

# Measuring What Matters

Commonwealth Treasury Consultation Paper

Centre for Policy Development

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## INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) is grateful for the opportunity to make a public submission to the consultation for the Measuring What Matters.

The Centre for Policy Development's Wellbeing Initiative works on approaches to the economy that meet the needs of people, communities and the environment. With world-leading research in wellbeing economics, government practice and public sector innovation, the CPD Wellbeing Initiative is a leader in research and convening to advance Australia's approach to wellbeing.

In August 2022, CPD's Wellbeing Initiative published [Redefining Progress](#), a global scan of wellbeing approaches in government. *Redefining Progress* looks at twenty-one global approaches to wellbeing measurement, frameworks and approaches to government decision-making, drawing conclusions to guide Australia's wellbeing journey. In September 2022, we published a brief report on the [Principles for an Effective Wellbeing Budget](#).

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- 1. The government should start by identifying broad wellbeing goals.**  
We should determine what our wellbeing goals are prior to measuring them. Such goals can act as guides for all policymaking, providing a unifying vision for all government departments to work towards. Broader wellbeing goals will also reduce the risk of a focus on short-term reactive policies and favour long-term preventative policies.
- 2. Discovering what these goals are needs to be part of a national conversation about the Australia we want for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.**  
A national conversation can be used to engage and inspire the public, contributing to longevity by making sure

that the government brings the people with them. A conversation also creates a space to provide more information to the public, helping to change the focus from purely economic measures of progress, and increasing opportunities for informed and active democratic participation.

- 3. This national conversation must include community consultation that is broad and inclusive.**

Effective community consultation brings legitimacy to wellbeing frameworks, creating a public mandate for action. This will ensure broad acceptance of the framework and increase the chances of achieving meaningful and lasting change. Broad community consultation also expands the potential for new ideas to emerge.

**Measurement is a tool to support a wellbeing framework and should be carefully designed with utility in mind.**

Measurement indicators should be supported by investment in timely data that can be disaggregated by demographics and geography. Recognising that there will be data gaps and uncertainty, space needs to be made for more indicators to be incorporated as available data improves.

## IDENTIFYING BROAD WELLBEING GOALS

We need to determine what matters to us as a country - what we are working towards - before we can measure what matters and whether we are making progress towards it. In finding out what really matters to Australians the government has an opportunity to identify the central goals that make up a national vision of the future - the Australia we want for ourselves, our communities, our children and our grandchildren.

National wellbeing goals are more than domain headings:

- They should be driven by a collective vision of the future, meaning they need to come from listening to the detail, not just the headlines of what Australians say matters to them.
- They should continue to feed into a collective vision of the future that is clearly understood and communicated, and which resonates with the public.
- They should contain enough detail to clearly guide government and public body decision making without being limited to short-term or single-issue targets.

Such goals are at the heart of several wellbeing frameworks internationally.<sup>1</sup> Wales, for example, has seven wellbeing goals that drive government and public decision making in all its forms.

The Goals are: 1) A Prosperous Wales; 2) A Resilient Wales; 3) A More Equal Wales; 4) A Healthier Wales; 5) A Wales of Cohesive Communities; 6) A Wales of Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; 7) A globally responsible Wales. Each goal extends well beyond their title - their meanings are clearly explained in a paragraph that accompanies each (see appendix 1).

For example one goal, 'a Prosperous Wales', is stated as follows:

An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the resources efficiently and proportionally (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

Similarly, Scotland's National Performance Framework has a statement of purpose and a statement of values alongside their eleven goals, called 'national outcomes', that "describe the kind of Scotland we want to see" (see appendix 2). Examples of these goals include: "We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential" and "We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".

