

**Submission
No 16**

**A FRAMEWORK FOR PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND DRIVING
WELLBEING OUTCOMES IN NSW**

Organisation: The Mentally Healthy Futures Project and the Matilda Centre for
Research in Mental Health and Substance Use

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Submission to the NSW Public Accounts Committee's Parliamentary Inquiry: A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW

Submitted by:

The Mentally Healthy Futures Project,
The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use,
The University of Sydney

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Introduction: The Mentally Healthy Futures Project and The Matilda Centre

[The Mentally Healthy Futures Project](#) is a five-year project (2023-2027) that aims to build partnerships and democratise evidence to support the development of evidence-based policy to improve the mental health of Australians now and into the future. Mentally Healthy Futures has a particular focus on improving outcomes for young Australians, with evidence showing mounting rates of mental disorders among this group. This project also supports the continuation of [Australia's Mental Health Think Tank](#), which was established in 2020 and brings together experts across the mental health sector to produce unified evidence-based directives for research and policy. Core to the Mentally Healthy Futures Project's values is meaningful consultation and co-design with young Australians. Mentally Healthy Futures has engaged a group of young Australians from different States, together forming the (self-named) [Youth Mental Health Advisory Team](#).

The Mentally Healthy Futures Project is based at The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, the University of Sydney. We're a multidisciplinary research centre committed to improving the health and wellbeing of people affected by co-occurring substance use and mental disorders. Established in 2018 and now



including over 100 research staff, the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use aims to generate innovative and workable solutions to address substance use and mental disorders, which are currently the leading global causes of burden and disease in young people.

Feedback on the proposed wellbeing themes and outcomes

The eight wellbeing themes identified within the framework capture a wide range of factors that influence wellbeing. However, there is a distinct lack of consideration of mental health within the current metrics proposed. While the healthy indicator states that ‘a healthy NSW means a society where people have good physical and mental health...’, mental health is only considered with regard to hospital re-admission within a 28-day period. Further, this metric currently is not included in the proposed suite of 19 ‘Wellbeing outcomes,’ meaning that no mention or consideration of population mental health is considered among the proposed outcomes.

The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (NSMHWB) conducted in 2020-22 found that in New South Wales, an estimated 2 in 5 (40.5%) of adults aged 16–85 have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime (ABS, 2020-2022). This equates to 2.5million people in NSW. 1 in 5 adults (19.5% or 1.2million people) experienced a mental disorder in the prior 12 months (ABS, 2020-2022).

While State-based prevalence is not available for specific age groups, the Australia-wide prevalence of a mental disorder in the prior 12 months among young people aged 16-24-years, was 2 in 5 (40%) (ABS, 2020-2022). These rates among young people are double that of the last National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2007), indicating a substantial threat to Australia’s future wellbeing. As such, mental health should be a core tenet of any wellbeing framework and monitoring.

Basing an assessment of the mental health of the NSW population solely on hospital re-admission data within a 28-day period cannot provide a comprehensive picture of population-level mental wellbeing. Evidence shows that among those with mental disorders, there is a substantial treatment gap. The NSMHWB found that less than half (47%) of all people with a mental disorder have engaged with *any* mental health service (ABS, 2020-2022). Further, hospital admission represents only the most severe cases. Although NSW-data is not available, national data shows that only 1% of the population presented to emergency for mental-health related issues (AIHW, 2023), in contrast to the NSMHWB finding that showed that 20% of the population experienced a mental disorder within the prior 12-months. Further, while readmission within 28 days indicates unsuccessful resolution of mental health issues at the prior admission, which is important to monitor, this will capture the most severe cases, and is not an indicator of mental wellbeing in the overall NSW population.

Our submission is that a general measure of mental health, as well as a measure of subjective mental wellbeing should be added to the ‘Healthy’ metrics. Further, one, or ideally both measures should be considered in the final suite of wellbeing outcomes. In addition, it is crucial that the framework is culturally appropriate and incorporates



measurement of the First Nations concept of *social and emotional wellbeing* (SEWB), and we recommend that a measure of SEWB is added to the Healthy metrics and ideally the wellbeing outcomes.

