

## How should we measure wellbeing across the life cycle? An Evidence Check

### Snapshot

- Governments increasingly want to know if the programs and services they deliver improve how people feel and function in their lives – their wellbeing.
- An Evidence Check was conducted to identify and assess evidence-based indicators that could measure wellbeing across the seven domains of the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework.
- The authors identified and rated 96 indicators of wellbeing that have been used consistently in the wellbeing literature.
- Sixteen of the indicators, including educational attainment, homelessness, and mental health, were assessed as having high useability in the NSW context.
- The key findings from this Evidence Check could be used to help choose indicators to measure a person's wellbeing.
- The Evidence Check revealed a gap in indicator availability in the empowerment domain. Future research is needed to identify other indicators that could be included in this domain.

### Introduction

The NSW Government is committed to measuring the impact of its services on clients. In 2017, we commissioned an Evidence Check to identify and assess evidence-based indicators of wellbeing that could be used to measure client wellbeing.

This Evidence to Action Note summarises the key findings reported in the Evidence Check '[Wellbeing indicators across the life cycle](#)'.

### What is an Evidence Check?

An Evidence Check is a synthesis, summary and analysis of the best and most relevant research evidence to inform policy and program design.

## Why is measuring wellbeing important?

Measuring wellbeing is important because it provides useful information about the quality of people’s lives, which can be used to inform public policy. In recent years, there has been a shift in focus from using economic measures only (e.g. income and GDP) to using a broader range of measures of quality of life or wellbeing. Focusing on wellbeing enables us to adopt a multidimensional approach that captures all important aspects of life, rather than focusing purely on the economic aspect.

The Evidence Check defines wellbeing as the extent to which a person has a high quality of life, can achieve desired outcomes in life and can contribute to society. Wellbeing is multidimensional, capturing all important aspects in life, including mental health, physical health, economic wellbeing, social wellbeing and liveability.

Identifying indicators to measure wellbeing enables the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to assess whether a person’s wellbeing has improved over time as a result of the programs and services they have received. This is an important part of how we are applying the [NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework](#).

### SOCIAL & COMMUNITY



All people in NSW are able to participate & feel culturally and socially connected

### EDUCATION & SKILLS



All people in NSW are able to learn, contribute and achieve

### EMPOWERMENT



All people and communities in NSW are able to contribute to decision making that affects them and live fulfilling lives

### ECONOMIC



All people in NSW are able to contribute to, and benefit from, our economy

### SAFETY



All people in NSW are able to feel safe

### HEALTH



All people in NSW are able to live a healthy life

NSW  
HUMAN  
SERVICES  
OUTCOMES  
FRAMEWORK

### HOME



All people in NSW are able to have a safe and affordable place to live

## What did the Evidence Check find?

Outcomes are the changes that occur for individuals, groups, families or communities during or after participation in a program or intervention. To determine whether or not those changes have occurred, we need to use indicators. Indicators are measurable markers that show whether progress is being made on a certain condition or circumstance, that is, whether an outcome has been achieved or is in the process of being achieved.

The Evidence Check identified 96 indicators that we can use to measure progress in the seven domains of the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework. Each indicator was assessed as high, medium or low for each of the following criteria:



Overall, 37 indicators were identified as having high or medium usability in measuring outcomes. These indicators are listed on page four.

## How can indicators be used?

When applying the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework, indicators are used to determine if an intervention has achieved its intended outcomes. They can be used to see if a person's wellbeing has improved over time, as a result of the programs and services they have received.

 **Economic**

Indicator	Usability
Household income	High
Employment	High
Unemployment	High
Financial hardship	High
Household wealth	Medium
Personal income	Medium
Working hours	Medium
Job satisfaction	Medium
Inflation rate	Medium

 **Health**

Indicator	Usability
Life expectancy	High
Self-reported health status	High
Disability	High
Smoking behaviours	High
Mental health	High
Overall life satisfaction/ Self-rated happiness	Medium
Exposure to air pollution	Medium
Climatic variability and climatic change	Medium
Time devoted to leisure and personal care	Medium
Leisure activities (sports participation)	Medium

 **Safety**

Indicator	Usability
Feeling fairly/very safe	Medium
Self-reported victimisation	Medium
Crimes against people	Medium

 **Empowerment**

Indicator	Usability
Voter turn-out	Medium

 **Education and Skills**

Indicator	Usability
Educational attainment	High
Students' cognitive skills	High
Those not in education, employment or training	Medium

 **Social and Community**

Indicator	Usability
Perceived social network support	High
Volunteering (more than once in the past 12 months)	High
Trust in government	Medium
Feelings of loneliness	Medium
Relationship with partner	Medium
Feeling of sense of belonging to their neighbourhood	Medium
Accessing natural environment	Medium
Engagement with/ participation in arts or cultural activities	Medium

 **Home**

Indicator	Usability
Overcrowding	High
Housing affordability	High
Homelessness	High

## Where to from here?

This Evidence Check could be used to help choose indicators to measure a person's wellbeing. That is, to see if a person's wellbeing has improved over time, as a result of the programs and services they have received. For example, when designing a program for DCJ clients, a program officer could identify indicators to measure the progress of the people who receive their program. Measuring this progress would tell us how effective the program was and what kind of impact the program had on the wellbeing of clients.

The Evidence Check reveals a gap in indicator availability in the empowerment domain. Future research is needed to identify other indicators that could be included in this domain.

The Evidence Check assessed the state of current evidence at the time the check was completed. It is important to remember that the state of evidence is evolving rapidly and is likely to change as more high-quality evidence becomes available.

DCJ is continuing the work of identifying indicators for the NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework by developing an indicator bank. This work includes identifying core outcomes for DCJ clients, and developing online tools to assist DCJ staff and our partners to identify relevant outcomes and indicators to measure client wellbeing.

This work will support us to focus on achieving positive outcomes for clients. It will also support us and our government and non-government partners to have a common understanding of the outcomes that are priorities across our work and to work together effectively to collect and analyse reliable and good quality client outcomes information and data. This will better enable us to understand the needs of clients and which programs best support them to achieve the outcomes that matter the most to them, in the most cost-effective way.

## More Information

### Evidence Check: Wellbeing Indicators across the Life Cycle

The Evidence Check was brokered by the [Sax Institute](#) for the then Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), now the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), and published in November 2017. The Evidence Check was prepared by Riyana Miranti, Robert Tanton, Yogi Vidyattama, Jacki Schirmer, Pia Rowe from The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) and the University of Canberra.

The Sax Institute also produced an [Evidence Brief](#) that summarises this Evidence Check.

### The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework is a cross-agency framework that is designed to support NSW Government agencies and non-government organisations adopt an outcomes-focused approach in human services design, delivery and evaluation.

DCJ is using the Outcomes Framework to support the design, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based programs that seek to improve client outcomes. See [here](#) for more details.

The [Department of Finance, Services and Innovation](#) also has a number of resources to assist government organisations and NGOs implement the Outcomes Framework.

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