



# Social Marketing for Social Good: What Fifty Years of Scholarship Has Taught Us

**Centre for Social Impact**

Dr Uwana Evers | UWA Business School | Tuesday 5 May 2026





# Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Western Australia is  
located alongside the Derbal Yerrigan  
(Swan River) on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja.

Artist: Dr Richard Barry Walley OAM



# The core problem

Across domains such as health, sustainability, and community participation, a persistent gap remains between what people intend to do and what they actually do.

This intention-behaviour gap is not new - but it remains stubborn (*Sheeran & Webb, 2016*).



Image source: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/nudge-action-behavioural-science-sustainability>

# What is social marketing?



## The Benchmark Criteria

*(Andreasen, 2002; French & Blair-Stevens, 2006)*

**“the application of marketing principles and techniques to influence target audience behaviours that benefit society”**

*(Andreasen, 2002).*

Reviews suggest that interventions incorporating a greater number of benchmark criteria tend to report stronger outcomes

*(Carins & Rundle-Thiele, 2014).*

# What social marketing is not...

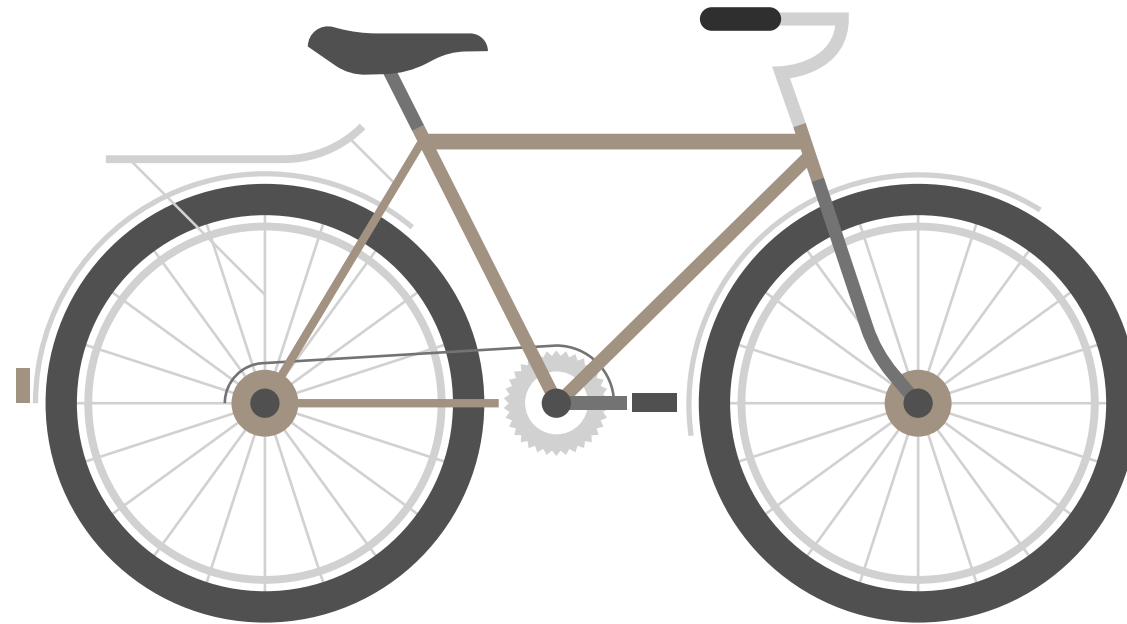
Social marketing is usually confused with:

- social media marketing
- corporate social responsibility campaigns
- public awareness campaigns



Image source: <https://www.intotheminds.com/blog/en/social-media-marketing-smm/>

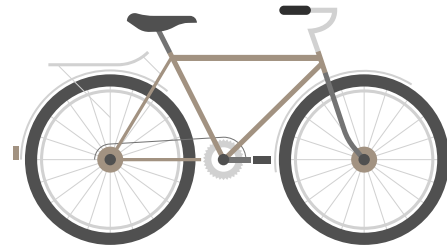
# Social marketing in action



# Social marketing: Four critical distinctions

## 1. Behaviour

Social marketing is explicitly concerned with observable behaviour change (*Andreasen, 2002*)



