

15 November 2022

To Whom it May Concern

### **MEASURING WHAT MATTERS SUBMISSION**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the 'Measuring What Matters' consultation.

Complementing our focus on mental health disorders, Flinders Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing (FIMWell) 'Well-being and Resilience' theme recognises that there is much more to a life well lived than the absence of mental illness. The science of well-being concerns all of those biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to human flourishing. Our researchers study well-being by considering people's evaluations of their own happiness, as well as recognising the broader human attributes that indicate a striving towards the fulfilment of potential, such purposeful activity, enriching social connections, personal growth and a sense of autonomy.

A key aspect of well-being is resilience, which concerns the processes involved in responding to adversity. The breadth of perspectives on resilience across the disciplines represented by FIMWell make us ideally placed to apply contemporary systemic approaches to the study of resilience. Such approaches recognise studying interactions among the characteristics of individuals, their social connections, and the broader built, natural and political environments as key to developing an understanding of the complex processes that determine our capacities to not only survive, but to thrive.

#### **Measuring well-being**

To effectively assess the well-being of a nation, it important to quantify the biological, environmental, economic and social systems that we know impact the well-being of individuals and communities. This is consistent with the OECD framework that identifies key dimensions for current well-being: income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, knowledge and skills, environment quality, subjective well-being, safety, work-life balance, social connections, civic engagement; and resources for future well-being: natural capital, economic capital, human capital, social capital (1). We adopt approaches that measure the mental health concerns across these domains. But we also adopt an approach that measures wellbeing across these domains which is currently being used to assess veteran suicide. The life domains approach is often used in conjunction with a life course methodology assessing wellbeing across the life course.

As an Institute, we support the application of a similar approach to measuring national well-being in Australia. Within this broader framework, we offer the following more specific recommendations for consideration in the assessment of subjective, or more psychological aspects of well-being.

1. It will be of benefit to consult with other nations assessing well-being to- where appropriate- use corresponding measures, thereby allowing for cross-national comparisons.
2. Although we appreciate that brevity of survey instruments is necessary in large scale work of this kind, where possible we recommend use of validated measures that have published data on their psychometric properties, and that are suitable for use across different cultures. For example, the Pemberton Happiness Index (2) provides a brief overall index that captures both hedonic (i.e.,

satisfaction with one's life and a predominance of positive over negative emotions) and eudaemonic (i.e., opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment of potential) aspects of well-being that has been designed for cross-cultural use.

3. Expanding on Point 2, we recommend the assessment of aspects of eudaemonic well-being in addition to more general measures of happiness or life satisfaction. One example of a brief measure of eudaemonic well-being that may merit consideration is Diener's Flourishing scale (3).
4. Often researchers assessing subjective well-being measure affect (i.e., positive and negative emotions) using scales such as the PANAS (4). Although widely used, the PANAS (at least in its shorter versions) primarily assesses high arousal emotions. This creates a potential confound when considering affect across the lifespan, as older adults may be more likely to avoid high arousal emotions even when they are positive (e.g., surprise, excitement). If affect is to be assessed, we recommend using a measure that equally represents low and high arousal emotions such as the SPANE (3).

Your sincerely



Ben Wadham  
Co-Deputy Director, Welbeing and Resilience  
Flinders Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing (FIMWell)

#### References

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3. Diener E, Wirtz D, Tov W, Kim-Prieto C, Choi D won, Oishi S, et al. New Well-being Measures: Short Scales to Assess Flourishing and Positive and Negative Feelings. *Soc Indic Res*. 2010 Jun;97(2):143–56.
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