

# **Mapping community wellbeing:**

*Using community wellbeing indicators  
to choose goals and measure progress*

**Mike Salvaris  
John Wiseman**

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## 1. Introduction and summary of recommendations

This Report has been prepared for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) to:

- provide a concise overview of learning from recent Australian and international research and policy development on the design and use by government and non government organizations of community progress and wellbeing indicators (in this report shortened to ‘community wellbeing’ or ‘CWB’ indicators);
- inform consideration by government and non government organizations of policy, research, capacity building and resourcing priorities to improve the development and use of community wellbeing indicators; and
- inform consideration of future VicHealth policy and funding priorities.

In this publication the term ‘community wellbeing indicators’ refers to a broad range of measures and evidence designed to identify and communicate economic, social, environmental, cultural and governance trends and outcomes at local, regional and national levels.

The main purpose of the Report is to guide VicHealth and Victorian policy and research priorities rather than to provide a comprehensive overview of CWB indicator initiatives. The content has, however, been informed by an extensive review of relevant literature and practice as well as feedback from a broad range of Australian researchers and policy makers. It is therefore envisaged that the Report will also be useful to community organisations and policy makers in a range of other Australian and international contexts.

The primary mechanism for obtaining input from researchers and practitioners was through an ‘Activity Scan’ workshop on recent experience in developing and using community indicators, held at VicHealth in November 2003. A list of individuals who attended this workshop and a summary of workshop outcomes is included at Appendix C. A short list of useful references and Internet links is included at Appendix E.

### **Why community wellbeing indicators matter to VicHealth**

Community wellbeing indicators are an increasingly important resource and priority for all health promotion and health policy organisations. Public health bodies around the world have played a central role in designing new measures of community wellbeing to more effectively monitor trends in the social, economic and

environmental determinants of good health as well as providing mechanisms for working with communities to identify and address high priority issues.

Vic Health has played a leading role in supporting Victorian and Australian work on community well being indicators with a clear understanding that this is an essential contribution to fulfilling the VicHealth mission: to 'build the capabilities of organizations, communities and individuals in ways that change social, economic, cultural and physical environments to improve health for all Victorians; and strengthen the understanding and the skills of individuals in ways that support their efforts to achieve and maintain health'<sup>1</sup>.

The VicHealth strategic plan also stresses the importance of evidence-informed policy and practice in health promotion and public health; in addressing priority health areas such as tobacco control, mental health promotion, physical activity and healthy eating; and in tackling health inequalities.<sup>2</sup>

Community wellbeing indicators provide the basic tool kit for an evidence based approach to identifying trends and measuring progress in the social, economic and environmental determinants of health. They are also an essential starting point for identifying the extent of health inequalities; for assessing the effectiveness of actions to reduce inequalities; for building community capacity to bring about social, economic and environmental change, and for reaching agreement on policy and resource priorities.

In relation to mental health, the VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan and the establishment of the new VicHealth funded *Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Centre* at Melbourne University are both informed by compelling evidence that the key determinants of mental health and social wellbeing are social connectedness, freedom from discrimination and violence and economic participation<sup>3</sup>. Improved community wellbeing indicators will be a valuable tool for the MHP plan to meet its objectives and measure success.

VicHealth is strongly committed to working on a partnership basis with the many other government, non-government and academic organizations involved in the development and use of community wellbeing indicators. In Victoria, for example the local government sector has been particularly active in taking a leadership role in creating the environment for strong, healthy local communities. The recent VicHealth publication, *Leading the Way*<sup>4</sup>, has been produced as a resource to continue to strengthen local government capacities and skills in this area. It is envisaged that future VicHealth support for work on local community indicators will build further on this foundation as well as complementing related policy and research activities being undertaken by a range of State and Commonwealth government agencies.

## Overview of report

The Report begins with an overview of the historical development and significance of community wellbeing indicators (Section 2). This is followed (in Section 3) by a discussion of some of the most important lessons from recent international and Australian CWB indicator initiatives. These lessons can usefully be summarised in the following way.

1. Community wellbeing indicators are equally important both for setting community goals and measuring progress towards them.
2. Choices about community wellbeing indicators reflect philosophical and political values, not just technical expertise, and should be made openly and democratically.
3. An effective indicator system should integrate social, cultural, economic, environmental and governance dimensions of wellbeing within a transparent overall framework of goals and values.
4. The process of selecting indicators requires a clear statement of purpose and values, effective community engagement and sound technical and policy advice.
5. Indicators selected should be able to clearly demonstrate trends in relation to agreed community outcomes and to be collected in ongoing data sets.
6. Community wellbeing indicators and frameworks should, as far as possible, be coordinated and complementary at local and regional, state and national levels.
7. Community wellbeing indicators are a valuable governance tool for improving the responsiveness, clarity and accountability of policy making and implementation.
8. The development of community wellbeing indicators can provide an important new vehicle for engaging citizens and improving community planning.
9. Realising the potential value of community wellbeing indicators will require strong policy leadership and coordination. The most immediate priority is to move from the current piloting and experimentation phase to embedding and mainstreaming the use of community progress measures as a core mechanism for democratic, accountable and integrated policy making.

Section 4 provides an indication of a variety of different models and frameworks for indicators at a range of different geographical levels with further details of these models included in Appendix B.

The report concludes by arguing that the current Victorian policy context provides a unique opportunity to bring together key community indicator and community wellbeing strategies and stakeholders to achieve substantial and lasting improvements in the wellbeing, policy making capacity and governance of Victorian communities. This will require strong political and organisational leadership, driving a strategic and co-ordinated approach to :

- scale up and mainstream the use of community wellbeing indicators;
- link the development and use of community wellbeing indicators more effectively into community engagement, policy making and reporting;
- improve the quality and comparability of data sets and frameworks; and
- improve knowledge and capabilities about the development and use of community wellbeing indicators.

We believe that VicHealth is ideally placed to take an important leadership role in the development of such a strategic approach, with a primary initial focus on the local community and Victorian levels combined with a longer term advocacy role at the national level.

## **Recommendations**

The Report recommends that:

(1) VicHealth, in partnership with relevant local, State government and community sector agencies, the ABS and the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Centre should facilitate the development and implementation of a *Victorian Local Community Indicators Project*. Main tasks and outcomes of this project would be:

- Working with local governments to design and implement a range of innovative approaches to involving citizens and stakeholders in the identification and prioritisation of local community goals and indicators;
- Drawing on this work with local government and local communities to develop agreed State wide frameworks and indicators for measuring community wellbeing outcomes and for integrated 'Health of Victorian Communities' reporting;
- An audit of current local community (LGA level) data sets and development of a strategy for filling gaps leading to regular and ongoing collection of valid and reliable local area data sets;
- A co-ordinated strategy for building the capacity of local government and community organisations to develop and use community wellbeing indicator measures including appropriate professional development and training programs
- Regular publication of local 'Health of Victorian communities' reports;
- Development of resources to maximise the potential for community well being indicators to be used as mechanisms for more informed community planning and local government policy making; and
- Capturing and disseminating learning from this project through appropriate action research, publication and conference activities

The draft outline of this project including benefits and an indicative work plan outlined in Appendix D is intended only as an illustration of an approach which could be taken, with detailed project development requiring careful consultation with relevant stakeholders.

If this recommendation is accepted the next step would be for VicHealth to commission the development of a detailed project work plan informed by consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

(2) VicHealth initiate discussions with relevant government, community sector, academic and philanthropic agencies to identify the most effective means of progressing the following State wide actions:

- Drawing on the outcomes of the *Victorian Local Community Indicators Project* to work towards a common State wide framework and indicators for measuring community wellbeing trends and for a more integrated suite of 'State of Victorian communities' indicators;
- Development of a Victorian Community Wellbeing Measurement Act (linked to and building on *Growing Victoria Together* and the *Victorian Local Government Democratic Reform Act*);
- An audit of current State and regional data sets and development of a strategy for filling data gaps (including through the development of new measures) leading to regular collection of valid and reliable community wellbeing data at State, regional and local levels;
- Regular 'State of Victoria ' reporting on Statewide, regional and local trends and outcomes;
- The publication of a Victorian Handbook on the identification and use of community wellbeing indicators by State and local governments;
- Improving public and community sector capacity in the design and use of community wellbeing indicators for community engagement, policy making and reporting.
- Developing a more integrated approach to the use of community well being indicators in the design and implementation of community strengthening projects.
- Playing a leadership role in developing a co-ordinated national approach to the development and use of community wellbeing indicators.