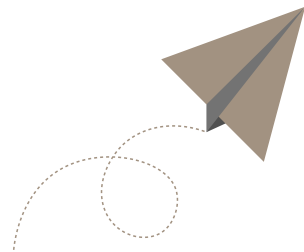
## 2. Audience insight

Formative research, segmentation, and pre-testing are consistently identified as success factors (*Stead et al., 2007*)



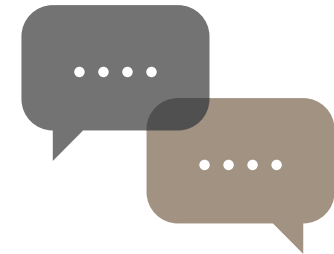
## 3. Exchange

Benefits must outweigh costs from the audience's perspective (*Bagozzi, 1975; Andreasen, 2002*)



## 4. Competition

Desired behaviours compete with entrenched habits, social norms, and commercial influences (*Hastings, 2007*)



## CASE STUDY

# Cancer Council Victoria SunSmart

### Slip! Slop! Slap!

- Long-term behaviour focus
- Multi-level targeting (schools, parents, policy)
- Shifted social norms around sun exposure



Image source: <https://www.generationsunsmart.com.au/sunsmart-services-exclusive/>



# What the evidence says

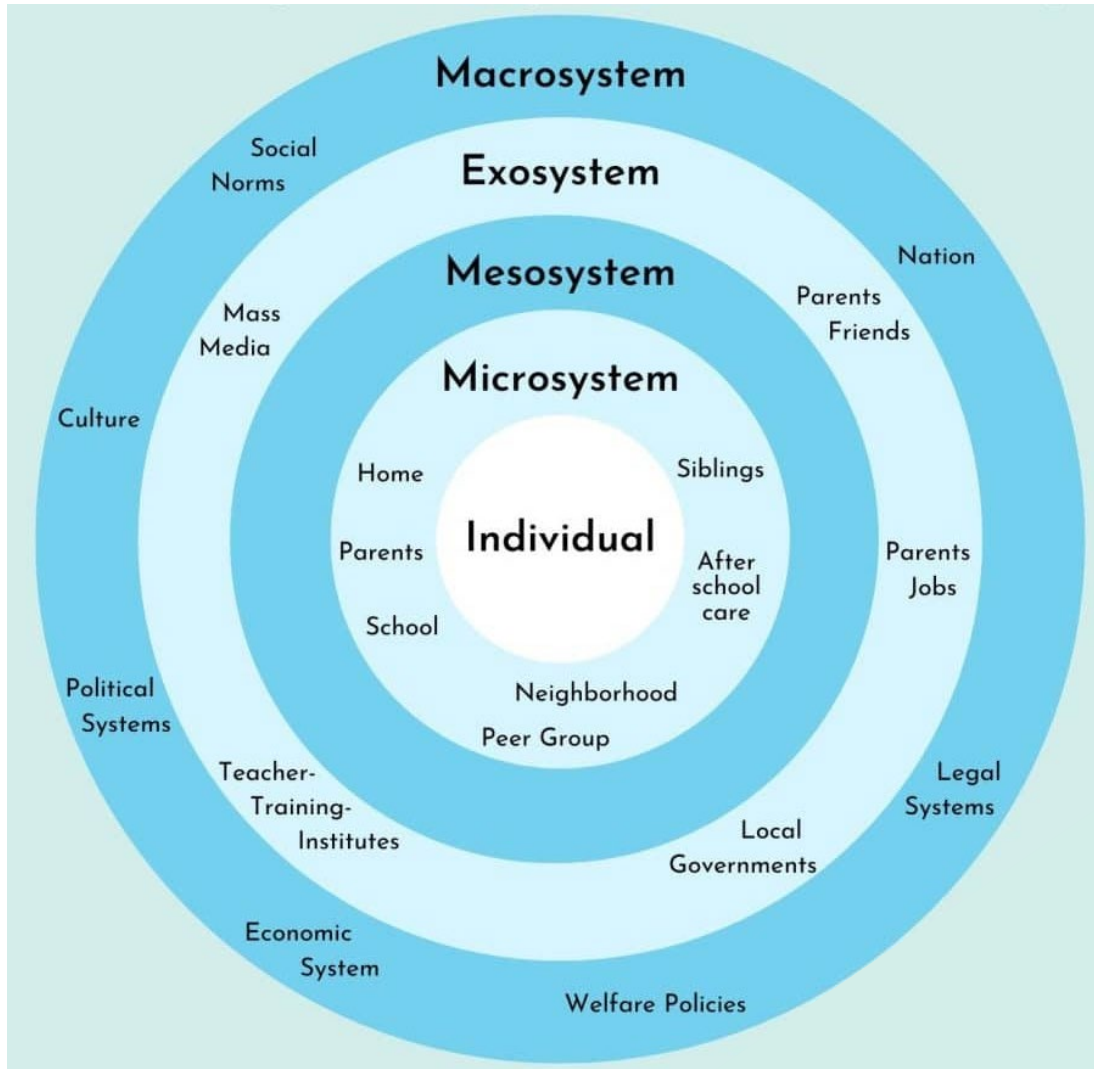
- Social marketing can change behaviour
- Strongest evidence in public health