There are a number of reasons to follow the leads of these countries in starting Australia's path to a wellbeing approach:

1. **Goals are what people want to talk about: Australians want to be genuinely listened to.**

A [recent report by Australia ReMADE](#) based on conversations with a diverse group of hundreds of Australians revealed a strong public expectation that the voices of everyday people should be heard and respected. But instead, there was a feeling that "citizen input or feedback was mostly disregarded and lost in a void of bureaucracy" (p.10). They want opportunities to engage with the decisions that affect their lives, and they want to see their contributions reflected in the responses from government. A focus on narrow measures limits the scope for community participation and for the community to see their contributions reflected in the final product produced by the government. Looking towards goals, rather than indicators or domain headings, also gives the government more opportunity to have their decisions genuinely driven by this process, increasing the potential for the longevity and effectiveness of the end product by building legitimacy with, and enthusiasm from the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the New Zealand wellbeing budget objectives are not the same thing as broad national goals - while they offer guidance for the improvement of wellbeing, they are far more specific and tied to a particular process - the budget - than the goals underpinning a complete national vision would be.

2. **Goals can be deeply useful to government decision making.**

Wellbeing measures driven by national indicators are important for providing a snapshot of how a nation is doing, sparking public debate, and highlighting some key areas for action. However, they are not typically able to deeply inform policy decision-making (Tallis, 2004). Wellbeing indicators do not provide the kinds of detail that is useful to guide policy proposals. They also move very slowly and are therefore difficult to use for tracking the effectiveness of specific policies. Having national wellbeing goals that accompany a suite of measures, in contrast, can be used in national standard-setting with the scope to inform policy approaches across government. Well-written goals contain guidance not just about where we want to go, but how to get there, such as shared visions on child wellbeing, economic inclusion, full employment and decent work, and tackling intergenerational disadvantage.

What this could look like:

- Consultation and debate about national wellbeing goals should be framed in terms of the nation, the community, the future. They are about Australians' vision for the future.
- Consultation should not be limited to set questions. The process to define national wellbeing goals needs Australians to reflect deeply on what matters to them and what their hopes are for the future. This process also needs the government to genuinely listen to and engage with what Australians have to say. Consultation should explicitly invite people to expand beyond domains or headings to what goals actually mean. Everyone may feel, for example, that

safety is important to having a good life, but what safety means often gets reduced by the media to more police presence, or crime statistics when it will possibly mean something very different to many people. For example, for many greater safety means a better designed criminal justice system; police working closely with communities; domestic violence reduction measures; safer transport infrastructure; better prevention of and response to natural disasters; etc.

## STARTING A NATIONAL CONVERSATION

The first step to a wellbeing framework should be inviting people to participate in defining a national vision and accompanying goals. A national conversation approach looks to engage and inspire the public - it informs Australians, and invites debate, rather than merely soliciting responses. By running consultation alongside a broader public campaign which invites deliberation, a national conversation can expand the reach of community consultation and the government's wellbeing work by increasing awareness. In doing so it can increase the legitimacy of this work and contribute to its longevity by making sure that the government brings the people with them.

There are a number of reasons to embark on a national conversation about wellbeing goals and what matters to us as a country as part of the Measuring What Matters process:

1. **A national conversation can build public excitement and buy-in for this agenda.**

A national conversation has a broader reach than just public consultation - even those who are not consulted directly or choose not to submit a contribution can feel they have a greater stake in the process and its outcome if they see it unfold in forms they can connect to. This includes (but is not

limited to) the media, public campaigns, community champions, town hall meetings, kitchen table conversations and political debates. If these measures are to actually matter, people need to know about them, and see their hope and lives in them. This connection creates a mandate for the work that outlives one government term and helps political accountability.

2. **A national conversation helps inform people.**

While there is general public support for putting wellbeing at the heart of government decision-making, there is significant scope to improve public understanding of what this means and why it is necessary.<sup>2</sup> Having a good understanding of what wellbeing means and how it can be used to guide meaningful change for Australia can also empower people to think deeply about their answers when they are consulted on the vision and goals for Measuring What Matters - so they feel they can go beyond [just 'rattling off top-of-the-mind essentials'](#). Overall, such a process may also help to shift the focus from GDP as a measure of progress.

What this could look like:

- A national conversation can use media engagement and a public campaign to increase awareness and encourage involvement from all Australians.
- Public events such as citizens' assemblies and roundtables create spaces for deep engagement and deliberation. Citizens' assemblies take a representative sample of the population, inform them about an issue, and then allow them to discuss and come up with

recommendations. They have been used successfully worldwide to broaden the voices that are active in the public debate, inspiring good faith deliberation outside of traditional political contests to tackle challenging topics such as climate change (the UK, France, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark and Finland), abortion (Ireland) and electoral reform (Canada and the Netherlands).

