

31 January 2023

The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
Treasurer of Australia
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

ABN 59 004 240 779

By email: MeasuringWhatMatters@Treasury.gov.au

Dear Treasurer

Measuring What Matters: a submission from Korus Connect

Korus Connect commends the Australian Government's ambition to improve the lives of all Australians through establishing a national framework for measuring Wellbeing and Progress.

We also welcome this consultation process established by The Treasury to capture the experiences, expertise, opinions and recommendations of interested individuals and organisations to inform future policy development processes.

To that end, we are pleased to make our contribution to this important undertaking through this submission which presents our own practical experiences, supported by a wealth of Australian and international evidence, in support of our contention that *spirituality* be included as a vital aspect of "Measuring What Matters".

Korus Connect has more than 65 years' experience supporting individual and community wellbeing through the provision of pastoral care and chaplaincy services, initially in the school setting but more recently in a range of community and other settings.

We use examples of our own work which have been independently reviewed and assessed for efficacy and impact by credible, independent and authoritative experts, combined with evidence presented by a range of academic, community and professional institutions, to validate our contention.

We also cite a range of existing Australian Government policy documents and statements which demonstrate an already evident and coherent recognition of the important role spirituality plays in the well-being of individuals and communities across Australia.

More information about our organisation and the services we provide can be found at www.korusconnect.org.au

1.0 Defining Spirituality

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations (UN) Charter for Human Rights state that spirituality must be considered a factor of health and wellbeing.

More than half (55%) of Australians believe spirituality is connected to mental wellbeing, with 43% connecting it with relational wellbeing and 41% linking spirituality with physical wellbeing ([The Future of Spiritual Care in Australia](#), McCrindle, 2022).

Australians also say spirituality offers them: peace (50%); values (49%); purpose (34%), morality (34%) and love (34%) (ibid).

And while the majority of Australians (69.1%) ([Australian Bureau of Statistics](#), Religious affiliation in Australia 04/07/2022) who recognise the value of spirituality in their own lives and within the community identify this through their religious beliefs (Christianity 28.4% and other religions 40.7%), a growing proportion of Australians (14%) are affiliated with the term 'spiritual' but do not identify as religious. ([Faith and Belief in Australia](#), McCrindle, 2017).

According to [The Study of Spirituality in the United States](#) (Fetzer Institute, 2020) spirituality is a complex phenomenon, experienced by people of all religious or spiritual affiliations and as such can be unique to the individual.

But people who identify more strongly with spirituality are more engaged in civic life and are also more likely to feel connected to humanity and the world as a whole.

2.0 — Spirituality and wellbeing

2.1 Wellbeing is Both Individual and Collective

Wellbeing is both an individual and collective concern and both of these need to be reflected in what is measured to inform the proposed wellbeing budget.

To date, the majority of wellbeing measures have focussed on people's subjective wellbeing, for example, the [Satisfaction with Life Scale](#).

This focus is also stated in Treasury's 2011 Wellbeing Framework, (for example, *'A focus on individuals or households is consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of domestic and overseas approaches to measuring progress or wellbeing, including the Australian Bureau of Statistic's Measures of Australia's Progress'*...') (ABS, 2001, p 32).

But we also know that the health of communities is a significant factor both in individual wellbeing as well as national wellbeing and that both contribute to social capital, defined by the OECD as networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups" (OECD, 2001, p 41.) (<https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=3560>)

2.2 Wellbeing and Social Capital

Social Capital is built through personal relationships, the strength of social networks, through people's active participation in civic life and is underpinned by trust, shared values and norms (ibid).

The weakening of Australia's social capital is the impetus for new writing and research. For example, Leigh and Terrell in their book, *Reconnected: A community builder's handbook*, (La Trobe University Press in conjunction with Black Inc, 2021), have noted amongst others, the decline in volunteering, membership

of groups and community organisations, indicating a loss of collective belonging, identity and trust, all essential to social capital and healthy communities.