(3) VicHealth initiate discussions with relevant government, community, sector, academic and philanthropic agencies to identify the most effective means of progressing the following Commonwealth level actions:

- Development of a national project to involve communities and stakeholders in the identification and prioritisation of key issues and indicators;
- Development of national Community Progress and Wellbeing legislation;
- Agreement on a common framework and integrated suite of national progress and wellbeing indicators, including the further development of those in the current ABS MAP project;
- An audit of current national data sets and development of strategy to fill data gaps;
- Regular 'State of Australian communities' reporting; and
- The publication of a Commonwealth government handbook on the development and use of community progress and wellbeing indicators.

## 2. Community wellbeing indicators: Where have they come from and why do they matter?

‘Social indicators (are) statistics, statistical series and all other forms of evidence-that enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals, and to evaluate specific programs and determine their effect ...Statistics are gathered not out of a general sense of curiosity, but rather because it is presumed that they will be guides to planning and action...(they) are used to *persuade other persons* to take actions and adopt policies.’<sup>5</sup>  
(Raymond Bauer)

### International developments

In its broadest sense the history of the development of community progress and wellbeing indicators encompasses and reflects the full range of debates about the nature of the ‘good life’, the ‘good society’ and the nature of ‘progress’. From the Domesday book onwards, the collection and analysis of data about social conditions and trends has also reflected the tensions between ‘top down’ and bottom up’ approaches – between the desire of rulers and policy makers to monitor and manage social outcomes and the desire of communities and citizens to prioritise and address local goals and concerns. Decisions about the choice of indicators and about the way data is collected, analysed and interpreted are all, in the end, political decisions.

The political and policy implications of choices about progress indicators are particularly clear in the emergence of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an all encompassing proxy measure of societal progress in the period following World War II.<sup>6</sup> The narrowness of the GDP index increasingly came under fire from a number of quarters. Feminists pointed to the ways in which much of the unpaid work carried out by women was simply invisible in GDP accounting<sup>7</sup>. Development agencies such as the United Nations Development Program noted the need to include health, education, housing and income inequality outcomes and trends<sup>8</sup>. The environment movement became a strong advocate for the inclusion of environmental trends as well as highlighting the ways in which economic growth often involves environmental costs as well as benefits.

Robert Kennedy brought all these concerns together in the following over arching commentary on the importance of a broader framework for thinking about and measuring progress and wellbeing.

‘The gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors, and jails for the people who break them. ... The gross national product includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm and missiles with nuclear warheads.... And if the gross national product includes all this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the

strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials.... The gross national product measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.’<sup>9</sup>

By the 1970s governments, statistical agencies and university based researchers were therefore developing a more integrated range of economic, social, environmental and cultural progress measures<sup>10</sup>. Some governments, such as those of Norway and Sweden, were also beginning to connect the identification of integrated wellbeing indicators into broader processes for involving citizens in the selection and achievement of long term political and policy priorities.

The rise of neo-liberal and managerialist policy settings in the 1980s slowed this initial work on community wellbeing indicators with a renewed focus on economic performance and efficiency defined by the more readily quantifiable measures of financial costs and benefits. By the late 1990s the backlash against the more extreme forms of economic rationalism, and increasing support for ‘triple bottom line’ policy making and reporting, had again begun to create a favourable climate for a more holistic approach to community indicators. As the United Nations Development Program noted in 1996

‘Human advance is conditioned by our conception of progress ... (It is time to end) the mismeasure of human progress by economic growth alone. The paradigm shift in favour of sustainable human development is still in the making. But more and more policy makers in many countries are reaching the unavoidable conclusion that, to be valuable and legitimate, development progress—both nationally and internationally—must be people centred, equitably distributed, and environmentally and socially sustainable.’<sup>11</sup>

Some of these experiments involved attempts to develop composite ‘quality of life’, ‘happiness’ and ‘liveability’ indexes. The UNDP’s *Human Development Index* is based, for example, on a weighted composite of life expectancy, GDP per head and years of education<sup>12</sup>. The more common, and arguably more useful, approach has been to construct a comprehensive suite of indicators which can provide a clear picture of progress and wellbeing in a particular nation or region. This is the approach taken by the Canadian Government with the *2003 Canada Wellbeing Measurement Act* requiring public national reporting on a range of ‘triple bottom line’ indicators and in Europe in the construction of the European Union’s *Social Indicator Framework*<sup>13</sup>.

This renewal of interest in community wellbeing indicators has been fuelled by a recognition that their potential significance extends well beyond monitoring community trends and outcomes. Many governments at all levels are now exploring the potential for community wellbeing indicators to act as a springboard for community based planning and development projects and for stimulating and focussing discussions on community, regional and national goals and priorities.<sup>14</sup> This trend has been given extra impetus by renewed support for community building strategies and by increased interest in measuring progress in relation to outcomes which have previously been seen as being outside the scope of effective measurement (eg. social capital, democratic participation, trust in public institutions).

Table A1 (Appendix A) provides a summary of some particularly innovative and useful international approaches to the development of community wellbeing indicators at a variety of levels.

## **The Australian experience**

### *National level*

By the mid 1970s the Commonwealth Government had become a keen participant in the OECD project of developing a more comprehensive social indicator framework. This led to an expansion of ABS social statistics, the publication of consolidated *Social Indicators* and *Social Trends* volumes, and proposed Department of Social Security *Indicators of Community Wellbeing*.<sup>15</sup> Although the ABS continued to collect a wide range of important social data, the idea of an integrated national social indicators framework foundered along with the OECD project in the early 1980s.

From the early 1990s, the Industry Commission (now the Productivity Commission) began producing a series of national reports identifying performance and outcome measures for a wide range of economic and social issues. These reports have generated indicators in important new fields such as community health and social capital. Similarly, the Commonwealth Grants Commission, although focused primarily on State and Commonwealth revenue sharing, has developed a range of useful measures for monitoring health and community service trends.<sup>16</sup>

From the mid 1990s on, the project of developing a more comprehensive approach to community wellbeing indicators has gained renewed momentum. In 1996 the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee published an influential Report recommending the development with the ABS of a national framework to set goals and measure progress in social wellbeing and citizenship support.<sup>17</sup> Australia's first national *State of the Environment Report* was also published in 1996, bringing together extensive environmental evidence with community and expert input.<sup>18</sup>

In 1997 the national conference, *Measuring Progress: Is Life Getting Better?* co-sponsored by the CSIRO, the ABS and Swinburne University brought together researchers, community groups and policy makers to consider the development of integrated national measures of progress and well-being. In addition to the landmark conference publication edited by Richard Eckersley, this event also led directly to the development of an *Australian Genuine Progress Index* (by the Australia Institute) and the initiation of the *Measuring Australia's Progress* (MAP) project by the ABS<sup>19</sup>.

The first MAP Report, published in 2002, provides a comprehensive analysis of national wellbeing data and sources. It makes a strong case for an integrated framework of national progress and wellbeing indicators and notes the need for new data collection in previously neglected areas such as social attachment, civil and democratic participation, human rights, cultural activities and biodiversity. As part

of the next step in building a comprehensive suite of indicators and data sets the ABS has also initiated a major project to identify indicators of social capital and social connectedness.<sup>20</sup>

Other important recent initiatives with national implications include:

- The Australian Collaboration publications *A Just and Sustainable Australia* (on an integrated 'triple bottom line approach to national policy issues and priorities); and *Where are We Going?* (on improving national reporting on social, economic and environmental issues)<sup>21</sup>;
- The Jesuit Social Services *Unequal in Life* project ( a broad index assessing the level of disadvantage and inequality in local communities across Australia)<sup>22</sup>;
- The *National Benchmarks for Social Development and Citizenship* project led by Swinburne, Deakin, Monash and RMIT universities and the Victorian Council of Social Service.<sup>23</sup>

### *State level*

Until the 1990s the development of wellbeing indicators at the State level mostly followed the national lead. State government statistical reporting was usually little more than a State by State breakdown of national statistics, with the State ABS branches following the national office.

