



Measuring What Matters – Consultation Round 2

ARACY Submission

May 2023

About ARACY

ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) seeks to catalyse change by bringing people and knowledge together for the benefit of children and young people. We strive to achieve this by advocating for evidence-based policy and practice, focusing on prevention and early intervention. Our consultations with over 4000 children and young people, their families, and experts have shown us what wellbeing means to them: to be loved, valued, and safe; to have material basics; to be physically and mentally healthy; to be learning; to be participating; and to have a positive sense of identity and culture. These domains are described in Australia's first National Framework for Child and Youth Wellbeing, ARACY's [the Nest](#). This framework informed a compilation of indicators to track wellbeing of Australia's children and young people initially through our wellbeing Report Cards, and most recently through our joint [ARACY-UNICEF Wellbeing Index](#). We therefore are compelled to share our learning and experience to ensure the wellbeing of Australia's children and young people is enshrined in Australia's first national wellbeing framework.

Our Consultation

We thank Treasury for the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of a National Wellbeing Framework and we applaud the acknowledgement of children, young people, and families as a fundamental part of our Australian community. To best inform Treasury, we consulted with 11 organisations across the child and young person wellbeing sector as well as three young wellbeing advocates via a virtual roundtable and digital survey. The roundtable was structured to facilitate in-depth discussion of each theme, as well as overarching considerations, over a 3-hour period. In addition, a modified version of Form 1 from the Measuring What Matters Consultation Pack was circulated across our networks. Through our consultation, we aim to bring the perspectives and needs of children and young people from 0 to 24 years into the development of this framework. The following content collates the feedback from our consultation with our response to the proposed themes and descriptions.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Public Health Association of Australia for formally endorsing this submission.

We would also like to acknowledge the following individuals and organisations who provided feedback on our submission:

Our three young wellbeing advocates	Australian Human Rights Commission
UNICEF Australia	Telethon Kids Institute
Dr. Fiona Robards, convenor of the Public Health Association of Australia's Child and Youth Health Special Interest Group	NHMRC's Centre for Research Excellence in Adolescent Health
Australian Association for Adolescent Health	WH&Y Commission
Australian Health Promotion Association	Royal Far West
Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership	Health Justice Australia
Social Ventures Australia	

Overarching Feedback

There was general support for the content within the descriptions of each key theme with no disagreement with any specific point within the theme descriptions. There was some disagreement with how the themes were structured and titled (details below), and a feeling that some descriptions of themes needed additional content. The following section summarises the key points for consideration of the framework overall.

Children and Young People

There was strong support for descriptions of themes to be explicitly inclusive of children and young people. For example, under the 'Cohesive' theme, where "arts, culture, and sporting activities", "play" could be included. Presently, only a single descriptive point makes explicit reference to children despite acknowledgement of children, young people, and families as a key focus. It was also felt that wording of descriptions could be more child centred. For example, "A society that ensures the health and development of its children" does not acknowledge children as individuals with rights and views. Child-centred wording could include "A society where children and young people are supported to reach their full developmental potential and optimal health". It was also felt that wording could be altered to resonate more broadly. For example, 'financial security' was not a realistic goal for young people given it would occur following their finalisation of their education and training. 'Adequate living standards' on the other hand has broader applicability.

There was discussion around whether children and young people should have a separate, dedicated framework for wellbeing given their varying and distinct wellbeing needs. Eventually consensus was that children and young people should have fair representation in the final National Wellbeing Framework, noting that they constitute approximately 30% of the Australian population and that they are important to the nation's future. This should be captured through:

- Dedicated reference to children and young people throughout the themes
- Child-centred and young-person centred wording of the descriptions
- Mapping of the Convention of the Rights of the Child to the final theme descriptions
- A proportion of indicators within each theme of dedicated relevance to children and young people

However, due to the distinct developmental phases of children, and variable needs throughout their life-course, there remains a strong need for ongoing comprehensive and dedicated monitoring of children's wellbeing, such as through the joint ARACY-UNICEF Wellbeing Index. We note that the OECD also has a dedicated Measuring What Matters for Child Wellbeing framework, alongside New Zealand's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and associated indicators which strongly reflect ARACY's The Nest Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People.

