

Submission to the Productivity Commission

Pillar 4 – Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently

Time — it cannot be bought, nor made. It slips through our hands unless it is honoured by conscious design. In a nation of constraints, time itself is value — the very measure of quality in our lives. It is not to be squandered on navigating labyrinths of paperwork and portals in an already complicated world.

The government alone has the reach to draw a whole picture of the citizen — to hold the multidimensional person in view, not as fragments scattered across agencies. This is the only instrument the Australian people have to produce the efficiencies we need, and to secure the quality of life all citizens require.

The task is enormous, as rail once was, as roads once were. It will not be achieved by one pillar standing alone, but by all pillars rising together on a common base. Data infrastructure is our modern civic work — the rail and road of our century — enabling seamless passage across borders, systems, and lives. Only when we build it collectively can we release the greatest dividend: a society where time is not wasted on complexity, but lived fully in the things that matter.

Building on shared ambition

The Commission is right to frame reform as breaking through silos. For citizens, silos are not abstract — they mean retelling histories, repeating forms, and carrying paperwork from one desk to another.

Private corporations already hold a more seamless picture of our lives than public institutions:

- Amazon knows what we will buy before we do.
- Apple tracks the rhythm of our heartbeat.
- Meta and Instagram know what we eat, where we go, and who we love.
- Google Maps records every journey we make.
- Tesla tracks our daily movements through the cars we drive.

Yet in a medical emergency, doctors and carers often cannot see a complete record. A national, portable record would change this.

This is not a task for private enterprise. Profit-driven actors innovate and thrive at the edges of systems, but they cannot be expected to build the common frameworks on which

everyone relies. Their mandate is survival through profit; one cannot change this nature. Rail and roads were not built by competing firms for private gain, but once they existed, countless businesses flourished along them. So too will it be with data. A seamless, portable care record is the civic work of our generation — something only citizens, through government, can fund and safeguard. Once built, it will provide the ground on which private innovation can thrive, not the other way around.

Adopting the Commission's growth mindset means designing for time: a portable care record that lets citizens "report once, use often" and gives back hours otherwise lost to duplication.

Efficiency through anticipation

Efficiency in care is not about shaving minutes off a consultation. It is about respecting time — anticipating need, preventing crises, and lightening the load on families and workers alike. With longitudinal data flowing through secure national systems, the right team can be triggered at the right time, across the full arc of care — from GP to hospital, from diagnostics to rehabilitation, and finally back home.

We already know how to do this. A cancer diagnosis triggers a pathway where the door opens once and the system carries the person forward. The pandemic showed that when urgency demands it, silos give way to coordination and information flows seamlessly. These lessons can guide us as we extend the same design discipline to ageing, disability, and chronic illness.

A growth mindset recognises that productivity is a "game of inches." No single reform will restore momentum. But a shared foundation — data and tools that anticipate need — ensures those inches add up, so that AI's promised productivity lift becomes safer care and smoother navigation, rather than heavier compliance.

The architecture of reform

Reform can be pictured as civic architecture. The foundation is data and the tools that make it usable. The pillars are the Commission's five areas of reform — distinct yet interdependent, each bearing its share of the load. And the entablature they hold up together is the wellbeing and security of citizens. Without the foundation, the pillars sink. Remove a pillar, and the structure cannot hold. But when they all stand together, the architecture is whole, and it gives strength and shelter.

Seamless reform across the pillars is not only strategic, it is cost-saving. Since silos emerge as a common thread across every pillar, addressing them should be the priority. It is a big task, ambitious in scope, but efficiency and productivity demand no less. A common user infrastructure would allow information and effort to flow across programs, feeding other

initiatives at the periphery. This will in turn demand innovation from the private sector, which can create new tools and services that contribute to the same stream. Like nature's design, tributaries feed into rivers, and rivers into seas. So too can a coherent national infrastructure gather and carry the contributions of many, while keeping the flow simple and dependable for the citizen at its heart.

Closing reflection

This task is not simple, but neither were the great civic works of the past. Rail and roads connected a nation physically. Data infrastructure can connect it socially and institutionally. Built gradually and collectively, it will ease pressures on workers, reduce trauma for families, and return to citizens the one thing no system can manufacture — time.

In a complex world, simplicity and coherence in care are not luxuries — they are the foundation of productivity itself.