In recent years, governments and community groups at State and local community levels have become more interested in developing reporting models that better reflect their own priorities and issues. While the common thread linking these initiatives has been a desire to improve the quality of social, economic and environmental indicators and reporting, there has been considerable variation in their scope and purpose, and in the degree of community involvement.

The *Tasmania Together* project is the most developed example of a State wide project emphasising a 'bottom up' approach. Launched by the Tasmanian Government in 1999, it involved an extensive grass roots program to identify priorities for a long term, twenty year *Tasmania Together* State plan.<sup>24</sup> The consultation process led to the identification of ten 'community goals' (summarised in Table B4) and some 250 indicators for measuring progress. Reporting is mandated by legislation and monitored by a Board made up of community and government representatives.

In 1999 the ACT government published the *State of the Territory Report: Improving Our Quality of Life in Canberra*, an official well-being audit, built on a series of consultations with the ACT Council of Social Service and including a wide range of indicators of economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

In Western Australia the Auditor General's office has supported the initial development of a model for whole of government planning and reporting,

establishing performance indicators for government departments based on addressing agreed policy and community outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

In Victoria, during the 1990s a number of community action projects explored the use of progress and wellbeing indicators as tools for more democratic approaches to local and State planning. *People Together*, established in the early days of the Kennett Government, was initially a response to cuts in public services and challenges to local democratic processes. It developed into a statewide civic action movement using public inquiries, 'community summits', 'community audits' and 'social justice report cards' as advocacy strategies. One legacy of this approach, the *Purple Sage* project, initiated in 1998, led to a community dialogue involving over 5,000 Victorians with the aim of developing a new community vision and action program for the State. These and other local community development and research projects, such as the Swinburne University *Community Indicators and Local Democracy* project, had a significant influence on the directions of the incoming Bracks Labor government.

In 2000, the newly elected Victorian Labor government hosted the *Growing Victoria Together* 'community summit' seeking agreement on a long term vision and goals for Victoria. The Summit recommended the development of a 'triple bottom line' approach to policy making and reporting, informed by extensive community involvement. The most immediate outcome was the publication of the Victorian Government's medium term strategic framework, *Growing Victoria Together*<sup>26</sup>. The GVT framework, and its goals and indicators (summarised in Table B3), were primarily drawn from government policy consultations, rather than the broader 'bottom up' community engagement process of the kind implemented in Tasmania.

The GVT framework has however provided a fertile environment for a range of local and state wide community wellbeing indicator initiatives. The Victorian Population Health Survey, designed and developed by DHS with the support of VicHealth has, for example, provided valuable new sources of data about health and well being trends and outcomes.<sup>27</sup> This large scale CATI survey enables data to be collected on a broad range of health issues across Victoria. Importantly it includes a range of questions on social capital measures such as levels of civic participation, social connectedness and trust. The ABS has also played an important role in the identification of new State and regional level indicators and data sets and further work on local data sources is likely to be triggered by the audit of local data sets conducted by the *Department for Victorian Communities*.

At a broader level the establishment of the *Department for Victorian Communities* has the potential to provide a stronger organisational focus for the integration of work on community well being indicators into whole of government policy making and community strengthening initiatives. There are also a range of ongoing discussions about options for the development of local, regional and state wide community indicator frameworks (see for example the proposal for a state wide 'wellbeing reporting framework' developed by the Swinburne Institute for Social

Research in Appendix B). Table A2 summarises a number of useful recent Australian community indicator projects and examples at national and State levels.

### *Local community level projects*

The last five years have seen strong growth in local government interest and investment in community wellbeing indicators, as a basis for reporting on local trends, as a planning tool and as part of a renewed interest in engaging citizens in community building and community planning. Key drivers for this process have included the amalgamation of local governments into larger areas; the devolution to local governments of wider and more explicit planning responsibilities (often on a 'triple bottom line' model); and a perceived need to re-engage local citizens.

Community planning and wellbeing indicator projects have proliferated in Victoria because of the high level of networking in Victorian local government - between local governments and their officers and professional associations, especially in community services and planning areas, and because of a strong interest in overseas and interstate models. The recent *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act* is likely to provide a further strong impetus for the development of community based planning in which community wellbeing indicators and citizen participation in them play a strong role.

Table A3 provides an overview of innovative Australian local government community indicator projects, with web references.

### **Community wellbeing indicators and the health sector**

From the earliest days of statistics and public policy, health issues and health indicators have been at the centre of discussions about measuring wellbeing. This is not surprising, in that health issues are bound to be a substantial component of any reasonable definition of community wellbeing and quality of life. Health agencies around the world have also often led collaborative partnerships to develop broader and more democratic community wellbeing measures.

The health sector has been a significant player in the broad development of community wellbeing indicators, both in Australia and internationally, in at least four fields:

- Helping to broaden initial definitions of wellbeing, to include factors previously ignored, such as psychological and social wellbeing (for example, the WHO's 'Health for All' policy and the Ottawa Charter of 1986).
- Reinforcing arguments for an integrated approach to defining and measuring wellbeing, by showing the links between health outcomes and social, economic and environmental conditions, and more recently, between health outcomes,

inequality and social inclusion (for example, extensive research on the social determinants of health<sup>28</sup>).

- Pioneering research on many new indicators and measures of wellbeing (such as Healthy Life Years, ADL Disability Scales, social health and function indices, Psychological Wellbeing Scales and Social Network scales. Many of these indicators and indexes are now routinely used in monitoring public health, including, for example in the Victorian Population Health Survey<sup>29</sup>).
- Working at a local level with community and local government bodies to integrate health issues into broader community wellbeing planning that includes citizen participation, goal-setting and progress measurement (for example, the Healthy Cities Program, and in Victoria, Municipal Public Health Plans).

### 3. Community wellbeing indicators: what have we learned?

Reflection on the recent experience of developing and using community wellbeing indicators, informed by feedback from the VicHealth Community Indicators Expert Workshop, leads to the following conclusions about key lessons and ways forward.

#### (1) Dual purpose: setting goals *and* measuring progress

*The significance of community wellbeing indicators lies in their dual role: they are essential tools both for facilitating broad, informed consideration of community goals and priorities and for assessing progress towards achieving these goals.*

Community progress indicators are no more - and no less - than tools for translating the abstract goals of citizens and communities into clear, tangible and commonly understood outcomes and for assessing and communicating progress in achieving these outcomes and goals.

It is relatively easy to articulate and reach general agreement on the broad goals of improving health, education or environmental sustainability. However these goals remain abstract and largely meaningless until we translate them into tangible commitments. Precisely which health outcomes will be improved – and for which people? Does an improvement in education mean smaller classes – or higher school retention rates – or better exam results? What does better water or air quality actually mean – and how would we know if it was occurring?

This is a world in which citizens, communities, politicians and policy makers are all struggling to make sense of an ever increasing cacophony of information, claim and counter claim about what matters - and whether the things that matter are getting better or worse.

Tools which can help citizens, communities and policy makers identify and agree on a reasonably small number of goals translated into tangible and concrete outcomes and indicators are extremely valuable in a complex and contradictory world.

#### (2) Indicators reflect values, not just expertise

*Choices about community wellbeing indicators reflect philosophical and political values, not just technical expertise, and should be made openly and democratically.*

As Raymond Bauer, one of the pioneers of the post war social indicator movement, has noted, the real purpose of indicators is to 'enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals'.<sup>30</sup> This immediately gives rise to

the questions: Whose values and whose goals? The recent Canadian Policy Research Network report on Quality of Life indicators answered this question very directly. 'To be legitimate, societal indicators require the explicit involvement of citizens to determine what matters to them. Then experts can try to devise the measures that citizens need'.<sup>31</sup>

Choices about what matters most to citizens and communities will always reflect differing, contested philosophical and political values and assumptions. So too will choices about the indicators used to prioritise and measure specific outcomes such as employment, safety or trust in public institutions. In complex industrial societies, most people can at best have only a very indirect knowledge of the issues they need to know about to form a view about the progress and well-being of their societies. 'Official' government measures and statistics therefore become extremely powerful in framing public debate, steering planning and shaping people's attitudes and perceptions about political choices.