Marginalisation

Intense discussion occurred around the handling of groups experiencing marginalisation, such as young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, gender or sexually diverse, in contact with the child protection system, or incarcerated given then need for a concise framework without excessive indicators. With respect to groups experiencing marginalisation there is a structural problem often ignored: marginal and marginalised populations are typically small populations in absolute numbers. Increasing marginalisation is associated with increased disadvantage¹.

Those who need additional support are often a minority and will therefore not be visible in national datasets. For example, young people who identify as transgender have extraordinarily high rates of mental illness including suicide that would not be evident in a national dataset. This poses a very realistic problem that requires a more concerted approach to measurement. Strategies to address this include:

- Collected data must either come from very large populations, or deliberately oversample individuals within marginalised groups so that reliable estimates of wellbeing can be derived.
- Data must also include information about belonging to a marginalised group (such as gender diversity, First Nations identity). This will facilitate disaggregation of data by (e.g., by age, ethnicity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, vulnerable migrants, location, gender

¹ Robards, F., Kang, M., Luscombe, G., Hawke, C., Sanci, L., Steinbeck, K., Zwi, K., Towns, S., & Usherwood, T. (2020). Intersectionality: Social Marginalisation and Self-Reported Health Status in Young People. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(21), 8104–. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218104>

identity, sexual identity, homelessness, Low SES). National data that can be disaggregated enables comparison of subpopulations to the national average. This empowers other special-interest organisations to support Treasury in enhancing national wellbeing by undertaking analysis of subpopulations, highlighting wellbeing strengths and issues in marginalised groups. Using only a national average hides the most disadvantaged within our communities and the significant inequalities across the population.

- Indicators of equity should be included within themes (such as distribution of wealth via the Gini coefficient).

Human Rights Framing

There were specific calls for descriptions of themes to be mapped to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (a succinct attempt at this is included below). There was strong support for a human-rights orientated and informed wellbeing framework.

Equity

There was strong support for equity to be woven throughout selected themes, both in theme descriptions and (where able) through indicators. For example, “People are financially secure” (within Prosperous) could be reworded to explicitly state equity e.g. “All people are financially secure, regardless of age, gender, religion, race etc.” This could be coupled with an indicator measuring distribution of wealth. We note concepts of equity were articulated within the ‘Inclusive’ theme, but the consensus was that this was a principle that would be interwoven throughout themes rather than a separate theme. We also note and applaud that attempts have been made to address equity – for example in reference to “Gender equality” within ‘Inclusive’. Concepts of equity were broad, included accessibility issues that extended beyond financial or geographical accessibility. For example, access to health services has been limited in Australian children and young people experiencing marginalisation (such as homelessness, sexually or gender diverse) due to fear of discrimination or stigma². This is considered inequitable regardless of financial or geographical accessibility of those services.

Feedback on Individual Themes

Prosperous

- This theme had the least support in the roundtable and survey results.
- It was felt that **national economic prosperity is a means to wellbeing and not the end goal**.
- Consensus was that this theme should be reformulated to reflect individual living standards as well as national economic prosperity.

² Robards, F., Kang, M., Steinbeck, K., Hawke, C., Jan, S., Sanci, L., Liew, Y. Y., Kong, M., & Usherwood, T. (2019). Health care equity and access for marginalised young people: a longitudinal qualitative study exploring health system navigation in Australia. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 18(1), 41–41. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-019-0941-2>

- Financial wellbeing as defined by Muir et al. (2017)³ would be 'when a person is able to meet expenses and has some money left over and is in control of their finances and feels financially secure, now and in the future. Importantly, the concept of financial wellbeing recognises both objective components (such as savings and debt management) and subjective components (such as feeling secure and in control). Financial security may not resonate with young people, the financial wellbeing of themselves and their families is key to them thriving.
- Given a concise number of indicators is required and not all populations will be accurately reflected, measures of equity and distribution of wealth **must** be included. Ideally, these measures would be able to be disaggregated by age, gender (including gender diverse people), ethnicity, geography, ability status, First Nations identity so that inequities within specific populations can be identified.
- Appropriate indicators include measures of housing, poverty, measures of income inequality, and intergenerational mobility.