- The recruitment of 'champions' is a consultation method that increases public awareness of the consultation process while establishing new networks of community engagement. For example, in [consulting for Measures of Australia's Progress](#), the ABS conducted a social media campaign and partnered with prominent Australians in order to encourage engagement. We recommend that government takes this strategy even further: the stronger and more diverse the community connections of 'champions', the more viewpoints and communities can be reached, as was found during the [consultation process for the Welsh Wellbeing of Future Generations Act](#).<sup>3</sup>

## BROAD AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A genuine public mandate, vision and goals cannot be achieved without proactive and inclusive community consultation. Such a process can also unearth dynamic and creative ideas that are illustrative of the perspectives of the broader population, and particularly those who are historically considered 'hard to reach'. If these ideas are taken in good faith, the equitability of this process will affirm popular support for a resultant wellbeing framework and

<sup>2</sup> CPD polling, Essential Media, February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> The Welsh consultation process involved the recruitment of 150 'Future Champions' intended to represent a range of geographical areas and relevant communities, and promote the process to "as wide an audience as possible".

assure its longevity. However, it is important that genuine consultation be undertaken from the beginning of the process and that it not be rushed, or else it will fail to achieve the feeling of collective ownership that is needed to underpin a successful wellbeing measure or framework (Hall et al, 2004).<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of features that need to be present for community consultation to be genuinely representative and inclusive:

1. **Community consultation needs to be mixed-method.**

Mixed-method community consultation promotes participation by utilising purposive approaches - such as focus groups, online mechanisms and public meetings - to support the engagement of every part of the community (Marshall, Steinmetz & Zehner, 2012).

2. **Community consultation needs to be proactive.**

A proactive approach to community consultation means identifying and addressing the barriers to engagement experienced by much of the population, so that consultation can be truly representative (Cook, 2002). For example, the ACT utilised a proactive approach to its Wellbeing Framework consultation process by offering financial compensation to participants; similarly the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) used compensation in the form of supermarket vouchers to increase participation opportunities in its recent [Voices of Victoria listening tour](#).

organisations are tasked with directly listening to the people that they speak on behalf of and sharing this feedback. Running consultation through organisations in this manner makes use of pre-existing networks, ensuring both the efficacy of the process and the opportunity for the largest range of voices to be heard - particularly those that are most underrepresented. This also facilitates the contributions of groups that may be distrusting of government. First Nations people, for example, have reason to be wary of state structures. Coordination with trusted community organisations, accompanied by the use of research ethics guidelines can allow communities to control their own involvement - such as the [guidelines](#) employed by the [Mayi Kuwayu](#) national study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' wellbeing.

- Proactive online consultation: The flexibility allowed by online methods of community consultation - whether surveys, panels, small conversations, or other approaches entirely - can improve the engagement of underrepresented Australians. Online methods reduce the barriers of distance and timing promoting accessibility for rural and regional communities, including many remote First Nations communities, as well as people with disabilities and significant health issues, and for people who experience significant limitations to their time due to such commitments as work and caregiving.

What this could look like:

- Partnering with representative organisations: Such partnerships present an opportunity for a valuable approach to consultation particularly where

Online consultation methods will, however, not achieve the goal of inclusivity and reaching 'hard-to-reach' participants on their own - they must be proactive. It was [found in the ACT](#) that simply having a community input website mostly drew responses from the 'usual suspects', with a

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<sup>4</sup> "Because the process of collaborating can inculcate a sense of ownership of a project, it shouldn't be rushed. We're aware of initiatives that have foundered because consultation and collaboration was initiated too late in the piece or undertaken too quickly." Hall et al, 2004: 444.

failure to achieve a representative sample of respondents. Taking a proactive approach to online consultation might involve the use of social media comments sections as sites for consultation; links to surveys accessible through popular third-party websites; and facilitation of engagement through the provision of WiFi modems or digital literacy training.

## MEASUREMENT INDICATORS

Wellbeing measurement indicators are an important tool to support a national wellbeing framework. Measurements should reflect what wellbeing means to the Australian people – this can be done through a combination of subjective and objective measures as well as through community engagement in developing and refining measurement tools.