But there are some limitations to the evidence...

- △ Short term focus
- △ Self-report bias
- △ Weak designs
- △ Behaviour harder to shift than attitudes

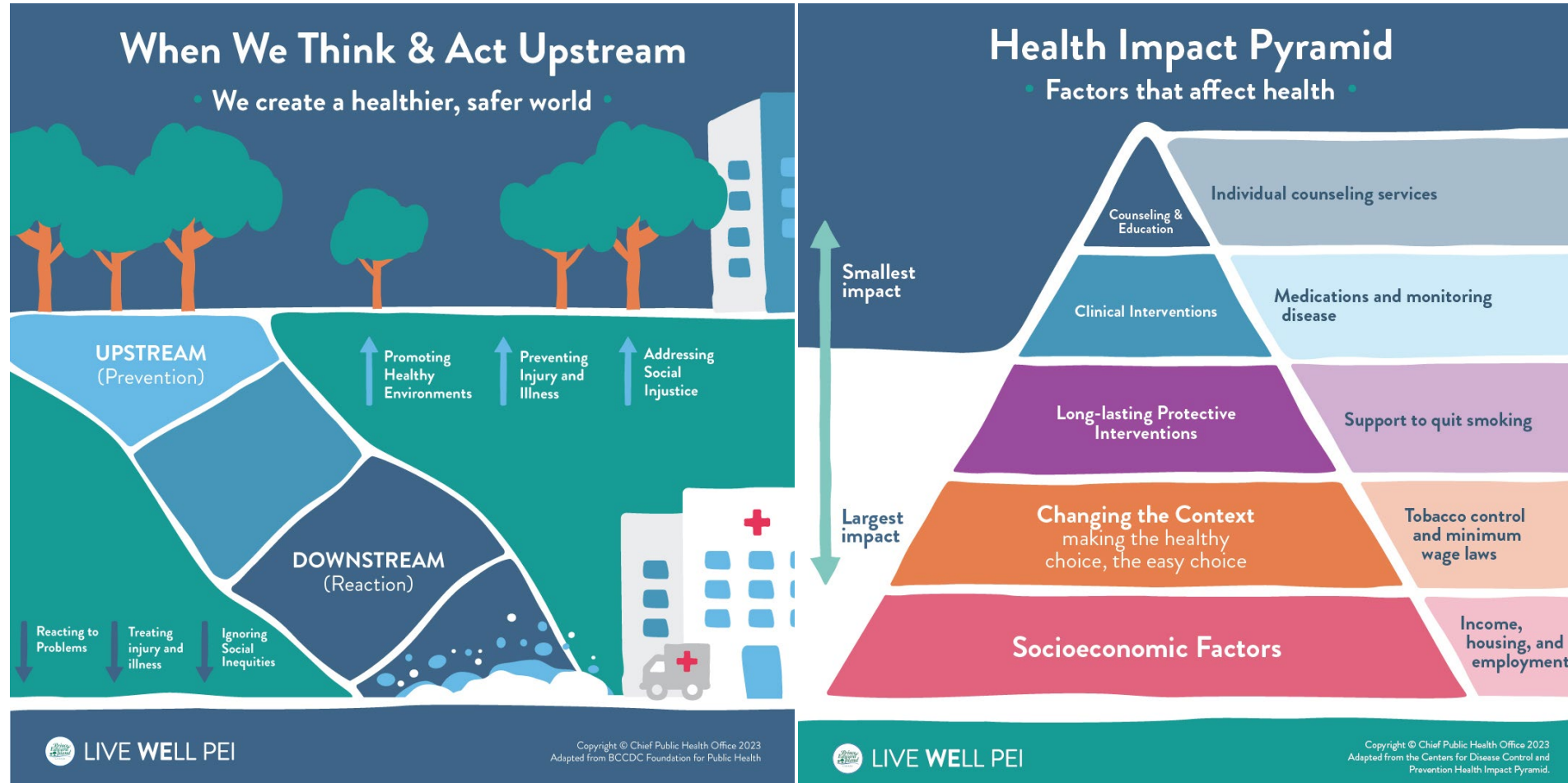


Carins & Rundle-Thiele (2014); Delvaux & Van den Broeck (2023); Firestone et al, (2016); Stead, M., Gordon, Angus & McDermott (2007); Roger et al (2023); Truong (2014).



# The shift from the individual to systems

# Thinking (and acting) “upstream”



## CASE STUDY

# Tobacco Control Program Australia

Why it's working:

Addressing multiple levels

- ✓ Downstream: quit campaigns, individual support
- ✓ Midstream: smoke-free norms over time
- ✓ Upstream: taxes, plain packaging legislation

