

Measuring What Matters: Consultation Feedback form

To be completed by meeting host after each meeting and returned to measuringwhatmatters@treasury.gov.au by 26 May 2023.

Meeting details

Meeting host name/ organisation: Australia's Mental Health Think Tank

Meeting host contact details [phone or email]: Chair Professor Maree Teesson AC

Meeting host

- ☐ Member of Parliament
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ Non-government organisation
- ☐ Business
- ☒ Academic
- ☐ Community group
- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Other [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Meeting date: 8/05/2023

Meeting location: Zoom

Participants attending:

- ☐ Member of a community organisation
- ☐ Businesses
- ☒ Academics
- ☐ Union members
- ☐ Individuals
- ☒ Other [Members of Australia's Mental Health Think Tank](#)

Number of participants: 12

What matters to Australians?

1. Did the five emerging policy themes Prosperous, Inclusive, Sustainable, Cohesive and Healthy resonate with meeting participants?

☒ Yes ☐ No if not, why not [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

2. Which of the following themes are most important to you? (Select three)

☒ **Prosperous:**

A growing, productive and resilient economy

☐ **Inclusive:**

A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate

☐ **Sustainable:**

A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations

☒ **Cohesive:**

A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation

☒ **Healthy:**

A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future

3. Which themes or descriptions were most frequently discussed? (Select three)

☐ **Prosperous:**

A growing, productive and resilient economy

☒ **Inclusive:**

A society that shares opportunities and enables people to fully participate

☐ **Sustainable:**

A natural environment that is valued and sustainably managed in the face of a changing climate for current and future generations

☒ **Cohesive:**

A safe and cohesive society that celebrates culture and encourages participation

☒ **Healthy:**

A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health now and into the future

4. What do you see as the most important issues for future wellbeing? Are these captured by the emerging policy themes?

Australia's Mental Health Think Tank welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the second phase of the Measuring What Matters Consultation. The Think Tank provides evidence that mental health and its drivers are one of the most important issues for the future wellbeing of Australians. The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing conducted in 2021 found that an estimated 1 in 5 (21%) Australians aged 16–85 experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months (ABS 2022a). Among young people aged 16–24-years, prevalence was 2 in 5 (40%). These rates are markedly higher than the last National Survey, indicating a substantial threat to Australia's future wellbeing.

Mental disorders have considerable impacts on individuals and communities and conservatively cost the Australian economy over \$40 billion each year (Productivity Commission 2020, Baker et al 2020). When the full social and emotional consequences, decreased life expectancy and productivity losses are considered, the cost of mental illness and suicide are projected to be up to \$200–\$220 billion each year (Productivity Commission 2020).

The emerging policy themes identified in the draft Measuring What Matters Framework capture a wide range of factors that influence wellbeing. While mental health is included within the "Healthy" policy theme, evidence suggests that mental health is inherently linked to *all* of the proposed themes. For example, financial distress, poverty, and discrimination are key drivers of mental health concerns, so the "prosperity" and "inclusive" themes should consider and measure impacts on mental health. Conversely, mental ill-health impacts on productivity, so population level improvements in mental health will improve the Nation's prosperity and inclusivity. This bi-directional relationship plays out between mental health and each of the proposed policy themes, further evidencing why the mental health of Australians is a critical issue for future wellbeing.

In addition to mental health, Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and valuing First Nations culture are paramount to Australia's future wellbeing. Again, while this is captured within the "Cohesive" theme, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank – including leaders Prof Tom Calma AO (Senior Australian of the Year 2023) and Prof Pat Dudgeon AM – draw attention to the key role of Closing the Gap across all descriptors. Closing the Gap would lead to a more prosperous, inclusive, cohesive and healthy Australia, and valuing First Nations culture and knowledge will be paramount in a quest for sustainability.

Further, to respect First Nations culture, per the "Cohesion" theme, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of wellbeing – a more holistic view termed Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) with substantial evidence – should be incorporated, and development of indicators should consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aotearoa New Zealand's Treasury's CBAX tool provides one possible case study. The tool is a decision-aid to evaluate the wellbeing impacts of any proposed policy or investment, and incorporates principles from the He Ara Waiora Framework - a holistic, intergenerational approach to wellbeing derived from mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) in addition to the more general Living Standards Framework. (Te Tai Ōhanga, New Zealand Treasury. 2021., Te Tai Ōhanga, New Zealand Treasury. 2021.)

