

# COMPACT

## A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Following the 2014 Lindt Café siege in Sydney, governments faced a pressing question: how could communities be protected from violent extremism without alienating the very people whose trust and participation were essential to preventing it?

In response, Macquarie University researchers Dr Julian Droogan and Lise Waldek partnered with Multicultural NSW to develop the Community Partnership Action (COMPACT) program. Rather than treating communities as potential security threats, COMPACT recognised them as the foundation of resilience – building social cohesion, youth leadership and civic participation to reduce the conditions in which violent extremism can emerge.

### FROM RESEARCH TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

Commissioned by the NSW Premier's Office in 2015, the researchers examined why many international countering violent extremism (CVE) programs had failed. Drawing on community consultation with more than 50 multicultural organisations and leaders, comparative international analysis and evidence from sociology and criminology, they developed a new evidence-based model centred on partnership rather than surveillance.

COMPACT brings together community organisations, government, universities and businesses to deliver locally led initiatives that strengthen belonging, community connections and resilience. Unlike many international programs, it adopts a whole-of-society approach, avoids stigmatising minority communities and embeds independent evaluation from the outset.

### TRANSFORMING AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH

Over the past decade, COMPACT has become one of Australia's most successful community resilience initiatives. It has:

- engaged more than 80,000 young Australians through community-led projects
- secured more than $37.5 million in bipartisan NSW Government funding across four funding rounds
- built the COMPACT Alliance – a statewide network connecting community organisations, government, universities and industry
- contributed to the expansion of Australia's Countering Violent Extremism Framework to address the social drivers of extremism
- enabled 82 per cent of participating organisations to establish new partnerships through the alliance.

Independent evaluations by Urbis in 2018 and 2024 described COMPACT as a 'first-of-its-kind initiative' that achieved 'significant progress towards its objectives' – findings that have supported its continuation under four successive NSW Premiers. The program has also attracted international recognition, including acknowledgement by RAND and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate as a leading model for community-based approaches to preventing violent extremism.

### CONTINUING IMPACT

A decade after its creation, COMPACT has reshaped how governments think about countering violent extremism. By demonstrating that stronger, more connected communities are one of society's most effective safeguards against radicalisation, the program has established a lasting, evidence-based model for building safer and more resilient communities. Macquarie researchers continue to guide the evolution of COMPACT by evaluating hundreds of grant applications, advising government on future community resilience programs and developing new approaches to addressing emerging threats, including far-right violent extremism.

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