This means that, in a democratic society, the process of choosing our measures of progress must ideally be a collaborative process, drawing on the ideas, concerns and creativity of the whole community'.<sup>32</sup> This does not, of course, mean that every citizen must be involved in every decision at every level about policy priorities or indicator choices. But it does mean that the value framework and selection process for indicators needs to be explicit and transparent.

Some initial questions that must be clearly answered are:

- Why are community progress indicators being developed and who are they being developed for? Is the purpose primarily to measure and report on trends and outcomes or is it also to contribute to ongoing consideration of policy choices and priorities?
- What values will inform the choice of indicators and the nature and level of benchmarks chosen for measuring progress?
- Who could and should be involved in considering and selecting indicators and benchmarks?
- How will this involvement occur and be supported and how will differences be resolved?

### **(3) A clear, integrated framework of community wellbeing**

*An effective indicator system must integrate social, cultural, economic, environmental and governance dimensions of wellbeing within a clear framework of values and goals.*

The American sociologist Kenneth Land has argued that, in designing any set of social indicators 'one is faced with the necessity of spelling out some more or less explicit model of society'.<sup>33</sup>

There is a huge pool of statistical data with the potential to tell us about some aspect of community wellbeing. These statistics are collected and kept by government statistical offices like the ABS (through the Census and regular household and employment surveys); local, State and Commonwealth Departments and their agencies (e.g. income security, schools, hospitals, courts, police and cultural organisations); non-government, and university research organizations.

It is important however to remember that an indicator is not just a simple statistic. A good indicator is a measure of something that is important or valuable. To measure a concept as large and important as community progress and wellbeing, we need first to be able to describe the most important components, issues and goals which make up community well-being: what cannot be described cannot be measured.

This means that we need a clear framework or map, which describes the outcomes that would show whether we are achieving community progress and wellbeing and provide clear guidance about the best evidence and measurements to demonstrate this. This may mean that we decide that we need new statistics, since it is better to measure what is important than what is available.

The most valuable systems of indicators are those developed as part of an overall framework of community progress and wellbeing that has been established beforehand, and which is an integral part not just of social reporting, but also of planning and democratic accountability.

In the past decade many governments and international agencies have embarked upon the complex task of developing such frameworks, to guide and monitor community wellbeing policy and outcomes. (Table A1 summarises and provides links to some of the best international examples).

One almost universal issue has been the increasing recognition of the need to take full account of social and environmental, as well as economic, outcomes. This has itself been the product of a paradigm shift, within government and business as well as the broader community. In the former model, economic outcomes had the highest priority, and social and environmental costs and impacts were seen as secondary. Now there is a more comprehensive and integrated approach to economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Much of the initial impetus for this shift has come from innovation in private sector performance evaluation, as many companies developed forms of 'triple bottom line' reporting and planning systems. Triple bottom line approaches and methodologies are also increasingly being applied in the public sector: to planning, evaluation and accountability and at program, departmental and whole of government levels.

The shift has been driven by public pressure for a more balanced and holistic approach. People now expect governments and corporations to take greater responsibility for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It has also been informed by new research and evidence, showing important linkages between health and wellbeing outcomes, and broader social and environmental

factors such as social connectedness, meaningful work, trust in public institutions, civic participation, community belonging and a sense of hope for the future.

In thinking about public policy outcomes, it has also become clear that cultural and governance outcomes need to be included in any comprehensive and integrated matrix of the issues that matter to communities and the way in which progress is measured<sup>34</sup>. Some commentators suggest that this supports the idea of a '5BL' rather than '3BL' (triple bottom line) approach to wellbeing indicator frameworks and reporting.

There is also growing interest in exploring ways of defining and measuring important wellbeing issues and outcomes previously thought too vague, 'soft', subjective or political: for example, public and private trust and confidence, social capital, community connectedness, inequality, democratic engagement and subjective assessments of 'happiness', quality of life and wellbeing

Most international wellbeing frameworks and measurement methodologies now take for granted the need to start from an integrated approach to social, environmental and economic outcomes, and many include cultural and governance issues in the mix. The trend towards integrated planning and reporting models is even clearer at local government and community levels.

Rhetorical commitment, though, is not always matched by effective implementation. While many transnational corporations and international development agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, now talk the language of 'triple bottom line' policy making and 'corporate responsibility', much of this remains public relations spin. 'Share-holder value' and the 'financial bottom line' are still the test of 'real success'. The same gap between rhetoric and reality applies to many national and state financial and economic planning departments.

National statistical agencies still invest far more in economic statistics than other areas and tend to run subordinate data collection and reporting regimes for 'less important' and 'less reliable' indicators. Scepticism about the validity and reliability of methodologies for assessing progress in relation to 'hard to measure' trends such as subjective wellbeing, social mobility, inequality or democratic participation remains deeply entrenched. Investment in research leading to better data sets and methodologies for measuring progress across the full range of social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance outcomes will be a vital next step in the development and implementation of an integrated approach to community progress indicators.

#### **(4) Practical steps in developing community wellbeing indicators**

*The key ingredients for selecting and prioritising indicators are: a clear statement of purpose and values; effective community and stakeholder engagement; and sound technical and policy advice.*

The process for developing and implementing an integrated approach to community progress indicators should involve the following steps, in roughly this order:

- Clarifying the purpose and audience for development of indicators.
- Clarifying stakeholders to be involved in the selection of indicators.
- Developing a commonly agreed view about high priority values and goals and about the way in which abstract goals will be translated into tangible outcomes. This should be an open and democratic process with genuine opportunities for informed consideration and debate about key assumptions, values, options and implications.
- Agreement on a clear explanatory framework showing the way in which the overarching vision and values inform the choice of priority goals and outcomes.
- Identifying options for indicators and benchmarks which can provide tangible demonstrations of the state of play and trends in relation to outcomes. While the selection of indicators should be informed by a good understanding of available data sets and sound technical advice on issues of validity and reliability the choice of indicators should not be driven solely by the availability of data.
- Identifying gaps in data availability and the possibility of developing new data sets and collection instruments or adapting existing ones.
- Preparing a base line report on the current state of play in relation to the selected indicators can then be prepared and circulated.
- Producing regular progress reports: to ensure information on progress informs policy priorities and implementation and to facilitate continuing discussion with citizens and communities about priority goals and actions.

##### **(5) Good indicators measure important community outcomes**

*The selection criteria for community wellbeing indicators should be based on their capacity to clearly and credibly communicate ongoing trends in relation to commonly agreed goals and outcomes.*

The most important characteristic of a good set of community wellbeing indicators is that they provide an easily understandable guide to the state of play and trends in relation to the issues that matter to a particular community or group of citizens. The overall set of indicators should therefore:

- Be informed by an agreed, transparent framework of values and goals.
- Provide a sound basis for translating these goals and values into concrete outcomes.
- Strike the right balance between keeping the number of indicators small enough to provide a clear, focussed picture and comprehensive enough to adequately cover the highest priority economic, social, environmental, cultural and governance trends. As a general rule a suite of between 15 and 25 indicators seems to be a useful target.

- Be meaningful and appropriate for the particular geographical and jurisdictional level.
- Include both objective evidence (eg. crime rates) and subjective measures (eg. are citizens feeling safer?).
- Be capable of showing both overall trends and trends in relation to particular population groups (eg. capacity to be disaggregated by gender, age, race, ethnicity etc.). This will also allow indicators to be used to show changes in distributional as well as aggregate outcomes.
- Be capable of being expressed in plain language that resonates with relevant audiences.

The capacity to collect the right statistics ('data sets') is clearly an essential selection criteria but, as noted above, it is essential to focus on measuring what is important, not what is simply measurable.<sup>35</sup> The starting point in selecting indicators should always be the recognition that an 'indicator' is a sign of something important or valued, measured against an agreed standard. Australia's main unemployment indicator is a good example of the dangers involved in being overly driven by the availability of existing data sets. Currently the official measure of unemployment is 'the number of people working more than two hours a fortnight' – a measure clearly out of step with the common sense understanding of 'being employed'.

Investment in the development and adaptation of new data collection instruments is therefore an essential component of an effective strategy for improving the usefulness of community progress indicators. Potential data sets need not be confined to those collected by official statistical agencies. Administrative data, commissioned surveys, focus groups and narrative methodologies may all be valuable sources.