With regard to the data source for these metrics, timely and representative data on the mental health of New South Wales residents is unfortunately lacking at present. While the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing provides some useful data, it is conducted infrequently (currently less than once per decade). Similarly, the NSW Population Health Survey is only conducted every two years. Our understanding is that the National General Social Survey announced within the recent Federal budget will be conducted annually, and with a large sample size, so hopefully this survey will also offer NSW-level data. The HILDA survey does include a measure of psychological distress, so this is one option for a general measure of mental health.

In the next section, we provide some recommendations for suggested scales that could be utilised to measure the proposed metrics, should the NSW Treasury have the opportunity to contribute to either the General Social Survey or HILDA.

Suggested scales to consider for the measurement of population mental health and social and emotional wellbeing

This section is heavily informed by Australia's Mental Health Think Tank's submission to Commonwealth Treasury during the Measuring What Matters consultation (Australia's Mental Health Think Tank, 2023). The Think Tank includes many of Australia's leading mental health academics and First Nations leaders, including Professor Maree Teesson AC, Prof Tom Calma AO (Senior Australian of the Year 2023) and Prof Pat Dudgeon AM, Prof Pat McGorry AO, Prof Ian Hickie AM, Prof Frances Kay-Lambkin, and several others.

Measuring mental ill-health 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. 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.

Consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be conducted to identify an appropriate measurement strategy for social and emotional wellbeing. There are some existing measures available from the Menzies School of Health Research, such as the Strong Souls Scale (2010) and the Brief Wellbeing Screener (2015). However, further development work is being led by Prof Gail Garvey, Dr Graham Gee, and the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing group (TIMHWB, 2018), 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).

The importance of meaningful consultation, particularly with young people

Public consultation plays a critical role in ensuring that policy decisions consider the interests, priorities and needs of the public. Importantly, consultations with the general public are essential for building trust and enhancing transparency in government, which we understand to be a core interest of the present consultation. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that children and young people, those who have traditionally not been given a seat at the table, are meaningfully consulted and listened to in the development of all policies relevant to them. Indeed, children and young people have a right to participate and voice their opinions in decisions which affect their lives, their communities and their futures, as stipulated in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. Youth consultation and engagement is particularly important in the context of a wellbeing framework. Young people today are currently experiencing worse mental health than ever before, yet they represent our leaders of tomorrow and will shape the future of Australia. Engaging and empowering young people in designing policy and contributing to decision-making processes will enable more inclusive, youth-centred dialogue and lead to stronger policy responses that foster positive social change. Supporting young people to be architects of their futures through genuine youth-adult partnerships is essential to the health and wellbeing of current and future generations.

The [Youth Mental Health Advisory Team](#) (YMHAT), comprised of eight young people (15-24 years) with varied youth participation experience through advocacy groups, community coalitions and youth leadership programs, was established in 2022 to provide advice and expertise on the Mentally Healthy Futures Project. Members of the YMHAT, in partnership with researchers from the Matilda Centre, co-designed, co-produced and co-authored several publications examining mental health outcomes associated with youth participation and engagement. The YMHAT played an integral role in the design and development of a [Systematic Scoping Review](#) investigating how youth participation initiatives, such as volunteering, activism, and youth governance, impact young people's mental health and wellbeing. Synthesising three decades of global literature, the review highlighted the significant mental health benefits of meaningful youth participation, and the importance of centring youth lived experience and perspectives in all youth-relevant decision-making processes. Findings from the review informed the development of Mentally Healthy Youth Participation Guidelines (to be published in the Medical Journal of Australia, October 2024), led by the YMHAT. The



Guidelines provide evidence-based recommendations for how to design and implement youth participation initiatives that protect the mental health and wellbeing of involved young people. If of interest to the committee, we may be able to share an embargoed copy of the Guidelines on request. The Mentally Healthy Futures Project recognises that youth-centred, participatory co-research and co-design is vital in understanding how society can best meet the unique needs of young people, now and into the future.

