Joint submission to the Australian Government Treasury on Measuring What Matters

Second consultation process, May 2023

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Matilda Centre

Australia's **Mental Health Think Tank**

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Context

In April 2023, the Australian Government invited a second round of feedback on the Treasury's Measuring What Matters Statement; Australia's first national framework on wellbeing. Recognising that traditional economic indicators provide important insights, but not a complete picture or holistic view of the community's wellbeing, the Statement sought to define a suite of social and environmental indicators.

Treasury set out several key questions and invited organisations and individuals to conduct their own consultation guided by these questions. The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use recognised the need to 1) ensure mental health is considered as paramount in any conceptualisation of wellbeing, and 2) centre both academic evidence and the voices of young people. As such, two consultation sessions were held; firstly with Australia's Mental Health Think Tank, which is chaired by The Matilda Centre's Professor Maree Teesson; and secondly with the PREMISE Centre of Research Excellence in Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Illness and Substance Use Youth Advisory Board and The Matilda Centre Youth Mental Health Advisory Team.

Chaired by Distinguished Professor Maree Teesson AC, Australia's Mental Health Think Tank includes mental health experts from around Australia: Mr John Brogden AM, Professor Philip Batterham, Professor Alison Calear, Professor Tom Calma AO, Scientia Professor Helen Christensen AO, Professor Patricia Dudgeon AM, Professor Ian Hickie AM, Professor Frances Kay-Lambkin, Professor Patrick McGorry AO, Professor John McGrath, Professor Marc Stears, and Professor Harvey Whiteford.

Eight diverse young people aged 16-25 were involved in the second submission and were reimbursed for their participation.

The findings from these consultations and resulting submissions are contained in this document.

In July 2023, Treasury released the final Measuring What Matters Framework. Australia's Mental Health Think Tank, The Matilda Centre and PREMISE look forward to hearing more about the implementation of this framework and tracking of the 50 chosen indicators.

Treasury prompt: 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.

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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/treasurys-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

Treasury prompt: 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."

Treasury prompt: 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 and the Brief Wellbeing Screener). 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 at 2022), however measures of structural racism should also be considered (Dudgeon, 2023)

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Strong Souls Scale: https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/192063_Strong_souls_assessment_tool.pdf

Brief Wellbeing Screener https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/161345_Brief_Wellbeing_Screener.pdf

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.

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Treasury prompt: 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.

The Matilda Centre and PREMISE Youth Advisory Board
and Youth Mental Health Advisory Team submission

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

Protecting the mental and physical health of young people are critically important issues for the future wellbeing of the nation.

Involving young people in mental health and wellbeing policy is a right and an economic imperative, yet there is currently no democratic mechanism for youth input on wellbeing policy. Given that the onset of mental health problems typically occurs in adolescence, the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use recognizes the importance of involving young people in research and policy. Previous evaluations of our approach to working with young people have found that involving young people as advisors enhances the quality and appropriateness of youth-related research, improves dissemination messages and implementation strategies, and increases youth understanding of materials/measures used (Prior et al 2022).

Reflecting the Matilda Centre's commitment to working in partnership with young people to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes, we worked with six young people (age 16-24) who are part of our existing Youth Advisory Boards to contribute to the second phase of the Measuring What Matters Consultation via a series of online consultations with our team. These Youth Advisors (YA's) welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the second phase of the Measuring What Matters Consultation.

The YAs resonated with the five emerging policy themes, sharing that each of the themes "summarise important issues that need to be addressed" to improve societal wellbeing. One YA stated that while *Cohesive* and *Inclusive* are important and expected, they sound like "business terms" and suggested adopting different names that "resonate with people more". Overall, the YAs agreed that important wellbeing issues were captured by the emerging policy themes. The following factors were specifically discussed as critical to the wellbeing of young people; safety, healthy relationships, community engagement, protecting vulnerable populations and financial wellbeing. Other important issues for wellbeing identified by YAs not captured by the five policy themes included:

- Belonging, described as living in a society that fosters mutual respect and caring relationships, and does not tolerate discrimination or violence – is important for supporting wellbeing and inclusivity.

- Supporting mental health, as this has downstream benefits for productivity and economic growth.

Additionally, the YAs noted that it is important to explore the overlap and intersection between themes and consequences (e.g., building a resilient economy may have environmental costs, cost of living crises may prohibit community participation), citing the following examples;

- _**Healthy**_**:** when people are physically and mentally healthy, they can contribute to a prosperous society and economy.

- _**Sustainable**_*:* protecting the environment is important for collective wellbeing, particularly as young people are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

- _**Prosperous**_*:* a resilient, sustainable economy can lead to secondary benefits, such as greater access to services, education, infrastructure, and better mental health.

- _**Inclusive**_*:* an inclusive society that equally shares opportunities is also a more cohesive society.

- _**Cohesive**_*:* societal participation and active engagement (e.g., creative activities, culture) contributes to wellbeing.

