

A review of current work on wellbeing and public policy (July 2022)

Mike Salvaris¹

In the past few years, there has been strong and broad growth in the worldwide movement to develop new progress measures and new approaches to government and the economy around the goal of equitable and sustainable wellbeing ‘beyond GDP’. Increasingly, the focus is on how to build these measures and principles into government to guide policymaking, budgets and economic development. Some of the key projects and relevant reports are described below.

INTERNATIONAL WORK

OECD and the new Wellbeing Centre (WISE)

The OECD has shown outstanding and sustained international leadership in developing broader measures of sustainable social progress and wellbeing beyond GDP and implementing them in government. Since 2004, it has sponsored regular large scale international conferences, regional workshops, policy guides and a model Better Life Index which is followed by many countries. (In a recent article, the OECD reported that over half of the OECD member countries now have wellbeing frameworks of one kind or another).

The OECD has now acted to consolidate all of this work in a dynamic new international Centre on Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (the WISE Centre). This centre effectively functions as a global laboratory, coordinator and generator of ideas and policy papers, supporting new projects such as WEGo (below). Former Australian Finance Minister Matthias Cormann is currently OECD Secretary-General and apparently supports this work.

(See on recent WISE Centre and OECD work generally:

<https://www.oecd.org/wise/measuring-well-being-and-progress.htm>

An excellent overview paper of how governments are putting wellbeing into practice:

[https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC\(2018\)7&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC(2018)7&docLanguage=En))

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The UN SDG’s have provided powerful authority and greater international spread for the whole sustainable wellbeing movement beyond the OECD group of countries. The SDG’s themselves cover most of the fields of sustainable wellbeing comprised in the OECD wellbeing framework. Several countries have produced national frameworks and stock-taking to monitor their implementation of SDGs, though in few cases are they actually built-in as mandatory priorities or goals alongside budget and economic ones. The OECD has produced ‘a unique methodology’ allowing inter-country comparisons of progress and national goal-setting in implementing SDGs (see below).

¹ Director, ANDI Limited and Hon Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.
Mike.salvaris@unimelb.edu.au

An important recent development was at the UN Stockholm + 50 conference on the environment in June this year, where there was strong support for accelerated development of wellbeing economies and measurement frameworks, which hopefully will encourage Australian developments. They include a proposal to set up a 'High Ambition Coalition on Wellbeing Economies' and a possible Inter-Governmental Co-ordinating Panel on Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and the Economy, (like the IPCC, even if not as large-scale) to, among other things, adopt a better progress indicator than GDP. There is also a recommendation to adopt legislation like Wales's (below). The video of the session at Stockholm is inspiring, especially the contribution by Sophie Howe, the Welsh Commissioner for Future generations.

(See: Report on Stockholm +50 Workshop and communique:

<https://www.stockholm50.global/events/wellbeing-economies-new-economic-approach-human-and-planetary-health>

OECD monitoring methodology: SDGs <https://www.oecd.org/about/civil-society/sdgs>)

International 'Wellbeing Economy Alliance' (WEAll) group

The WEAll project (in which Australia's Katherine Trebeck has been a key organiser) has gone from strength to strength in the last five years, with active national hub groups now established in Europe, South and North America, Africa and Australia-New Zealand. WEAll has an outstanding website at www.weall.com and has produced numerous high quality guides and reports, emphasising policy and government change, as well as community engagement, communications and 'narrative change' (that is, how we think about the role of the economy in a society that aims for equitable and sustainable wellbeing).

(See most recent WEAll report

<https://weall.org/this-is-the-moment-to-go-beyond-gdp>)

Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo)

One of WEAll's key achievements has been to help build a coalition of governments committed to wellbeing economies. Supported by the OECD, and with its Secretariat established in Scotland's Treasury Department, WEGo includes Scotland, New Zealand, Wales, Iceland, Finland and most recently, Canada) which represent some of the real pioneers in this field and mostly have women leaders.

(See: <https://weall.org/category/wego>

<https://www.gov.scot/groups/wellbeing-economy-governments-wego/>)

Wales Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

Recently recognised by the United Nations as an international model, Wales has possibly the most comprehensive policy and legal framework for building sustainable wellbeing into government policy and planning at all levels, the 'Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015'. The Act is linked to a strong community engagement program, 'The Wales we Want', and gives a unique and powerful oversighting role to the Commissioner for Future Generations.