The establishment of agreed standards or benchmarks is itself a significant act of political choice, often with significant implications for policy and resourcing priorities. Options in relation to benchmarks include:

- Improvements over time (e.g. 'literacy rates will improve by 10 per cent over 2 years');
- Comparison with other comparable communities or jurisdictions, or with international standards (eg. 'literacy rates will be as high or better than those in other Australian States; the OECD average' etc.);
- Achievement of a specified target (eg. '95 per cent of all children leaving primary school will be literate').

Composite indexes of wellbeing, liveability and quality of life are superficially attractive as communication and publicity tools, but they can be misleading given the implicit value choices involved in the weighting of indicators and problems in reconciling different units of measurement.

Strategies for effectively communicating community indicators should also be driven by a clear understanding of purpose and audience. The presentation of community progress indicators has improved greatly in the past 20 years. Long, boring statistical

tables have increasingly been replaced by far more attractive and accessible combinations of graphical and numerical information.

## **(6) Coordination between levels of government**

*Despite some necessary differences, a co-ordinated and complementary approach to indicator development and data sets at national, state and local levels is essential to maximise the potential benefits.*

While there will always be important differences between the kinds of indicators and data sets which are useful and appropriate at national, State, regional and local levels, co-ordination between levels of government is crucial to develop a more complementary and co-operative approach to indicator development, data collection and reporting.

Statistical and research agencies are gradually developing more integrated data collection and communication strategies with the work of State ABS statistical coordination agencies like VSAC being particularly crucial. The 'Community Statistics' handbook recently produced by the Department for Victorian Communities is another good example of the actions needed in this area.

Some community wellbeing issues are clearly more important at one level of government than another. Local government has less influence over defence and national security – and national governments are less able to influence local environmental or planning issues. Nonetheless the kinds of issues that make up the whole picture of community wellbeing are important to all three levels of government, and can be designed so as to complement and build on each other. Importantly, too most citizens are uninterested in discussions about differing local, State and Commonwealth responsibilities. They just want to see the issues that matter to them addressed.

There are significant advantages in having similar frameworks and interchangeable data. At the State level, for example, if all local governments share a common core community wellbeing framework of indicators for reporting and planning purposes these local community measures can become the basic 'building blocks' for an integrated and better informed state wide framework. The advantages of common local indicators need to be balanced against the importance of being responsive to local differences in issues and concerns. The answer here is likely lie in a mix of common core indicators supplemented by a range of indicators relevant to particular communities and localities.

## **(7) The value of community wellbeing indicators for policymaking**

*The development and use of community wellbeing indicators can provide valuable tools for improving the responsiveness, sharpness and accountability of policy making and implementation.*

‘Governing by results or outcomes is taking hold in many states and communities, and along with that is the recognition of the importance of social indicators. These are the tools with which we take our bearings, chart and correct our course, and monitor conditions around us on an ongoing basis.’ (Vermont 2000)

‘One of the main drivers for monitoring progress is simply that it is good governance’.  
(Onkaparinga 2000)

As well as monitoring and reporting on progress, community wellbeing indicators can contribute to more responsive and accountable government policy making in a number of ways:

- Ensuring that policy priority and resource allocation decisions are informed by an understanding of community and stakeholder views about priority goals and issues as well as efficiency and cost benefit criteria;
- Creating greater transparency and openness in relation to value assumptions informing and driving policy choices;
- Facilitating a shift from a focus on inputs (e.g., dollars spent on schools) and outputs (e.g. specific school programs) to outcomes (e.g., changes in retention or literacy rates);
- Providing feedback on trends and impacts to policy makers and program managers;
- Supporting a more integrated, whole-of-government approach to policy development and program implementation and evaluation;
- Involving citizens and stakeholders in more informed consideration of issues and choices; and
- Exploring, elaborating and making explicit underlying values and assumptions and desirable concrete outcomes.

There is still some distance to go before these benefits are fully realised in government policy processes and outcomes. Considerable confusion continues between ‘performance measures’ (measuring the efficiency of specific programs in terms of inputs and outputs) and ‘outcome measures’ of the progress and wellbeing of people, groups or systems. In many government settings, an implicit emphasis on financial and managerial control and monitoring blurs these distinctions and compromises the usefulness of progress and wellbeing outcome measures.

Recent attempts to reform the Victorian Local Government Act provide a good example of this dilemma. These reforms potentially provide an important basis to establish an ongoing system of integrated local community wellbeing goals and measures. However there is also a danger that this potential may be limited because

of a perception that their primary purpose is to strengthen State government monitoring of the performance of local government rather than to support local government in improving the wellbeing of local communities and the involvement of local citizens.

### **(8) A key tool for democratic engagement**

*The development of community wellbeing indicators is an important new democratic vehicle to engage citizens and improve community planning strategies.*

The indicators a society chooses to report to itself about are surprisingly powerful. They reflect collective values and inform collective decisions ... The idea of citizens choosing their own indicators is something new under the sun - something intensely democratic. (Sustainable Seattle. 1998)

Monitoring and reporting is still the most common use of community indicators, but there is growing recognition of their value as a mechanism to involve citizens in discussing and setting the goals and priorities of their communities. At a time when most research and anecdotal evidence shows a sharp decline in civic participation and a weakening of democratic processes and political trust, this may be their greatest merit in the longer term. Participatory community wellbeing projects can create opportunities for citizens to 'create new visions of the future, develop new working relationships across old boundaries and define (the community's) assets, problems and opportunities in a new way'<sup>36</sup>.

Discussions about the choice of indicators and benchmarks have proved a valuable tool for involving citizens and community groups both in the development of area improvement plans (such as the Victorian Neighbourhood Renewal projects) and as a basis for ongoing community planning processes (like the Surf Coast and City of Wyndham Community Plans).

Discussion of indicator and benchmark options often provides a basis for more informed consideration and for grounding abstract debates about philosophical values and goals in more concrete policy choices, implications and trade offs. In some cases (e.g. the Eugene Deliberative Democracy project in the USA), community indicator projects have also been linked to more ambitious 'deliberative democracy' processes, including direct citizen involvement in the consideration of budget priorities.

### **(9) A unique opportunity that needs leadership**

*Realising the potential value of community wellbeing indicators will require strong policy leadership and coordination. The most immediate priority is to move from the current piloting and experimentation phase to embedding and mainstreaming the use of community wellbeing measures as a core mechanism for democratic, accountable and integrated policy making*

The most critical and pressing challenge, confirmed by a wide range of policy makers and researchers is the need to move the use of community wellbeing indicators from piloting and experimentation to embedding and mainstreaming as a core mechanism for democratic, accountable and integrated policy making.

Strong political and organisational leadership will be essential in driving a strategic and co-ordinated approach to:

- Scaling up and mainstreaming the use of community progress and wellbeing indicators;
- Linking the development and use of community wellbeing indicators effectively into community engagement, policy making and reporting activities;
- Improving knowledge and capabilities about the development and use of community progress and wellbeing indicators; and
- Improving the quality and comparability of data sets and frameworks.

## 4. Useful examples of community wellbeing frameworks and indicators

There are any number of ways to measure national well-being, and no one is necessarily superior to any others. The choice of approach usually depends on the end goal for which new indicators are being developed – for example, are the indicators intended to guide public policy? To educate the public? To serve a political agenda? To build consensus on a desired future outcome? To make international comparisons? To launch a national dialogue? Needless to say, each of the objectives argues for a different set of indicators. (Halstead, 1998)

The design of particular indicator frameworks and the selection of specific measures will be heavily influenced by threshold questions about purpose, scope and scale. The issues to be considered include:

- How much community and stakeholder involvement will there be? (ie. to what extent is this a 'bottom up' or top down' approach?)
- What is the balance between the objectives of identifying community goals and priorities, informing policy making and monitoring progress?
- To what extent is the focus on achievement of intermediate, medium term goals or longer term outcomes?
- Is the overall intention to design
  - a fully integrated, comprehensive framework to measure community wellbeing in an ongoing way or...
  - a mechanism for measuring progress in achieving a specific plan or set of goals (e.g., community building, community safety or environmental sustainability)?
- To what extent is it important to be able to show outcomes for particular population groups?