Measurements should also accurately reflect the best evidence on what matters to people and how to measure it, through design that allows for the level of detail needed to inform policy and the flexibility to allow for regular review and updating.

While one of the measurement indicators' primary purposes is to influence the public debate, the better they are designed the more useful they will be for government decision-making:

- 1. Data should be timely.**  
Wellbeing measures are known to be fairly slow to register changes, while many existing economic indicators can give near-real-time information. A wellbeing 'dashboard' should include indicators that can exhibit rapid change while ensuring that all indicators are fit for purpose in the short and long term. Data collection that supports all indicators needs to be well resourced to aid regular and speedy collection.
- 2. It should be possible to disaggregate data.**  
The ability to analyse the data by demographics and geography may also reveal new information about wellbeing in particular groups that is not well

recognised in the broader population. This is a critical requirement for targeted and nuanced policymaking.

- 3. There should be some consistency of measures and goals between jurisdictions.**

For robust cross-jurisdiction comparisons, some level of consistency across wellbeing measures will be required. Barriers to the sharing of national and state-held data across jurisdictions is currently a problem and a national approach to data sharing could significantly increase the resources available to policy makers while strengthening a national wellbeing measure.

- 4. Measures must be responsive to change in accordance with best practice, and able to be regularly updated as appropriate.**

For example, in Italy additional wellbeing indicators were developed to address the economic and social ramifications of the pandemic.

- 5. A wellbeing dashboard must include space for more indicators to be incorporated as available data improves, reflecting that there will be data gaps and uncertainty.**

No jurisdiction is going to have a perfect suite of statistical products and tools to furnish a wellbeing approach to decision-making. Rather than ignore these gaps (and try to make perfect decisions with imperfect information), a robust data framework will be clear about which concepts and ideas are important to the government but do not have sufficient quality data behind them. In Iceland, for example, some areas identified as important to wellbeing are not yet able to be measured accurately due to lack of data (e.g. the environment) or lack of clear measures (e.g. social capital).



Rather than leaving them out of wellbeing reporting there are essentially 'placeholder' indicators designed to encourage the collection and use of data in these areas when and where possible - similar to the placeholders used in the ABS's Measures of Australia's Progress.

deliver on the outcomes set out in the wellbeing framework.

## CONCLUSION

The approaches outlined have the potential to form a guiding vision for Australia, rooted in the wellbeing of people and planet, which can work as the compass for government decision making. With the kind of broad mandate that can be achieved by having an inclusive national conversation about our vision for Australia's future, the Measuring What Matters work can build on and support other government processes and policy agendas. For example, the Jobs and Skills Summit and Employment White Paper have taken a deep dive into what full employment and decent work mean and this could be the basis of what's explored in regard to economic inclusion/participation. Similarly, the Early Years Summit and Early Years Strategy could have a focus on child wellbeing - what that means, what it entails and how best to support it.

To truly adopt the recommendations we have outlined in this submission will take time. Rather than trying to accomplish it all as soon as possible, July could be the time to share a well-developed plan for future action. As the team that first developed Measures of Australia's Progress concluded: "Those in government wishing to collaborate with civil society, might do well to ensure that the collaboration begins at an early stage; that the pace of development is appropriate; and that a diverse range of collaborators express their views and become involved." (Hall et al, 2004)

Once goals are determined, the government needs to closely align its policy goals with them: the aim should be to develop, identify and resource those policies and actions that seek to

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## APPENDIX 1: THE SEVEN WELSH WELLBEING GOALS



**A Prosperous Wales**



**A Resilient Wales**



**A Healthier Wales**



**A More Equal Wales**



**A Globally Responsible Wales**



**A Wales of Cohesive Communities**



**A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language**

### **A prosperous Wales**

An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

### **A Resilient Wales**

A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change.

### **A More Equal Wales**

A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic circumstances).

### **A Healthier Wales**

A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

**A Wales of Cohesive Communities** - Attractive, safe, viable and well-connected.

### **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language**

A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

### **A Globally Responsible Wales**

A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

## APPENDIX 2: THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK





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