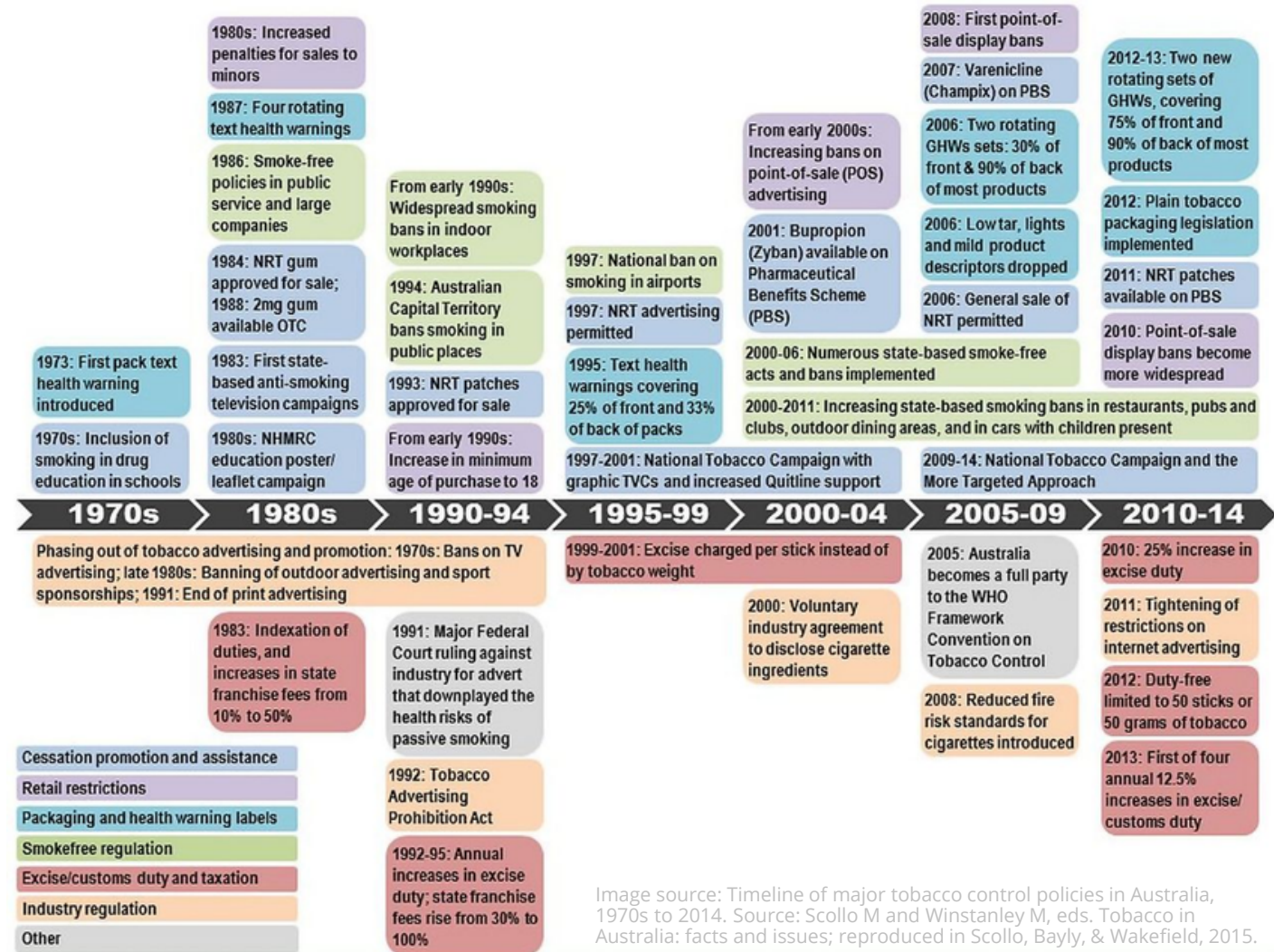


Image source: Timeline of major tobacco control policies in Australia, 1970s to 2014. Source: Scollo M and Winstanley M, eds. Tobacco in Australia: facts and issues; reproduced in Scollo, Bayly, & Wakefield, 2015.

# Why downstream alone fails



# The reality

Commercial determinants of health  
(Kickbusch, Allen, & Franz, 2016):

- Corporations shape behaviour environments
- Who influences policy? Social and cultural norms?





# Common questions about social marketing

# You might be thinking...

1

“Is there actually strong *causal* evidence that social marketing works?”

2

“Isn’t social marketing just behavioural science or public health?”

3

“How do you measure behaviour change properly in this field?”

4

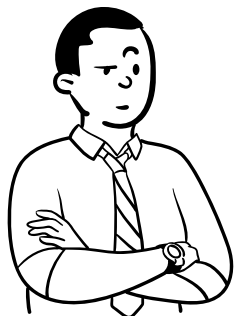
“Is co-creation really more effective, or just a trend?”

5

“If upstream factors are so important, what can practitioners realistically do?”

6

“How does social marketing deal with structural inequality?”



# What is the future of social marketing?



# So, what is the future of social marketing?

Systems thinking

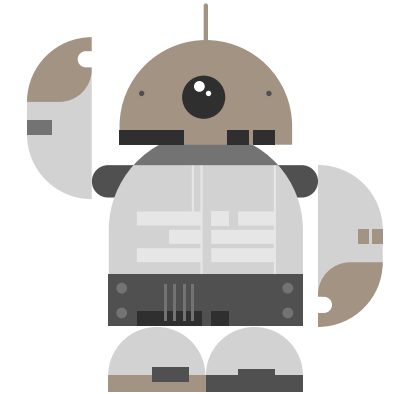
Behavioural models

Co-creation

Digital tools

Sustainable Development Goals

**Social marketing is moving from a communications discipline to a systems discipline**



What does it all  
mean in practice?  
Some ideas to takeaway  
with you



# What this means in practice



**Effective social marketing is about rigorous systems thinking**

# Using the benchmark criteria to diagnose, design, and deliver

## **DIAGNOSE**

(Understand the behaviour)

**Customer Orientation**

**Insight**

**Segmentation**



## **DESIGN**

(Build the intervention)

