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## Introducing AISH – The Australian Intervention Support Hub

Trust between communities and police has long been the bedrock on which Australia's domestic security is built. Since the 911 attacks that rocked America in 2001 and the bombings in Bali in 2002 that stole the lives of 201 people, including 88 Australians, many attempts to launch terror attacks in Australia have been thwarted because of good work by police and community. The rise of the Islamic State movement, however, has transformed the nature and intensity of threats facing Australia. Dozens of young lives have been taken far from home in the nightmarish conflict that has consumed Syria and Iraq. More than a hundred Australian families have suffered the trauma of having their children stolen away by dark networks of unknown recruiters. The challenges that we now face require more than just policing and prosecution.

There is no singular solution, no panacea, but the range of creative measures needed to prevent and reverse radicalisation, based on cooperation across society and working closely with community groups, has come to be known as countering violent extremism (CVE). Like all concepts in this field this is a work in progress. No one has all the answers but what is clear is that not trying to do more to protect society and those whose well-being is at risk is simply not an option. Hundreds of young Australians have been prevented from travelling to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq but whilst this sort of intervention saves lives it is not a sufficient response in and of itself. Families and community groups need to be helped to work with those stopped from travelling or found to be at risk of recruitment.

The new Australian Intervention Support Hub (AISH – the Hub), based at the ANU in Canberra and Deakin University in Melbourne, brings together established expertise, knowledge and experience and ensure that it is available to respond to government and community needs in a timely and sustainable manner.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) represents an evolving response to the problem of extremist violence that is more holistic than prior approaches. It involves working both 'upstream' and 'downstream' of problems and working collaboratively across community groups. To be effective it requires collaboration between diverse government and community stakeholders. Together they need to identify, develop, and implement progressive, non-coercive measures to work with vulnerable individuals and groups to deflect and dissuade them from using violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.

People from any background can become radicalised and become drawn into groups prepared to use violent means to support extremist political ideologies. There is no 'typical profile' just as there is no singular pathway to radicalisation. Extremist narratives play an important role in the process of radicalisation but radicalisation begins with, and is driven

by, social networks and relationships. Increasingly, these relationships are formed and developed partly, or even entirely, through virtual interactions online and via social media. Consequently, radicalisation often occurs without family and friends being aware.

Nevertheless, there are generally clear signs that are observable if people know what to look for. Changes in someone's social networks and relationships – forming new friendships and breaking-off old ones; and changes in expressed ideology – expressing increasingly extreme views at odds with their previous convictions; and changes in behaviour – acting more transgressively in contrast to previous patterns of behaviour – when occurring simultaneously often indicate radicalisation. It is change over time across all three domains that is important. This holds true for radicalisation into all forms of violent extremism. Because the vast majority of those being radicalised are aged between fourteen and thirty years old it is important that everyone working with young people have access to training about these indications that a young person's well-being is being threatened by radicalisation.

If it is felt that there is reason to be concerned intervention may be required, just as is the case with other kinds of threats to the wellbeing of young people. Each individual situation needs to be expertly assessed and, if needed, appropriate follow-up be established working with a point of contact – preferably a friend or family member.

At the same time CVE must also seek to reintegrate into mainstream society individuals and groups that have become radicalized and involved in violent extremism by facilitating their disengagement from social networks and patterns of behaviour that draw them into extremist violence.

There have been significant achievements with CVE initiatives and strategies around the globe. Elements of these programs could be borrowed and adapted for Australian conditions. A successful program run in Denmark, for example, involves the training of teams of community workers to conduct intervention conversations. In Britain community groups have developed effective social media campaigns in which young people speak directly to their peers. In Germany the Hayat program builds upon the insights of pioneering CVE programs like Exit Deutschland and demonstrates a promising model of family and community-led intervention. And in Singapore the work of the Religious Rehabilitation Group has pioneered an approach to community-led interventions that has considerable potential for adaptation to other contexts.

Working in collaboration with the Hedayah centre for CVE in the UAE, the Hub will act as a clearing house to collate, consolidate and disseminate insights gained from CVE programs around the world as well as conducting new research in collaboration with Australia's leading experts in social cohesion and countering extremism.

Evidence based research is critically important to underpinning policy and programs, as are systematic, methodologically sound evaluation measures. Australia, along with all other countries facing the multiple challenges of countering violent extremism, is working to bridge the capability gap in the development of CVE as a policy area. The Hub will help address this capability gap and produce evidence-based programs that build on the learning of previous programs to move towards 'best practice' over time.

The Hub will work on a project basis with researchers drawn from fields including international relations, terrorism studies, criminology/penology, psychology, communications, sociology and Islamic studies. The larger network of associated

researchers includes researchers from Monash University, the University of Melbourne, VU, UWS, UNSW, UWA and Curtin University.

The Hub's key objective is to support government agencies, law enforcement and community groups in developing and implementing nationally consistent, but locally implemented, evidence-based CVE programs by providing ongoing training, evaluation and applied research capacity. This support will take the form of:

- Identifying evolving international CVE best practice and helping to translate this to the Australian context in a timely and effective fashion;
- Providing a dynamic repository of stable knowledge and expertise about CVE programs and related initiatives to help retain institutional memory within government, policing and community organisations;
- Generating, collating and interpreting evidence-based CVE research which can be applied within a range of policing, government and community training and work;
- Providing training and support for groups and service providers to develop and sensitively undertake appropriate, sustainable interventions for individuals and families that help safeguard the wellbeing of individuals, communities and society;
- Educating media practitioners, educators and other professionals about violent extremism, radicalisation, and effective interventions to protect well-being and related CVE issues;
- Facilitating independent evaluations of CVE programs; and,
- Media and community engagement.

The Hub brings together key personnel who are uniquely placed to perform this work and have strong existing relationships with a range of policing, government and community groups. They understand the complex sensitivities involved in seeking to prevent radicalisation, re-engage troubled individuals and counter violent extremism through healthy social networks and effective counter-narrative messaging. By centralising a core group of CVE experts with a track record of conducting independent empirical research, the Hub provides Australia with responsive, effective and reliable CVE capacity both publicly (in the media and with community groups) and in the applied research space (for policing and government agencies).