If social capital contributes to individual and community wellbeing, it necessitates attention and measurement by the proposed Wellbeing Budget, noting that social capital also affects economic growth, in part through the web of trusting relationships, *'Across nations, trust is associated with faster rates of economic growth and higher levels of wellbeing.'* (Leigh and Terrell, 2021, p7).

Indicators of the strength of social capital will help inform priorities for a Wellbeing Budget. For example, the [World Bank](#) recommends a number of tools for measuring social capital.

At present, the one area that is underrepresented in wellbeing conversations and measures is spiritual wellbeing, although it is being increasingly recognised in certain sectors such as aged care and the wellbeing of First Nations peoples, as noted below.

2.3 Wellbeing and Spirituality

Leigh and Terrell include the research that *'Australians who regularly attend religious services are 10 percentage points more likely to volunteer in their communities.'* (p 177)

Other research indicates positive correlations between spirituality and subjective wellbeing, quality of life and overall wellbeing (<https://meaningfulageing.org.au/palliative-care-getting-the-most-out-of-life/>; *The Role of Spirituality and Religiosity in Subjective Well-Being of Individuals With Different Religious Status* <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525/full> (*The Future of Spiritual Care in Australia, A national study on spirituality, wellbeing and spiritual care in hospitals*, McCrindle, 2021).

3.0 Evidence of acceptance of the importance of spirituality in existing Australian policy settings and Government frameworks

In this section, Korus Connect provides a selection of Australian Government policy and framework documents which recognise the importance of spirituality in the context of well-being, childhood development, cultural identity and personal and community development.

The list is not exhaustive, but rather, is designed to provide a range of examples where recognition of spirituality is already identified as an important indicator for — and contributor to — the wellbeing of Australians.

- The Australian Government's [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration \(2019\)](#) signed by all Australian Education Ministers states: *"Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion."*
- The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) discussion paper No.9 (2009) states: *"Aboriginal Spirituality provides a philosophical baseline for Indigenous knowledges development in Australia. It is Aboriginal knowledges that build the capacity to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal people now living within a colonial regime."*

- The Department of Health and Aged Care [Head to Health website page](#) ‘Connecting with Spirituality’ states: *“The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the UN Charter for Human Rights state that spirituality must be considered a factor of health and wellbeing”*. And further, it states: *“Purpose, meaning, and direction in life are all linked to wellbeing. These are some of the many benefits of having a spiritual connection to something greater than ourselves. It can give us hope and reassurance in times of change, crisis, and need.”*
- The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0, 2022)* states: *“Children’s learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. This means that cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual and creative aspects of learning are all intricately interwoven and interrelated.”*
- The Australian Government Department of Health funded National Guidelines for Spiritual Care in Aged Care (2016) state: *“Spirituality is integral to quality of life and well-being.”*

As noted above, these examples are only a selection of a multitude of reports, research papers, guidelines and policy documents which cite direct links between spirituality and a range of indicators that contribute to the wellbeing of all Australians.

4.0 Spiritual Wellbeing a Priority

Despite its inclusion in numerous documents and policies, spirituality is both poorly defined and under-represented in priority statements.

Spirituality may be defined as one’s relationship to self, others, the environment and a Transcendent Other, or something larger than oneself (de Souza, 2003, p 273).

We remember the passion, energy and engagement that were fostered by community efforts to enhance connection during Australia’s COVID19-related lockdowns; people had a purpose outside of themselves which nurtured relationships, trust and community itself.

Spirituality is all about connections and relationships.

4.1 Communal Spirituality

Spiritual wellbeing may be nurtured through individual or collective activity, rituals and practices, but has the most significant impact on wellbeing when it is nurtured within a community context, (<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/Religion%20and%20well-being%208%20combined.pdf>, 6).