**Exchange**

**Competition**

**Theory**



## **DELIVER**

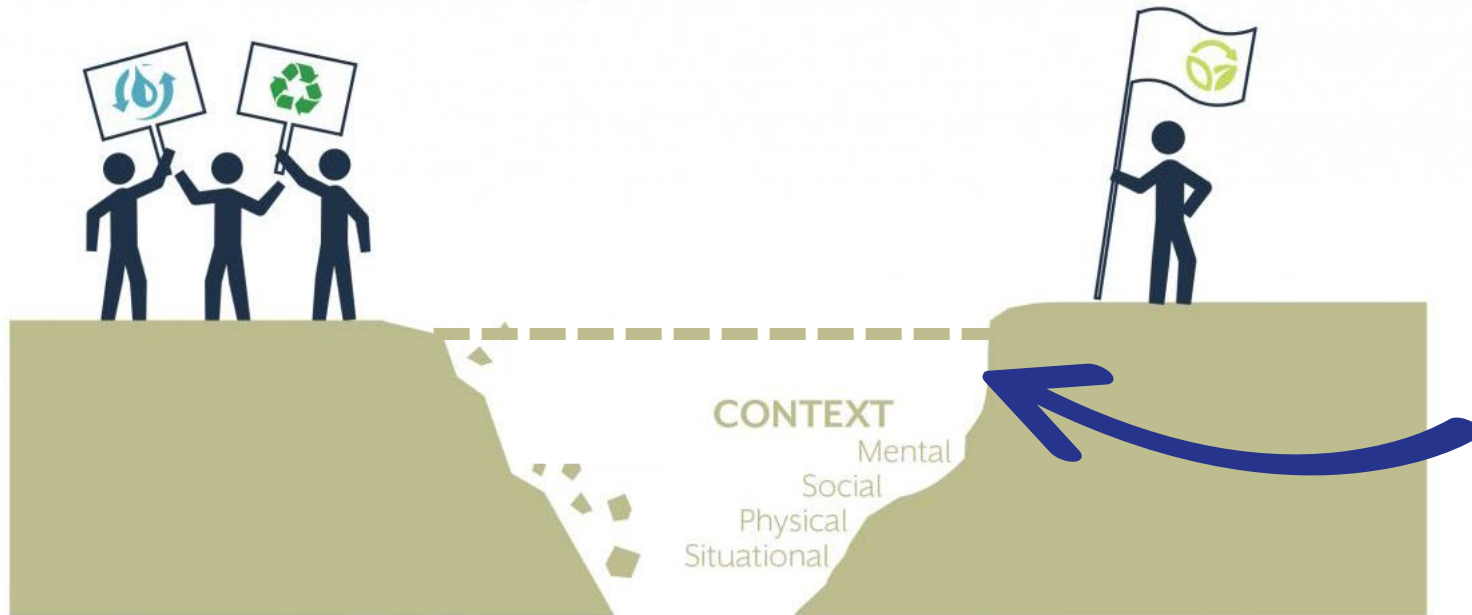
(Make it work in the real world)

**Marketing Mix**

**Behaviour Change  
(Outcome)**



We have the knowledge.  
We lack application at scale.



We must work toward understanding contexts and influencing systems so we can build bridges between intentions and behaviours

Image source: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/nudge-action-behavioural-science-sustainability>



# Asia Pacific Social Marketing Conference

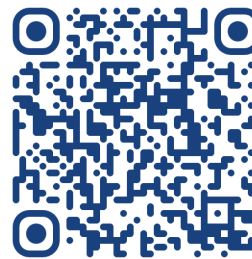
21-23 October 2026 | UWA Business School



The 2026 conference theme – *Compassion Complexity, and Change: Navigating a Polycrisis World* – invites contributions that reflect on how social marketing can respond effectively and ethically for positive impact.

Paper submission deadline: **21 May 2026**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**



<https://aasm.org.au/events/conferences/apsmc-2026/>

**UWA EVENT PAGE**



<https://www.uwa.edu.au/schools/business/events/asia-pacific-social-marketing-conference>



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# Let's keep in touch



[uwana.evers@uwa.edu.au](mailto:uwana.evers@uwa.edu.au)



[uwanaevers](https://www.linkedin.com/in/uwanaevers)



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# Questions?



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