### Developing frameworks: different approaches

The following summaries of differing approaches to the construction of indicator frameworks illustrate the ways in which differing choices about purpose and scale can effect the approach taken. The content of the frameworks discussed is included in Appendix B.

***Case 1: Sustainable Community Progress Indicators for the City of Port Phillip (Table B1)***

This is a good example of a framework built around a local community improvement plan with a broad theme ('sustainable community progress') with clear and specific goals. The choice of indicators was informed by an extensive consultation process. Many of the indicators reflect and communicate local concerns in creative ways ('cost of salad rolls', 'number of penguin eggs').

***Case 2: VicHealth: Mental Health & Social Wellbeing Framework (Table B2)***

While this framework has been designed to guide policy and program priorities in the specific field of mental health and social wellbeing, the goals and strategies and desired outcomes are broadly defined, to include most of the dimensions found in a state or national wellbeing framework or community improvement plan (e.g. social inclusion, freedom from discrimination and economic participation).

This framework provides a good illustration of the challenges involved in distinguishing between success in achieving shorter term or 'intermediate' outcomes such as improvements in individual self esteem or community connectedness and longer term social benefits such as improved productivity or reduced inequalities.

***Case 3: Growing Victoria Together Framework (see Table B3)***

Growing Victoria Together is an integrated, medium term State wide policy framework developed by the Victorian government. Implicitly it aims at improvements in all five key 'community wellbeing' dimensions (economic, social, cultural, environmental and governance) but it does so by defining priority policy goals. These goals were essentially selected within government, rather than by a community participation process. The indicators selected are for the most part tightly targeted to measure the achievement of the goals. In this sense they are a mix of program performance measures and broader community wellbeing indicators.

***Case 4: Tasmania Together (Table B4)***

Tasmania Together is a 20 year state improvement plan informed by broad community involvement at various stages: in developing the key state priority goals (which formed the basis for a layered framework of goals, key outcomes and progress indicators); and in the selection and monitoring of these (very numerous) indicators themselves. Table B4 shows only the key framework goals. The outcomes and indicators can be seen on the Tasmania Together web-site.

**Case 5: UK Sustainable Development Strategy ('Quality of Life Counts')  
(Table B5)**

This is a good example of a framework designed around a broad government national improvement strategy, with little community input, but incorporating most of the key dimensions of community wellbeing. Like the Victorian GVT framework, it defines community wellbeing indirectly through a series of specific goals, issues and objectives. To measure progress in each case, relevant available statistics have been selected. Essentially it is a 'performance measurement' framework which also includes a good deal of information on community wellbeing, although the indicators themselves lack clear benchmarks to judge the degree of 'progress' (other than the relatively crude 'more good things, less bad things' measure).

**Case 6: Measuring Victoria's Progress Framework (Table B6)**

The 'Measuring Victoria's Progress framework was developed as part of a report commissioned by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet to inform the *Growing Victoria Together* project. It is built around a four dimensional model (social/community, economic, environmental and governance/democracy) and identifies key outcomes and critical population groups to be considered in measuring wellbeing in each dimension. It was informed by a limited community participation process with the overall report recommending a more comprehensive state-wide community engagement process.

**Selecting indicators**

Table 4. 1 below illustrates a typical array of indicators in common use in many community wellbeing frameworks. It can be regarded as a starting point for the design and development of community wellbeing indicators at various levels from national to local. The choice of categories in the framework is similar to the approach taken in the VicHealth framework for Mental Health and Social Wellbeing. The indicators include a range of input, output and outcome measures and illustrate some of the assumptions involved in choosing between different combinations and types of indicators and measures.

**Table 4.1: Commonly used indicators of community progress and wellbeing**

<b>Important community wellbeing issues and goals</b>	<b>Examples of relevant indicators</b>
<b>Social inclusion</b>	
Health	Infant mortality rate Disability adjusted life expectancy Disability adjusted life years Self assessed life satisfaction Suicide rate Percentage of older people living in institutions (versus independently or with family) Public spending on public health as percentage of GSP Waiting times for health and community services Rating of quality of health and community services
Education	Average years of schooling achieved Retention rates to Year 12 Percentage of participation in adult and continuing learning Literacy and numeracy rates Public spending on public education Percentage of workers upgrading skills
Inequality and poverty	Percentage of people in households with income below 50% of average weekly earnings Income equality (top 20% households vs bottom 20%) Percentage of children living in low income families Hours of work at minimum wage to meet basic living standards Differences in health outcomes and/or mortality rates of highest and lowest socio-economic groups
Safety	Major crime rate Perceptions and fear of crime and violence People in prisons per 100,000 population Percentage of women who feel safe walking alone at night
Housing	Weekly rent of median priced unit as percentage of average weekly earning Cost of median housing loan repayments as percentage of average weekly earnings Levels of homelessness
Sense of pride, belonging and connectedness	Sense of pride in community Sense of optimism about the future of the community Sense that this is a safe healthy environment in which to raised children Participation in social, political and community organizations Participation in sporting and recreation activities Number of people who say they know at least five people they can turn to in a crisis Percentage of people volunteering

Transport access	Public transport usage Public transport usage by people with a disability
<b>Economic participation</b>	
Economic growth and productivity	GSP per capita growth rate Net productivity (GSP per worker)
Employment and work life	Ratio of net employment growth to economic growth Unemployment rate Percentage of young people unemployed Weekly hours of work Real wage growth for low income earners Male-female earning differentials Amount of leisure time
<b>Cultural participation and creativity</b>	
Creativity and innovation	Public and private sector expenditure on research and development as percentage of total public and private sector expenditure Public and private sector expenditure on cultural institutions and activities as percentage of total public and private sector expenditure
Cultural participation	Levels of participation in cultural activities Usage of public arts and cultural facilities
<b>Healthy and sustainable environments</b>	
Environmental quality	Air quality and atmospheric pollution Percentage of area committed to natural reserves, national parks Health of streams, rivers and bays Number of fish in rivers Numbers of birds in private gardens
Environmental diversity	Loss of key plant or animal species or habitat
Sustainable natural resources	Water use per head Use of renewable energy Waste per capita Recycling per capita
<b>Political and civic participation</b>	
Trust and participation in democratic processes	Public trust and confidence in public institutions Public trust in political parties and government Percentage of women MPs and local Councillors
Justice and legal rights	Proportion of population aware of key legal and human rights

One of the key tasks in developing a useful set of local community wellbeing indicators will be to reach agreement on a relatively small number of measures which can be expressed in 'plain English' in ways which resonate with local citizens.

For example, the question might be asked 'How will we know there have been improvements in the strength, connectedness and wellbeing of this community?' The answers might be: 'Because ...

- More people are feeling optimistic about the future of the community
- More people say they feel a strong sense of pride in the community
- More people say they believe this is a safe, healthy environment in which to raise children
- More people who are looking for paid work have found a job
- More people say they feel safe at home and when walking down the street
- There are more fish in the local creeks and rivers
- More people say they know at least five people they can turn to in a crisis
- More people are participating in active recreation and cultural activities
- A broader range of people are involved in community decision making
- A broader range of people are volunteering in this community.

## 5. Towards a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to the use of community wellbeing indicators

### Where we are now: the current state of play

Recent international and Australian initiatives in the development and use of community wellbeing indicators demonstrate an exciting array of creative approaches in a wide range of government and community settings. A considerable body of learning and expertise has now been built up about the design and application of indicators in policy making, reporting on trends, community building and citizen engagement. It is becoming clear that the development and use of community wellbeing indicators has the potential to play a major role in the development of more inclusive, accountable and democratic approaches to governance and to the setting and achievement of local, regional and national priorities.