Mapping to ARACY's The Nest:

- children and young people feel provided for; families have enough money for food, clothing, adequate employment, and safe and adequate housing; communities have access to open spaces, transport, and local services.

Mapping to the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- children and young people have a right to clean water, healthy food, clean and safe environment, clothing, and safe housing.

Inclusive

- There was broad support for this theme.
- There was some confusion over the inclusion of equitable access to material goods in this section.
- Inclusivity resonated strongly with concepts of social inclusivity and equity of participation, extending from services and physical environments into the ability to connect and form relationships.
- It was thought inclusivity should be broader and extend beyond gender or race.

Mapping to The Nest:

- Children and young people should feel heard and should have the opportunity to have a say; they should have the opportunity to participate in appropriate online activities, family recreation, and contribute to family decisions; communities should nurture and support

³ Muir, K., Hamilton, M., Noone, J.H., Marjolin, A, Salignac, F., & Saunders, P. (2017). Exploring Financial Wellbeing in the Australian Context. Centre for Social Impact & Social Policy Research Centre – University of New South Wales Sydney, for Financial Literacy Australia

clubs, groups, and social gatherings; children and young people should feel that they are helped by, and are able to help, friends and neighbours.

Mapping to the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Children and young people have a right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them; adults should listen and take the views of children and young people seriously; children and young people have a right to obtain information from digital, printed, and audio media; adults should ensure the content is not harmful, and government should encourage the generation of accessible media from diverse sources, including catering for different languages and abilities; refugee children and young people should have the same rights, support, and protection as children and young people born in Australia; children and young people with disability should enjoy the best possible life in society; governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and participate fully; children and young people have a right to use their own language, culture, and religion, even if these are not shared by most other people.

Cohesive

- This theme had the strongest support of all themes.
- Young participants particularly emphasised that this theme resonated most strongly with how young people conceptualise wellbeing.
- It was thought that this theme should explicitly incorporate concepts around child safety and child and adolescent protection, alongside community connectedness and positive sense of culture and identity.
- Wording could be more aspirational – e.g., “welcome” and “celebrated”.

Mapping to ARACY’s The Nest:

- Children and young people should feel loved and secure; have positive family interactions and trusting relationships; feel safe at school and in their neighbourhood; have a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self; positive cultural and spiritual identity; participation in family traditions, cultures, religious or linguistic practices; connection to community and culture; identity is respected and supported.

Mapping to the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Children and young people should not be separated from their parents unless they are not safe; parents should continue to have access to the child unless this is harmful; parents and guardians should always consider the best interests of the child; if children cannot stay with their parents, they must be looked after properly by people who respect their religion, culture, language; governments have a responsibility to protect children from violence, abuse, and neglect; refugee children should have same rights and protection as children born in Australia; children have a right to practice their own language, culture, and religion

even if these are not shared by most people in the country they live in; every child has the right to relax, play, and take part in cultural and creative activities; governments have a responsibility to protect children from exploitation.

Healthy

- There was a feeling that this theme needed greater emphasis on prevention, health equity, and acknowledge health determinants.
- A life-course approach to health should be conceptualised, from the antenatal period through to the early and middle years, followed by adolescence and adulthood.
- Important concepts include individual empowerment, healthy-orientated communities, systems, and policies, and protection from commercial interests (such as junk food marketing), and physical environments that support health (including access to green spaces).
- A distinction was made between feeling well versus self-perception of health i.e., may be medically unwell but still happy and contributing.

Mapping to The Nest:

- Children and young people should be active; emotionally and mentally supported; physically and mentally well (individual and family); healthy eating; sport and outdoor activities; healthy service

Mapping to the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Children and young people have a right to best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food, and safe environments; all adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy

Sustainable

- General support for this theme especially on acknowledging future generations.
- This theme should acknowledge and aim to mitigate climate-induced effects on wellbeing such as climate anxiety, as well as the impact of natural disasters and importance of building resilience and preparedness for this.
- Participants noted that most Australians live in urban areas and that physical environments, including the built environment impact wellbeing. Access to green spaces should be considered. Environments should be clean and healthy, not just natural.
- It was felt that corporate social responsibility should be considered.
- The theme should include measurement of opportunities for children and young people to have meaningful input to discussing, designing, and deciding policy on and programs for important public issues such as responding to global warming and climate change.
- Indicators should include tracking leadership and policy change in this space, measures of corporate environmental responsibility, tapping into data collected by waste management and recycling centres.