Spirituality nurtured in faith communities also impacts both happiness and civic engagement (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/01/31/religions-relationship-to-happiness-civic-engagement-and-health-around-the-world/>

Spiritual Wellbeing is strengthened when a positive sense of identity and culture is nurtured in community settings (cf ARACY’s Nest Framework, and Renshaw, L., (2019), *A Positive Sense of Identity and Culture: Defining and measuring progress for children and young people in Australia - a literature and scoping review on developing better indicators*, ARACY, Canberra).

4.2 *Measuring Spiritual Wellbeing*

The upcoming Wellbeing Budget would do well to measure both subjective spiritual wellbeing as well as community-based spiritual wellbeing.

A helpful model that is being successfully applied around the country to support the wellbeing of school communities through the National Student Wellbeing Program (previously the National School Chaplaincy Program) is offered below.

5.0 **A Working Model: Spiritual-Ecological Approach**

According to the National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) of which Korus Connect is a member, chaplains apply a 'spiritual-ecological' approach to the wellbeing of children and young people (<https://schoolchaplaincy.org.au/school-chaplaincys-contribution-to-wellbeing-in-schools/>).

Broadly speaking, ecological approaches explore the various influences on a person's development with the context of 'ecology' of the complex systems of relationships networks and systems that make up their everyday life (Hofnung et al, 2013).

Beyond the individual as a physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual entity in themselves, a child or young person's ecology is understood to consist of their friends and family; their school, social groups and local community networks; and the broader socio-economic, political and cultural influences (Health and Aged Care, 2000).

The spiritual-ecological approach acknowledges the following domains of influence on young people's lives: personal; relational; communal; and societal.

NSCA chaplains also place a high value on a young person's spirituality, that is, their personal spiritual health, beliefs, values and practices and how these impact upon their overall wellbeing, while also acknowledging and valuing spirituality as it is expressed in relational, communal and societal domains of their lives.

The NSCA has recently been exploring links between its approach and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth's (ARACY) Nest Framework. The resulting research; *An Outcome Evaluation of School Chaplaincy*, University of Western Australia, Perth, 2022, uses the six interconnected domains of wellbeing as its measure:

- i. Valued, loved and safe – children and young people have trusting relationships with family and friends;
- ii. Material basics – children and young people live in suitable housing with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water and clean air;
- iii. Health – children and young people have their physical, mental and emotional health needs met;
- iv. Learning – children and young people learn through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home and the community in which they live;
- v. Participating – children and young people have a voice, are listened to and have a say in decisions that impact them; and

- vi. Positive sense of identity and culture – children feel safe and supported to express their identity and have a sense of belonging.

The Nest Framework is a proven conceptual framework which draws upon the expertise of credible international and Australian wellbeing organisations including UNICEF, The Australian Child Wellbeing Project and the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development.

Further, Nest's 'Common Approach' links directly to the OECD's 'Aspirational Conceptual Framework for Childhood Wellbeing Development', with ARACY's [report cards](#) directly referencing the OECD wellbeing indicators when presenting their data, organising them according to the six domains of the Nest Framework.

Korus Connect notes the focus within this working example on its application to children and young people, but strongly contends that the six domains identified for measuring optimal wellbeing have ready application to all Australians and indeed as stated above, provide The Treasury with a robust, proven framework for understanding and improving outcomes by relying on indicators that are: relevant, complete, measurable, comparable, reliable and understandable.

6.0 Conclusion

Korus Connect strongly supports The Treasury's commitment to improve the lives of all Australians through establishing a national framework for measuring Wellbeing and Progress.

We acknowledge the need for Government to continually develop and strengthen key analytical and policy frameworks and the specific challenge measurement presents in areas of conceptual realms such as wellbeing.

To that end we commend the guidance provided on these matters in our submission and reaffirm our contention that *'spirituality'* be included as a vital aspect of "Measuring What Matters".

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important consultation process and we would be pleased to provide further information or answer any questions that arise from our submission.

Yours sincerely



Dawn Penney
Chief Executive Officer