Critically, the YAs strongly recommend that mental health should be considered as a cross-cutting issue across each theme and should be considered and measured within each accordingly. More information should be provided to understand how the proposed policy themes will be targeted, implemented, and measured.

Finally, there was a call for youth participation, including opportunities to engage diverse and representative youth in decision-making and evaluation processes under a wellbeing agenda. Young people are uniquely placed, and committed to shaping solutions to improve youth wellbeing and they should have a voice in developing wellbeing policies across portfolios. We welcome the recent establishment of a Federal Youth Engagement Model and see a critical place for Youth Steering Committees to contribute to the develop and monitoring of the Wellbeing Framework

In 2022 the Matilda Centre and our Youth Advisory Board put out a survey asking young Australians aged 16-25 for their views on the most important priorities for youth mental health prevention research and policy. A diverse group of over 800 young Australians answered the call signalling that young people are passionate about contributing improving youth mental health (Ross and Houston et al., 2023). Many of the issues identified in this Measuring What Matters consultation with our YAs are reflected in our findings from this survey. For example, nearly all survey participants (98.4%) agreed that young people should be involved in setting mental health and substance use prevention research and policy agenda (Ross and Houston et al., 2023). When asked about issues relevant to young people's mental health, the most important issues identified were; isolation and social disconnectedness, unhealthy relationships, climate change and intergenerational trauma. Additionally, there were strong calls among survey participants for increased mental health support through subsidised counselling, more mental health resources and improving school support, as well as calls for increased generalised financial support.

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Prior, K., Ross, K., Conroy, C., Barrett, E., Bock, S.G., Boyle, J., Snijder, M., Teesson, M. and Chapman, C., 2022. Youth participation in mental health and substance use research: Implementation, perspectives, and learnings of the Matilda Centre Youth Advisory Board. *Mental Health & Prevention*, *28*, p.200251.

Ross, K., Houston, J., Barrett, E., Duong, F., Dearle, T., Ravindra, S., Rowlinson, K., Bower, M., Birrell, L., Prior, K., Grummitt, L., Conroy, C., Grager, A., Teesson, M., Chapman, C. (2023) Youth perspectives on investment priorities in mental health and substance use prevention research (manuscript in preparation)

Treasury prompt: How might the descriptions be amended to best reflect our priorities?

The YAs involved in this consultation found that the descriptions were understandable and broad. However, they suggest that they could be improved to better reflect key priority issues such as housing affordability as well as a more diverse range of populations. The following changes were recommended;

- Under the policy theme *"Prosperous,"* add a descriptor relating to people having access to secure, affordable housing.
- Under *"Inclusive,"* add a descriptor relating to a society that does not tolerate discrimination, bigotry, violence or hate speech.
- Under *"Sustainable,"* include a descriptor acknowledging First Nations knowledge in addressing climate change. Additionally, the YAs noted the importance of civic participation in building sustainable communities.
- Under *"Cohesive,"* add a descriptor relating to a society that values First Nations culture and supports Social and Emotional Wellbeing.
- Under *"Cohesive,"* add a descriptor relating to the active participation of people of all ages in wellbeing policy.
- Finally, under the policy theme *"Healthy,"* a descriptor could be amended to be more inclusive of young people e.g., "a society that values the contribution of all regardless of health, ability or age" and "a society that supports the health and development of children and young people."

Treasury prompt: Are there any indicators and existing data sources that will be critical to inform the emerging policy themes?

The YAs stressed that key indicators of the social determinants of youth mental health such as employment, affordable housing, social inclusion and non-discrimination and civic participation in policy, will be critically important to inform the policy themes. Additionally, indicators of job satisfaction, employability rates, and educational attainment were described by the YAs as important, and one YA specifically highlighted the importance of financial stability and independence for young people. They also highlighted the importance of including indicators under each policy theme that capture a diverse range of people from different geographical areas, education levels, ages, and genders. As noted above, there was a strong recommendation that mental health should be considered as a cross-cutting issue across each theme and should be considered and measured within each accordingly.

Youth participation in wellbeing policy across portfolios should also be measured. For example, the Federal Youth Engagement Model should be transparently monitored, and indicators could be included under the Wellbeing Framework. In addition, the Youth Advisory Groups established as part of the Youth Engagement model should be involved in the development of the Measuring What Matters Framework.

The YAs noted the importance of accountability and transparency for the chosen indicators, and critically, there was a strong recommendation that they should be measured and reported on through budget and policy processes.

Treasury prompt: Is there any additional information you would like to see in the Measuring What Matters Statement? If so, please outline.

Our consultations highlighted the importance of accountability to ensure the success of the "Measuring What Matters" statement, including how the statement will be implemented, measured, and reported. One YA strong believed the statement should commit to agreed dates for progress reports. Finally, the YAs emphasise the importance of lived experience and community-led participation in research and policy, a common theme that is often discussed in our work with young people.

The Matilda Centre and our YAs would be open to contributing further to the Measuring What Matters Framework, particularly around youth engagement in wellbeing policy.