.



2: Support Us by following us on Social Media or by signing up to our mailing list.



3: Donate to us and help us produce more papers like this and spread the word about VOC & CIP.



4: Volunteer and get involved in any way that you're comfortable with.



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