In sum, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank proposes that mental health outcomes, Closing the Gap, valuing First Nations culture, and considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of Social and Emotional Wellbeing are the most important issues for Australia's future wellbeing. While these are included within the current policy themes, the Think Tank argues that they should be considered within each of the themes.

Finally, while it's crucially important, it's not enough to just measure what matters. The incorporation of the final Measuring What Matters Framework into budget and policy-making processes will be critical to ensuring the future wellbeing of the nation.

References

Rehm, J., & Shield, K. D. et al. (2019). Global Burden of Disease and the Impact of Mental and Addictive Disorders. Current psychiatry reports, 21(2), 10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-019-0997-0>

Productivity Commission. (2020). Mental health, report No. 95. Canberra: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>.

S.T.E. Baker et al. (2020). Prevention of mental and substance use disorders: Shaping priorities for research and implementation, Mental Health & Prevention, 24, Article 200211, 10.1016/j.mhp.2021.200211

Te Tai Ōhanga, New Zealand Treasury. The Treasury's CBAX Tool. New Zealand Government Treasury; 2021. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/state-sector-leadership/investment-management/plan-investment-choices/cost-benefit-analysis-including-public-sector-discount-rates/treasury-cbax-tool>

Te Tai Ōhanga, New Zealand Treasury. He Ara Waiora. New Zealand Government Treasury; 2021. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/he-ara-waiora>

5. How might the descriptions be amended to best reflect our priorities?

The Think Tank applauds Treasury on the broad conceptualisation of wellbeing descriptors. As mentioned in the prior response, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank suggests that mental health outcomes, Closing the Gap, valuing First Nations culture, and considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles of Social and Emotional Wellbeing should be a central focus of any wellbeing effort.

Evidence synthesised by the Think Tank shows that financial distress, social disconnection, and lack of access to quality mental healthcare are key drivers of mental health.

The financial drivers are well defined within the "Prosperous" and "Inclusive" descriptors of: "People are financially secure," "People have access to education, knowledge and training," "A society that allows all people to afford life's essentials," "A society that provides people access to secure, well-paying jobs," and "A society that supports social and economic accessibility and intergenerational mobility."

Whilst social connection is implicitly addressed within the "Inclusive" and "Cohesive" descriptors, the Think Tank suggests an amendment to the descriptor that is currently listed as "A society that supports engagement in the community through volunteering or other means" to "A society that supports social connection and engagement in the community."

Access to mental healthcare is implied within the Prosperous descriptor of "People have access to necessary services and amenities," however indicators should specifically measure access to quality mental healthcare services.

Finally, the Think Tank strongly recommends that the current descriptor "a society that is Closing the Gap and values First Nations culture" is split into two descriptors "a society that is Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" and "a society that values First Nations culture and supports Social and Emotional Wellbeing."

In sum, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank proposes three small changes to descriptors within the Cohesion theme:

1. Amendment – "A society that supports social connection and engagement in the community."
2. Amendment – "A society that is Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians."
3. Addition – "A society that values First Nations culture and supports Social and Emotional Wellbeing."

6. Are there any indicators and existing data sources that will be critical to inform the emerging policy themes?

The OECD Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress provides an indication of progress against several social determinants of mental and physical health, and we support the continued monitoring of these. Likewise we support the continued monitoring of other frameworks including the Closing the Gap National Agreement, however additional measures that are more directly related to concepts of wellbeing and mental health can provide evidence to drive attitude and policy change across government portfolios.

Measuring Social and Emotional Wellbeing

It's critical that measures of wellbeing are holistic, culturally appropriate and incorporate First Nations conceptualisations of social and emotional wellbeing. The term social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of a person (Gee et al. 2014). In addition to the ongoing monitoring of progress against the 17 socio-economic targets set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank recommends that specific SEWB indicators are included in Measuring What Matters.