(See: <https://gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales>)

New Zealand

New Zealand was one of the first countries in the world to introduce a 'Wellbeing budget' (in 2019) and recently produced its fourth such budget. The Wellbeing Budget is underpinned by a strong Living Standards Framework developed by the NZ Treasury (which seeks to put a value on both future and

current and future wellbeing, such as natural and human assets and was partly inspired by an earlier Australian Treasury model) and a separately developed wellbeing framework ('Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand') produced by Statistics New Zealand. While it is still developing and has some critics, the success of the NZ project to date, and its growing international recognition, has been largely due to the strong support and leadership by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Finance Minister Grant Robertson, and the central role of NZ Treasury.

(See: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/wellbeing-budget/wellbeing-budget-2022-secure-future>
<https://www.stats.govt.nz/indicators-and-snapshots/indicators-aotearoa-new-zealand-nga-tutohu-aotearoa/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/10/new-zealands-wellbeing-budget-made-headlines-but-what-really-changed>)

Canada National Quality of Life Framework and strategy

Canada is the largest member of WEGo. In the last year, it has introduced a national quality-of-life strategy and framework with plans to build it into government and budgets. This work built on the pioneering NGO-research work of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (started in the late 1990s) and is now driven by the Department of Finances and Stats Canada.

(See: Canadian Index of Wellbeing: <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/> ;
 Key Canadian government reports from DoF and Stats Can:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/measuring-what-matters-toward-quality-life-strategy-canada.html>
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2021006-eng.htm>

AUSTRALIA

Federal Government Wellbeing Budget initiative

New federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers appears firmly committed to develop a well-being budget for Australia. Chalmers' public statements suggest he wants to follow the New Zealand model, including a national well-being measurement framework and a broader review of well-being and the economy. There is likely to be some resistance to this idea both within government and outside it, at least to any kind of structural change in budgets or the economy, as distinct from smaller scale changes based on increasing the profile or funding of specific 'welfare' programs and stronger wellbeing 'language' (criticisms also made of New Zealand's wellbeing budget: see above).

(See: Chalmers press report and two recent articles:
<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/chalmers-first-budget-will-include-a-chapter-on-wellbeing-20220707-p5azvt>
<https://theconversation.com/australia-is-getting-a-wellbeing-budget-what-we-can-and-cant-learn-from-new-zealand-186725>
<https://theconversation.com/beyond-gdp-jim-chalmers-historic-moment-to-build-a-well-being-economy-for-australia-184318>

ACT Wellbeing Framework

The ACT is Australia's first state or territory government to formally develop a whole of government wellbeing framework that reflects community priorities and is intended to guide policymaking, planning and budgeting for the Territory's future development. It has been developed relatively quickly (since 2019), in part because of the strong support of Chief Minister Andrew Barr. The framework broadly reflects the most common progress and wellbeing domains adopted in most

national and the OECD frameworks and the ACT government is now focusing more strongly on the process of building the framework into government and the budget.

(See: <https://www.act.gov.au/wellbeing>)

WADI (Western Australian Development Index)

Over the last two years, work has been underway to develop a full-scale, state model of a wellbeing measurement and development framework for WA. The project, led by the Australian National Index (ANDI - see below) with WA's Professor Fiona Stanley as its key 'Ambassador', has been designed as a three-way collaboration between the community, government and research sectors. It will be based on extensive community engagement; incorporate international best practice (including WA joining the OECD/WEGo group, above); and be built into government and budgets. The WADI project is planned to be carried out over five years with a budget of \$13 million, with half to be provided by the non-government sector (and it has in-principle support from two major funders for this amount). Key partners include: the WA Council of Social Service, WA Local Government Association, the University of WA, Ernst and Young WA, and the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. In the past months, the WADI team have been meeting key State Ministers to build whole-of-government support.

(See: Fiona Stanley introduces the WADI: <https://www.andi.org.au/library/> (available after 19/7/22)
WADI background:
<https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/department/news/news-article/2020/02/25/a-handy-guide-to-andi>)

New South Wales Wellbeing Framework/budget

In April this year, the New South Wales government has produced an initial report (below) on developing a wellbeing framework for policy and budgets in New South Wales. A second report proposing a sequenced plan for the development of this in government is in draft form.

See: NSW Wellbeing Framework: <https://www.andi.org.au/library/> (available after 19/7/22)

Tasmania's Wellbeing framework

In May this year, the Tasmanian Premier announced his intention to develop a whole-of-state Tasmanian well-being framework which is intended to reflect community priorities and to guide budgets and policymaking. The University of Tasmania and the Brotherhood of St Laurence have been advisors on this project.