In Australia, work to date on community wellbeing measurement can best be characterised as a mixed bag of enthusiastic but fragmented experiments. While there are many examples of outstanding individual community indicator projects, there is also a clear need to develop a more co-ordinated and strategic approach if their full potential is to be realised. This was in fact the strongest single message from the practitioners and researchers who attended the VicHealth Activity Scan workshop informing this Report. Indicative comments included:

- ‘Overall, it is still an emerging and experimental field ... There is a great deal of different activity happening, at international, national, state and local levels, and with many organisations ...’
- ‘(There) is quite a degree of shared commitment, expertise and good will, and much potential for long term benefits ... but much of the current indicator activity is fragmented and duplicated...’
- ‘Much of the activity is contained within certain sectors, including the academic, and not sufficiently shared or spread across sectors, explained to the public or converted into practical policy applications ...’
- ‘Indicators are in vogue with government, but they haven’t been translated into programs or reporting frameworks ...’
- ‘(There) is a lack of will and support at the political levels ...’
- ‘There is a great need for coordination and leadership in this whole field, at national, state and local levels. This would require common standards and frameworks, a common language and better information and education. Great benefits would flow from this.’

The critical priority now is for strong political and organisational leadership to drive a more strategic approach, which moves from a period of fragmented experimentation to one in which the use of community wellbeing indicators is scaled up, 'mainstreamed' and embedded as a major contributor in community engagement, policy development, policy implementation and reporting across all levels of government.

The four key strategic areas on which co-ordinated action at local, State and Commonwealth government levels is needed are:

- scaling up and mainstreaming the use of community progress and wellbeing indicators;
- linking the development and use of community wellbeing indicators more effectively into community engagement, policy making and reporting activities;
- improving knowledge and capabilities about the development and use of community progress and wellbeing indicators; and
- improving the quality and comparability of data sets and frameworks

### **Victorian opportunities**

The current Victorian policy context provides an outstanding and unique opportunity to take this next step in developing a more strategic approach to the use of community wellbeing indicators, with the potential to deliver substantial and lasting improvements in the policy making capacity, governance and wellbeing of Victorian communities.

- Victoria has been a particularly fertile environment for community wellbeing indicator development and research. There is widespread interest and enthusiasm and a critical mass of practitioners and researchers with relevant expertise and experience.
- The current Victorian State government has a strong commitment to community strengthening and community engagement approaches. The *Growing Victoria Together Policy Framework* also provides a strong foundation for ongoing work on the identification and use of progress and wellbeing indicators at State wide and local levels. The establishment of the *new Department for Victorian Communities* provides a supportive organisational context for the development of a linked approach to community building and community indicator strategies.
- Victoria's local government sector has been a major player in community indicator development with a number of Councils working at the leading edge of innovation in the use of community indicators for both community planning and reporting on progress. The new Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act will provide further support for this work by effectively requiring all local governments to develop community wellbeing indicators as part of broader triple bottom line community planning and reporting.

- The Victorian office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics continues to be an Australian and international leader in the development of community wellbeing indicators and data sets with an excellent record of innovation and collaboration with government and community bodies.

### **Potential leadership role for VicHealth**

VicHealth has a strong track record in working collaboratively with all levels of government and with a diverse range of community organisations to improve the development and use of community wellbeing indicators. The expertise and goodwill generated by this experience provide a strong foundation for VicHealth to continue to play a leadership and co-ordinating role in the actions needed to develop a more strategic approach to the use of community wellbeing indicators. As noted in Section 1, further investment in the development and use of community wellbeing indicators will form an important part of the actions needed for VicHealth to achieve its stated mission of ‘build(ing) the capabilities of organizations, communities and individuals in ways that change social, economic, cultural and physical environments to improve health for all Victorians.’ The establishment of the new Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Centre will also provide an important new organisational focus for work in this area.

There are significant opportunities and challenges at local, state and national levels. However the most valuable immediate priority for VicHealth is likely to be a focus on the local community and local government level. The development of a co-ordinated approach to local wellbeing indicators, informed by broad community involvement has the potential to build on the current groundswell of enthusiasm and activity in many Victorian local governments and communities. It also provides an opportunity for VicHealth to build on its ongoing work in strengthening local government skills and capacity (including, in particular the ‘Leading the Way’ local government resource guide) and is highly consistent with VicHealth’s emerging interest in exploring and encouraging civic engagement initiatives. Work at this local level can also provide building blocks and learning opportunities for statewide and national community indicator and community strengthening initiatives.

### **Recommendations**

The Report recommends that:

(1) VicHealth, in partnership with relevant local, State government and community sector agencies, the ABS and the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Centre should facilitate the development and implementation of a *Victorian Local Community Indicators Project*. The main tasks and outcomes of this project would be:

- Working with local governments to design and implement a range of innovative approaches to involving citizens and stakeholders in the identification and prioritisation of local community goals and indicators;
- Drawing on this work with local government and local communities to develop agreed state wide frameworks and indicators for measuring community wellbeing outcomes and for integrated 'Health of Victorian Communities' reporting;
- An audit of current local community (LGA level) data sets and development of strategy for filling gaps leading to regular and ongoing collection of valid and reliable local area data sets;
- A co-ordinated strategy for building the capacity of local government and community organisations to develop and use community wellbeing indicator measures including appropriate professional development and training programs
- Regular publication of local 'Health of Victorian communities' reports;
- Development of resources to maximise the potential for community well being indicators to be used as mechanisms for more informed community planning and local government policy making; and
- Capturing and disseminating learning from this project through appropriate action research, publication and conference activities

The draft outline of this project including benefits and an indicative work plan outlined in Appendix D is intended only as an illustration of an approach which could be taken, with detailed project development requiring careful consultation with relevant stakeholders.

If this recommendation is accepted the next step would be for VicHealth to commission the development of a detailed project work plan informed by consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

(2) VicHealth initiate discussions with relevant government, community sector, academic and philanthropic agencies to identify the most effective means of progressing the following State wide actions:

- Drawing on the outcomes of the *Victorian Local Community Indicators Project* to work towards a common state wide framework and indicators for measuring community wellbeing trends and for a more integrated suite of 'State of Victorian communities' indicators;
- Development of a Victorian Community Wellbeing Measurement Act (linked to and building on *Growing Victoria Together* and the *Victorian Local Government Democratic Reform Act*);
- An audit of current State and regional data sets and development of a strategy for filling data gaps (including through the development of new measures) leading to regular collection of valid and reliable community wellbeing data at State, regional and local levels;
- Regular 'State of Victoria ' reporting on Statewide, regional and local trends and outcomes;

- The publication of a Victorian Handbook on the identification and use of community wellbeing indicators by State and local governments;
- Improving public and community sector capacity in the design and use of community wellbeing indicators for community engagement, policy making and reporting.
- Developing a more integrated approach to the use of community well being indicators in the design and implementation of community strengthening projects.
- Playing a leadership role in developing a co-ordinated national approach to the development and use of community wellbeing indicators.

(3) VicHealth initiate discussions with relevant government, community, sector, academic and philanthropic agencies to identify the most effective means of progressing the following Commonwealth level actions:

- Development of a national project to involve communities and stakeholders in the identification and prioritisation of key issues and indicators;
- Development of national Community Progress and Wellbeing legislation;
- Agreement on a common framework and integrated suite of national progress and wellbeing indicators, including the further development of those in the current ABS MAP project;
- An audit of current national data sets and development of strategy for filling data gaps;
- Regular 'State of Australian communities' reporting; and
- The publication of a Commonwealth government handbook on the development and use of community progress and wellbeing indicators.