Indigenous people must be consulted to determine what is useful in measuring SEWB. There are some existing measures available (such as the Strong Souls scale

https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/192063_Strong_souls_assessment_tool.pdf and the Brief Wellbeing Screener https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/161345_Brief_Wellbeing_Screener.pdf). However, further development work is being led by Prof Gail Garvey, Dr Graham Gee, and the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing group (timhwb.org.au/), who should be consulted when determining indicators. Some indicators in routinely collected data may also be used to form a picture of social and emotional wellbeing at a population level, including data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS). These surveys capture data on connection to language, connection to culture, connection to family, and connection to body and behaviours, all of which are domains of social and emotional wellbeing. However, at present the NATSISS is only conducted every six years and the NATSIHS has only been conducted twice (2001 and 2018/19).

Measuring population mental health and wellbeing:

Timely and representative data on the mental health and wellbeing of Australians is currently lacking. While the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing provides useful data, it is conducted infrequently (currently less than once per decade). The AIHW Suicide & Self-harm Monitoring Program and hospital data also provide useful indicators. However, although suicide and self-harm are important metrics to address, these outcomes are not direct measures of mental health or wellbeing and represent only the severe end of the mental health spectrum. In addition, healthcare data from hospitals and primary care are insufficient for identifying the level of mental health need in the population, as we know that fewer than 50% of people who meet criteria for a mental health condition engage with mental health services.

Assessing mental health and wellbeing in large, representative population samples would require more routine data collection. Measuring mental ill-health and substance use issues in the population is critically important in determining wellbeing, but requires brief measures. The Distress Questionnaire-5 (DQ5) or the Kessler-6 (K6), should be considered as broad measures of psychological distress. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C) and Drug Use Disorders Identification Test (DUDIT) are brief screeners for substance use issues. Assessing psychological wellbeing in large, representative population samples could utilise brief measures such as the World Health Organisation-5 (WHO-5) or Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS). When considering wellbeing, measuring functioning may be just as important as measuring symptoms – e.g., the Work and Social Adjustment Scale (5 items) may be used to identify how much a person's work, social, leisure, and home life is impaired by their mental health.

Social engagement, loneliness and isolation are also important influences of mental health and wellbeing and are relevant to the suggested amended descriptor “a society that supports social connection and engagement in the community.” There are several brief, validated measures available including the thwarted belongingness subscale of the Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire-10; Haslam’s 4-item Social Support Scale; or the brief De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale.

Finally, Treasury should consider measuring stigma, discrimination and racism as indicators within the Cohesion, Inclusivity and Health themes. The Centre for Mental Health at Melbourne School of Population and Global Health conducted a review into the measurement of stigma and discrimination on the basis of mental health (Morgan & Reavley 2021). Mayi Kuwayu: the National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing contains measures of racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Thurber et al 2022), however measures of structural racism should also be considered (Dudgeon, 2023)

References

Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A., & Kelley, K. (2014). Understanding social and emotional wellbeing and mental health from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*.

Morgan, A. & Reavley, N. (2021) Measurement of stigma: Evidence review. Centre for Mental Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health. Report prepared for the National Mental Health Commission. <https://mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/16da4bac-2e5e-4aea-b534-2f6a03afad08/Measurement-of-Stigma-Evidence-Review>

Thurber, K.A., Brinckley, M.M., Jones, R., Evans, O., Nichols, K., Priest, N., Guo, S., Williams, D.R., Gee, G.C., Joshy, G. and Banks, E. (2022). Population-level contribution of interpersonal discrimination to psychological distress among Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, and to Indigenous–non-Indigenous inequities: cross-sectional analysis of a community-controlled First Nations cohort study. *The Lancet*, 400(10368), pp.2084-2094.

Dudgeon, P., Bray, A., & Walker, R. (2023). Mitigating the impacts of racism on Indigenous wellbeing through human rights, legislative and health policy reform. *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 218(5), 203-205.

7. Is there any additional information you would like to see in the Measuring What Matters Statement?

If so, please outline.

Australia’s Mental Health Think Tank would be open to contributing further to the Measuring What Matters framework, particularly as indicators are developed. We would like to re-iterate the importance of consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts in the development of social and emotional wellbeing measures.