Youth consultation conducted by the Mentally Healthy Futures Team, in response to the Performance and Wellbeing Consultation Paper

While targeted and extended consultation with young people should be an essential next step for NSW Treasury, the Mentally Healthy Futures project conducted brief consultations with three young people who are members of the aforementioned Youth Mental Health Advisory Team. We utilised the framework provided by Treasury within the consultation paper and have first presented a synthesis of their responses and have then included their individual responses.

All three young people felt that the healthy indicator was within the top three, with general feedback being the need for more of a focus on preventive health measures, and inclusion of alcohol use- and mental health-related measures. Two of the young people also focussed on gendered violence and family violence as important considerations for the framework. Their individual responses are below.

Danica Meas (age 24, identifies as female, LGBTQIA+, and speaks a language other than English at home)

1. Which wellbeing areas mean the most to you (&/or your family)? Select up to three

The wellbeing areas that mean the most to me & my family includes:

- Healthy
- Community
- Prosperous

2. Why are these most important to you or your family?

Healthy – Health is something that we have overlooked in the past due a lack of knowledge on the benefits of being active, exercising, and eating healthy. Some people in my family experience chronic pain due to physical & mental trauma, stress, and being overworked. We acknowledge that health is important for our quality of life & wellbeing and some of my family members have made behavioural changes to support their health. This is something that cannot be taken for granted, as each person only has one body that we live with our whole life.

Community – I personally believe that it is important to feel connected with other people in community – family, friends, and even strangers. Being connected to a community has been so important for my family and I’s collective wellbeing as it



lessens feelings of loneliness and increases our happiness. My family lost many people in their community in the past due to genocide, so remaining connected with family and friends is highly valued, especially in our collectivist culture.

Prosperous – I hope to experience a sense of security within our systems, particularly because my family comes from a refugee background, they experience hypervigilance from previous traumatic events. Feeling secure, taken care of, and not having to worry about basic needs such as food, water, housing, etc. is incredibly important for our wellbeing.

The current cost of living crisis has impacted many people in my community, causing more stress and anxiety when it comes to financial costs and basic needs.

3. What feedback do you have on the Performance and Wellbeing Framework, such as its indicators?

Healthy:

Accessibility to healthy activities – Consider how groups of people, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds will access opportunities for physical activity and recreational sports. A NSW outcome could be “More people access opportunities for physical activity and recreational sports” with possible indicators being the amount of people engaging in activities. In support for this measure these activities should be government subsidised and made free for participants to support the amount of people engaging in the activities.

There is little mention of preventative health measures – There is a large emphasis on supporting hospice care, under “People receive timely, quality care in hospitals and the community” with 7 NSW outcomes compared to the 4 NSW outcomes listed in support of preventative measures. It is important to treat and prevent disease before patients receive hospitalisation or treatment for their chronic health disease.

Health measures should focus on preventative health care and lifestyle factors that holistically support health to begin with, to improve peoples’ quality of life and wellbeing. I strongly recommend that in-conjunction with the indicators, that the NSW government provides adequate support for these changes through implementing reforms and systems changes to support opportunities for people to access a better quality of life.

Although ‘People have good physical and mental health’ is mentioned under the Healthy theme, there is no direct mention of mental health within the Wellbeing indicators. Preventative measures to support mental health and wellbeing should be emphasised considering the prevalence of mental ill-health and the increasing rates of mental ill-health that young people are experiencing.