Additional Theme: Learning

It was felt that there was an absence of opportunities to share and grow knowledge, which is an essential element of children and young peoples' wellbeing. This can be extrapolated into adulthood as well as growth of knowledge at a national and global level.

Mapping from ARACY's The Nest:

- Children and young people should enjoy learning; go to school from an appropriate age; their family values learning; enjoy unstructured play; have learning opportunities outside school; formalised learning supports individual needs

Mapping from the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Every child and young person has the right to an education; every child and young person should have access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and children and young people should be encouraged to go to school to the highest possible level; education should help them develop their personalities, talents, and abilities, to understand their own and respect others' rights, cultures, and difference, and to live peacefully and protect the environment

<p>NEW: Prospering</p> <p>All individuals and communities enjoy a high standard of living, supported by a sustainable national economy.</p>	<p>ORIGINAL: Prosperous</p> <p>A growing, productive, and resilient economy</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society that provides equitable access to life's essentials, including healthy food, clean water, adequate clothing, safe and adequate housing, quality education, secure and appropriately paid jobs, a clean and safe environment, adequate transport, essential services and amenities, and access to clean open spaces. • A society where all children and young people feel adequately provided for. • A society which aims to abolish poverty. • An economy where wealth is distributed fairly, so that no child or person is left behind. • An economy that provides equitable opportunities for all Australians and facilitates intergenerational mobility. • An economy which supports the wellbeing of all Australians by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Being resilient and less vulnerable to shocks. ◦ Being dynamic, encouraging and offering equitable opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. ◦ Seizing opportunities from the net zero transition and digitisation. ◦ Having a sustainable budget that can continue to deliver the services Australian rely on and can buffer the economy against future shocks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economy that provides opportunities for all Australians. • An economy that is more resilient and less vulnerable to shocks. • People are financially secure. • People have access to education, knowledge, and training so they have the skills to fully participate in society and the economy throughout their life. • People have access to necessary services and amenities. • A sustainable budget that can continue to deliver the services Australians rely on and can buffer the economy against future shocks. • A dynamic economy, which encourages and offers opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship. • An economy that seizes the opportunities from the net zero transition and digitisation.
<p>Suggest indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % families with dependent children in overcrowded housing • % 0-14 years in relative poverty (<50% national median income) • % 15-24 (15-19 in 2007) years unemployed and seeking fulltime work • % of child and youth homelessness 	

NEW: Cohesive A safe and cohesive society that celebrates diversity.	ORIGINAL: Cohesive A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society where all people feel safe and welcome at home, work, where they learn, in their neighbourhoods and communities, and online, regardless of age, gender or gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability, location, or First Nations identity. • A society where children and young people are safe, cared for, and protected from harm and exploitation by their families, communities, and government. • A society that enjoys close relationships with family and friends. • A society that fosters a sense of belonging, a positive sense of identity, and a connection to community and culture. • A society where people are free to practice their own language, culture, religion, and family traditions. • A society where children and young people have equitable opportunity to participate and engage in the democratic process, arts, culture, social and sporting activities, and children have the opportunity relax and play. • A society that is Closing the Gap and values First Nations culture. • A government that is trusted and trustworthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society where people feel safe at home, online and in the community. • A society that is Closing the Gap and values First Nations culture. • A society where people have the time and opportunity to participate in the arts, culture, and sporting activities. • A society that has close relationships with family and friends. • A government that is trusted by the public. • People participate in the democratic process and engage in their community. • A society that supports engagement in the community through volunteering or other means.
Suggested indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-17 years in out of home care • % 15-19 years turning to parents for support • % 15-19 yrs extremely or very concerned about family conflict • % 15-19 yrs who have experienced discrimination in past year • % 14 - 21 yrs who identify as LGBTQ+ and have told most of/all their family 	