(see: Tasmanian Premier's press statement:
https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/progressing_tasmanias_first_wellbeing_framework)

ANDI (Australian National Development Index) Limited

ANDI developed from an informal community-research alliance on citizenship and wellbeing set up in around 1995. In 2008 the idea of a national wellbeing index with citizen engagement proposed by ANDI was endorsed at the 2008 National Ideas Summit, and in 2012, ANDI Limited was incorporated as a not for profit, public interest organisation established to develop a national wellbeing measurement and policy framework, based on research, community engagement and best practice. ANDI's formal and informal partners have included around 40 Australian organisations covering a wide range of fields from health, welfare, human rights and local government to the environment, indigenous issues and children's wellbeing. In the past 25 years, ANDI and its earlier research team

have advised and prepared reports for a wide range of Australian and international organisations including the OECD, the UN, the governments of New Zealand, Canada and Bhutan, the Senate, state and local governments in Australia and the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA). From 2018 to 2019, ANDI worked with the University of Melbourne to develop a pilot process for a full national development index focusing on two key domains, education and health (see below). In the past two years the main focus of ANDI's work has been the West Australian Development Index (below) and supporting other projects to promote wellbeing measurement and policymaking in Australia and internationally.

(See: ANDI website: www.andi.org.au
 ACOLA report: <https://acola.org/australias-progress-21st-century/>)
 ANDI and the global movement: https://www.andi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/salvaris2013-measuring_the-australia-we-want-aer-marchv46-no1-pp78-91.pdf
<https://theconversation.com/its-time-to-vote-for-happiness-and-well-being-not-mere-economic-growth-heres-why-116061>
 ANDI-UniMelb project 2018-19 (Trewin 2019): <https://www.andi.org.au/library/> (available after 19-7-22)
 ANDI-UniMelb project (Salvaris 2021, 'What do Australians think is important for national progress?': <https://www.andi.org.au/library/> (available after 19-7-22)

WEAll Australia hub

WEAll Australia was established last year and is hosted by the New Economics Network Australia (NENA) led by Dr Michelle Maloney. Its current plans include a national survey on what Australians want from their economy, and the promotion of wellbeing budgets with Australian State and national governments, as well as to widen its membership to create a strong national network of members of like-minded organisation interested in wellbeing and economic reform.

(See: <https://www.neweconomy.org.au/weall-australia/>)

George Institute/VicHealth project: Integrating wellbeing into the business of government

The George Institute for Global Health, based in NSW, has been commissioned by VicHealth to provide a report on international and Australian developments relating to well-being economies and well-being frameworks. This will summarise key literature reports and projects, interviews with Australian key participants and provide a toolkit of policy options. The final report is due to be released soon. VicHealth has had a consistent record in supporting this work since 2004 when then Director Rob Moodie commissioned a review of community well-being measurement projects and the potential for a national model (see below).

(See: George Institute Project: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/PDFs/VHIntegratingwellbeingintobusofgovv52FINAL.pdf?la=en&hash=8D4C64844BAE383F69ED69B8376CCF36DF9D4DCE&hash=8D4C64844BAE383F69ED69B8376CCF36DF9D4DCE>
 VicHealth 2004 paper (Salvaris and Wiseman: <https://www.andi.org.au/library/> (available after 19-7-22)

Centre for Policy Development project: Wellbeing government initiative

The CPD has been funded generously for at least three years on a project to build well-being into Australian governments. It is currently producing an overview report on Australian and global wellbeing government approaches in policy making and budgets. A key focus of the project will be on introducing and promoting models of 'wellbeing into government' in the senior levels of the state and federal public sectors, especially Treasuries and Premiers/PM departments. The CPD's first draft 'overview' report is currently being reviewed.

(See: CPD 2022 Impact Report:
<https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Impact-Report-Final-with-Hyperlinks-7mb.pdf>)

University of Canberra: National Conference on Wellbeing and Public Policy

Led by the University of Canberra (Dr Jacki Schirmer and Prof Rob Tanton), and with likely support from the ACT government, a major, 4-day national conference on wellbeing and public policy is being planned, most likely to be in Canberra in late November. The organisers are especially keen for this to be an inclusive national conference that brings all of the different stakeholders and actors together - research, community, government and media - and to invite some keynote international speakers such as Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. They are also very interested in finding other partners and funders for the project.

(For further information: Jacki.Schirmer@canberra.edu.au)