A suggestion for NSW outcomes could be:

- People are supported and are mentally healthy
- Potential indicators: Mental health
- Metric: Measures engagement with mental health services in combination with ABS data (quantitative data). New surveys on mental health conducted across NSW would be good to determine the amount of people experiencing mental ill-health and if they are receiving support or feel supported in their day-to-day lives (quantitative and qualitative data).
- Why this is important: Mental health is important for quality of life / Measure of patient experience accessing mental health care
- The direction could be going Up for quantitative data measuring engagement with mental health services because it would determine that more people are accessing these services and receiving support.

When discussing health, it would also be good to address subjective perspectives on health to determine how people feel about certain issues and determine any prevalence of stigma or barriers to accessibility – the systemic issues that prevent people from achieving healthy outcomes. This can include mental health, accessibility to physical activities & recreation, priorities for each person's health and wellbeing, and barriers to participation such as time, cost, opportunity, etc. This can help the NSW government to determine how to best support people to achieve healthy outcomes and a better quality of life.

Community / Secure / Prosperous

As previously mentioned, it is vital that the NSW government considers systemic issues and their impacts across NSW. The potential indicators do not address the gap of gender inequity itself, including the issue of invisible labor across households where in heterosexual relationships, women generally do more housework and child caretaking responsibilities compared to men. This has resulted in women working less than men, therefore earning less money because of their invisible labor, leaving women with less money than their male partners.

'Achieving' community cohesion means nothing if ongoing systemic issues continue. Although the Prosperous theme mentions increasing females in the workplace, it is vital that there be substantial reform and measures to support gender equity. This goes beyond increasing female workers in the workplace, particularly addressing the root causes of a lack of female participation in the workforce to begin with. The implications of this indicator demonstrate a band aid solution to a complex, wicked problem that must be addressed by the government. Increasing female participation in the workplace will not directly improve women's economic opportunities unless core issues are addressed and cultural, systemic changes are made.

Systemic issues of gendered violence – of men's violence against women – misogyny, bigotry and discrimination must be addressed in congruence with this goal.



Under the Secure theme, it is alarming that there is no direct mention of measures to reduce gender-based violence or domestic family violence, particularly as the rates of gender-based violence have increased across Australia. I urge the NSW government to consider this issue, and the importance of creating systemic change to protect and support victim-survivors of violence.

The NSW government must be prepared to address systemic issues and take active measures to change culture. Changing culture encompasses addressing gender-based violence and extends beyond it, to all forms of systemic issues that sustain inequity and uphold privilege and power. The indicators mean nothing without taking tangible actions and making a commitment to shifting our culture of violence, power and domination.

General feedback:

The issue of consultation accessibility and awareness – It would be beneficial to the framework if the NSW government could conduct a general survey open to the NSW population as consultation papers are not commonly known about or accessed by the public. There should be reduced barriers to accessing this information and it should be more widely promoted outside of institutions and disseminated in public spaces. People should freely know about this and use their voice to shape the decisions of the government as it tends to be those with a vested interest that engage in consultations. It would be nice if the final version of the indicators has a visual mind map representation of interconnections between the 8 different wellbeing indicators to demonstrate the linkages between each area. This could help readers view a broad overview of the indicators, understand how each indicator overlaps and links in a systems-level, and how they also interact with each system.

[REDACTED] *(age 23, identifies as female, speaks a language other than English at home)*

1. Which wellbeing areas mean the most to you (&/or your family)? Select up to three

The wellbeing areas most important to me are: Healthy, Housed and Secure.

2. Why are these most important to you or your family? And 3. feedback on the indicators

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs establishes physiological and safety needs as the foundations of a person's needs. A child constantly living in survival mode, fearing for their safety, misses out on opportunities to grow, develop and enjoy their childhood. This has profound consequences for that child developing mental health and/or substance use concerns, and interactions with the justice system as they grow up.

Children and young people (especially girls and women) are especially vulnerable to family/domestic violence and/or sexual violence, making Secure one of my most important wellbeing areas. I like that the indicators will drive better understanding and reporting of abuse received by people with disabilities, experiences of personal crime, and the effectiveness of crime prevention/reduction programs. Given unstable/unsafe out-of-home-care arrangements pose significant risk for future justice, I believe understanding this issue (and later improving on this issue) will be a significant step



towards crime prevention and reduction. I believe the performance indicators for the Secure theme needs to explicitly address sexual violence; according to the 2021-22 Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey, 22% of women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, making sexual violence a significant threat to safety we need to address.