NEW: Sustainable A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations.	ORIGINAL: Sustainable A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthy natural environment for current and future generations, protected from the damage being caused by climate change. • A society that values the social, cultural, and economic significance of our natural environment. • A society that values the political and economic embracing of First Nations wisdom in caring for and our relationship to nature and the earth • A society that recognises the importance of the natural environment to wellbeing and facilitates equitable access to green spaces. • A society and economy that is resilient and adapting to a changing climate. • A society that sustainably uses our natural resources, on track to reach to net zero emissions. • A society where individuals, communities, governments, and corporations are environmentally responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthy natural environment for current and future generations, protected from the damage being caused by climate change. • A society and economy that is resilient and adapting to a changing climate. • A society that sustainably uses our natural resources, on track to reach to net zero emissions. • A society that values the social, cultural, and economic significance of our natural environment.
Suggested indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures of corporate environmental responsibility 	

NEW Inclusive A society that enables equitable opportunities to fully participate in society.	ORIGINAL: Inclusive A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society where all children, young people, and individuals regardless of age, gender or gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability, location, First Nations identity, or income feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safe and empowered to speak out and express themselves ○ Heard and taken seriously about issues that affect them within their families, communities, at schools and other education institutions, at work, and by government. • A society where people have equitable opportunity to fully participate in society. For children and young people, this means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They have equitable opportunity to participate in family recreation and contribute to family decisions ○ They have equitable opportunity to participate in their communities, including appropriate digital communities and online activities. ○ Communities support diverse clubs, groups, and social gatherings suitable for children and young people of different ages, abilities, cultures, and identities. • All people have equitable opportunity to participate in the democratic process and engage in their community. • A society where leadership in government and business is fit for purpose (i.e., universally engaged against agreed upon outcomes) leadership and institutions feature high capability and accountability representative of our diverse society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society that allows all people to afford life's essentials. • A society that provides people access to secure, well-paying jobs. • A society that supports social and economic accessibility and intergenerational mobility. • Gender equality, including at work and in the community. • A society that supports diversity and equity. • Leadership in government and business that is representative of our diverse society.
Suggested indicators: % 15-24 yrs feel able to have a say among family and friends on important issues all or most of the time % 15-24 yrs feel able to have a say within community on important issues all or most of the time	

<p>NEW: Healthy</p> <p>A society in which people feel well and are in their best physical and mental health now and into the future.</p>	<p>ORIGINAL: Healthy</p> <p>A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society in which people feel well, healthy, and satisfied. • A society which aspires to abolish health inequities. • A society in which all people are supported and empowered maintain their best possible physical and mental health. • A society in which all people have equitable access to healthy food, clean water, clean and safe physical environments, and high-quality, culturally safe health services. • A society where people have enough time for family, friends, sleep, play, recreation, personal interests, and their community. • A society which maximises the healthy development of children and young people across the life-course. • A society which prioritises health preservation through prevention and early intervention. • A society where health is protected from commercial interests. • A government which recognises and addresses the wider health determinants through cross-sectoral, health-orientated policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society in which people are in good physical health. • A society in which people are in good mental health. • A society that ensures the health and development of its children. • A society in which people are generally satisfied with their life. • A society where people have enough time for family, friends, personal interests, and their community. • A society that values the contributions of all regardless of health or ability.
<p>Suggested indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % 12-24 yrs with high or very high psychological distress • % of liveborn babies with low birthweight • % children fully immunised at age 2 • % 5-24 yrs overweight or obese • % 12-19 rating themselves as happy or very happy 	

ADDITIONAL THEME: Learning A society where all people have equitable opportunity to learn and grow throughout their lives.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A society where all children, young people, and adults have equitable access to high-quality education and training throughout their life, so they have the skills to fully participate in society and the economy. • A society where all people are supported to fully develop their personalities, talents, and abilities, to understand their own and respect others' rights, cultures, and differences, and to live peacefully and protect the environment. 	
Suggested indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % 4-5 yrs (who do not attend primary school) usually attending preschool • % children at first year of school developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain • % children reporting that school is a place where they feel happy 	

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