Three generations of my family live in Australia, all of us having had different healthcare needs and different interactions with the health system, but one common theme emerges: When we need healthcare, we need timely quality healthcare. I like that the indicators address the different levels of acuity, from early childhood health and leading healthy/active lifestyles that prevent disease, to looking at urgent care services that reduce the pressure on emergency departments, to timely treatment in emergency departments. I believe the performance indicators for the Healthy theme should explicitly address alcohol use in young people, alcohol-related harms in young people such as drink-driving accidents, and alcohol use disorder in the general population. Alcohol is used by most Australians, and alcohol use disorder in one individual impacts many people around them (including their dependants), and a culture that normalises heavy drinking leads to fewer opportunities for people to socialise with others in alcohol-free settings.

Young people are disproportionately impacted by the increasing inaccessibility of housing. Many young people worry we will never afford our own house, let alone a house big enough to raise any child/ren we may want. It's important to me that everyone has access to suitable housing.

Fulin Yan (age 17, identifies as male, speaks a language other than English at home)

1. Which Wellbeing Areas Mean the Most to You and/or Your Family?

The wellbeing areas that mean the most to me are healthy, skilled, and community.

1. **Healthy:** As an athlete, maintaining physical health is a cornerstone of my daily life. Health is crucial not only for performance but also for overall well-being. Regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and mental health are vital components that allow us to lead fulfilling lives.

2. **Skilled:** Continuous learning and skill development are essential for personal growth and success. In my case, balancing athletic training with academic pursuits helps in building a well-rounded character. My family values education and the acquisition of skills as they provide opportunities for career advancement and personal satisfaction.

3. **Community:** Being part of a supportive community is invaluable. Participating in team sports has shown me the importance of belonging to a group that encourages mutual support and collective growth. A strong community provides social connections and a sense of security and belonging, which are critical for emotional well-being.



2. Why These Areas Are Most Important

These areas are most important to us because they are interlinked and collectively enhance our quality of life. Physical health allows us to engage in various activities and achieve our goals. Skill development ensures we are prepared for future challenges and opportunities, fostering a sense of competence and achievement. Community involvement provides emotional support and a network of relationships that enhance our social and mental well-being. Together, these areas create a balanced approach to life, promoting resilience, and a sense of fulfilment.

3. Feedback on the Performance and Wellbeing Framework

The NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework's comprehensive approach to measuring progress through a broad range of indicators is commendable.

1. Purposeful Indicators:

The indicators should align closely with the policy and service delivery priorities of the NSW Government. For example, indicators measuring participation in physical activities, skill development programs, and community engagement are critical. These indicators should reflect the actual impact of policies on residents' lives.

2. Comparable Metrics:

It is essential that the indicators are defined and measured consistently to enable comparisons with other jurisdictions and past performances. This comparability helps in understanding progress over time and identifying best practices from other regions.

3. Timely Data:

The availability of timely data is crucial for informed decision-making. Indicators should be updated regularly to reflect the current state of wellbeing accurately. This includes frequent data releases to track progress and adjust policies as needed.

4. Relatable Measures:

The indicators should be easy to understand and relatable based on the experiences of NSW residents. This ensures that the public can engage with the data and understand how policies impact their daily lives. Clear and accessible communication of these measures is vital.

5. Measurable Outcomes:

Indicators should be objectively measurable to provide clear evidence of progress. This includes both quantitative data, such as participation rates in physical activities, and qualitative data, such as community satisfaction surveys.



Conclusion

The Mentally Healthy Futures Project thanks the Public Accounts Committee for the opportunity to submit to this consultation. We would welcome the chance to discuss our submission further.

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