## Appendix A: Good examples of community wellbeing indicator projects

**Table A1. Innovative international CWB indicator models and strategies**

Project	Features	Web link
<b>International level</b>		
UN Development Program (UNDP) Annual Human Development Reports	Pioneered new international social measures in contrast to GDP	<a href="http://stone.undp.org/hdr/reports/">http://stone.undp.org/hdr/reports/</a>
OECD social indicators		<a href="http://www.statistik.admin.ch/events/symposium/abstracts/martin_internet.pdf">http://www.statistik.admin.ch/events/symposium/abstracts/martin_internet.pdf</a>
European Union Social Indicator Framework	Broad, well researched multi-nation reporting system with strong social development emphasis.	<a href="http://www.gesis.org/en/social_monitoring/social_indicators/EU_Reporting/public.htm">www.gesis.org/en/social_monitoring/social_indicators/EU_Reporting/public.htm</a>
<b>National level</b>		
UK Quality of Life Counts Indicators	Triple bottom line national reporting and policy framework, very detailed indicators	<a href="http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sustainable/quality99/">www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sustainable/quality99/</a>
Norway Long-Term Plan	Rolling 4 year plan, initiated in 1976. Integrated national goals, progress measures, community participation.	<a href="http://odin.dep.no/fin/engelsk/public/white_papers/index-b-n-a.html">http://odin.dep.no/fin/engelsk/public/white_papers/index-b-n-a.html</a>
Better Wales	10 year plan with specific targets and measures	<a href="http://www.wales.gov.uk/themes/betterwales/index.htm">http://www.wales.gov.uk/themes/betterwales/index.htm</a>
US Progress Project: Glaser Foundation, University of Washington		<a href="http://www.progressproject.org/program_areas/measuring_progress.asp">www.progressproject.org/program_areas/measuring_progress.asp</a>
Index of Social Health	Social disadvantage index for USA and Canada	<a href="http://www.hrdc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/publications/research/r-97-9e.pdf">http://www.hrdc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/publications/research/r-97-9e.pdf</a>
Calvert-Henderson Quality of Life Indicators (Henderson et al. 2000)	USA and international framework	<a href="http://www.calvert-henderson.com/">http://www.calvert-henderson.com/</a>
Canada Wellbeing Measurement Act 2003	Legislation establishing framework for national wellbeing reporting	<a href="http://www.cyberus.ca/~sustain1/7GB/preview5.shtml">http://www.cyberus.ca/~sustain1/7GB/preview5.shtml</a>
US Government	Requires US government	<a href="http://www.fpmi.com/training/Onsit">http://www.fpmi.com/training/Onsit</a>

Performance and Results Act 1993	departments to report on key outcomes	<a href="#">e/GPRA.html</a>
Canadian Quality of Life Societal Indicators Project, Canadian Policy Research Network	Outstanding Canadian project involving extensive citizen participation in identifying priorities for Quality of life Indicators	<a href="http://www.cprn.org/en/network.cfm?network=3">http://www.cprn.org/en/network.cfm?network=3</a>
<b>Region and city level</b>		
Redefining Progress (US)	Key US research, community action centre on indicators	<a href="http://www.rprogress.org">www.rprogress.org</a>
Eugene Deliberative Democracy project (US)	Includes 'Citizen Budget' and other innovations	<a href="http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ddp/">http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ddp/</a>
Oregon Shines (US)	Strongest on benchmarks and measures	<a href="http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb">www.econ.state.or.us/opb</a>
Minnesota Milestones (US)	Good on 'vision' and broad goals determining indicators	<a href="http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us">www.mnplan.state.mn.us</a>
Florida Benchmarks (US)	Very detailed benchmarks and updated statistics	<a href="http://fcf.state.fl.us/eog/govdocs/gapcomm">http://fcf.state.fl.us/eog/govdocs/gapcomm</a>
Quality of Life in Jacksonville (US)	One of longest running US projects at city level	<a href="http://www.unf.edu/faculty/clifford/jcci">www.unf.edu/faculty/clifford/jcci</a>
SmartGuelph (Canada)	Model project. Integrated indicators, strong citizen involvement, well documented.	<a href="http://www.smartguelph.ca">www.smartguelph.ca</a>
GPI Atlantic Community Progress Indicators, Nova Scotia (Canada)	Outstanding research based project	<a href="http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/communitygpi/community.shtml">http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/communitygpi/community.shtml</a>
Alberta Measuring Up (Canada)	Rigorous government performance measures	<a href="http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/measuring/">http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/measuring/</a>
Sustainable Seattle (US)	Influential project focussing on sustainability issues and community involvement	<a href="http://www.scn.org/sustainable">www.scn.org/sustainable</a>
<b>Support foundations</b>		
Glaser Progress Foundation (US) Atkinson Charitable Foundation (Canada)	Both foundations give priority to community progress measurement projects with citizen engagement	<a href="http://www.progressproject.org/program_areas/measuring_progress.asp">www.progressproject.org/program_areas/measuring_progress.asp</a> <a href="http://www.atkinsonfoundation.ca">www.atkinsonfoundation.ca</a>

**Table A2. Innovative CWB indicator projects: Australian national and state examples**

Project	Features	Web link
<b>National</b>		
Genuine Progress Indicator (Australia)	Alternative to GDP, includes social and environmental costs etc	<a href="http://www.tai.org.au/Publications_Files/DP_Files/DP14SUM.pdf">www.tai.org.au/Publications_Files/DP_Files/DP14SUM.pdf</a>
Measuring Australia's Progress	Key ABS national progress measurement project, biennial	<a href="http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/5883EAD30A3CFD59CA256A8B007F8B8B?Open">www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/5883EAD30A3CFD59CA256A8B007F8B8B?Open</a>
Unequal in Life	National community based survey of living standards and inequality in Australian communities	<a href="http://www.jss.org.au/media/news/HTML04/05.htm">http://www.jss.org.au/media/news/HTML04/05.htm</a>
<b>State</b>		
Tasmania Together	Key Australian project, using indicators, goals, community participation, integrated into policy	<a href="http://www.tasttogether.asn.au">www.tasttogether.asn.au</a>
Growing Victoria Together	State progress plan with key performance indicators, but also supporting wider wellbeing frameworks	<a href="http://www.growingvictoria.vic.gov.au/">http://www.growingvictoria.vic.gov.au/</a>
WA whole of government planning and reporting	Government department performance indicators addressing community outcomes	<a href="http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/performanceindicators.html">http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/performanceindicators.html</a>
ACT State of the Territory	Comprehensive report on community wellbeing by Territory government	<a href="http://www.act.gov.au/">http://www.act.gov.au/</a>

**Table A3. Innovative CWB indicator projects: local government examples**

Project	Features	Web link
Bass Coast Shire Council	10 year Community Plan based on participation of over 1000 citizens	<a href="http://www.basscoast.vic.gov.au/">http://www.basscoast.vic.gov.au/</a>
City of Greater Dandenong	Community plan with detailed progress indicators, an ongoing 'customer research' panel from local citizens. Has begun a community survey on wellbeing priorities.	<a href="http://www.greaterdandenong.com">http://www.greaterdandenong.com</a>
Hume City Council	Citizen based Social Justice Charter with local 'social justice indicators'	<a href="http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/">http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/</a>
Maribyrnong Council	Developed a community plan: 'Our Community's Future' which has involved 20,000 residents, incorporated in council plan 2003-2006.	<a href="http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Files/Council_Plan_2003-2006.pdf">http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Files/Council_Plan_2003-2006.pdf</a>
Moreland Council	Publishes detailed social, economic and environmental wellbeing indicators, three year plan with key goals and indicators based on community input, and a 'Consultation Framework'.	<a href="http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/publications/downloadpolicy-fr.htm">http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/publications/downloadpolicy-fr.htm</a>
Mornington Peninsula Shire Council	Has developed a 'Sustainable Peninsula' strategic community plan, including community forums and progress indicators.	<a href="http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au">http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au</a>
Nillumbik Shire Council	Has established a 'Community Planning Think Tank' and a series of community planning workshops.	<a href="http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au">http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au</a>
City of Port Phillip	'Sustainable Community Progress Indicators' developed with citizen participation.	<a href="http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/scpi.html">http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/scpi.html</a>
Surf Coast Shire Council	Developing a Shire wide Community Plan, with separate township plan and wellbeing indicators informed by extensive community research and input.	<a href="http://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au">http://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au</a>

Wyndham Council	Produces a 'Quality Community Plan' with citizen involvement; progress and wellbeing reporting through a 'Report Card'. Operates an ongoing Community Panel consulting with up to 500 local citizens on wellbeing issues.	<a href="http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/qc_pframe.htm">http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/qc_pframe.htm</a>
Yarra Ranges Shire Council	Has developed 'Vision 2020 Community Plan', a long term community based sustainability strategy integrating economic, social and environmental wellbeing goals.	<a href="http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/">http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/</a>
<b>Other States</b>		
City of Onkaparinga (SA)	Strategic Community Indicators details	<a href="http://www.onkaparinga.sa.gov.au/web/page/home.html">http://www.onkaparinga.sa.gov.au/web/page/home.html</a>
Glenorchy City Council (Tas)	Community Plan	<a href="http://www.gcc.tas.gov.au/">http://www.gcc.tas.gov.au/</a>
Brisbane City Council (Qld)	Living in Brisbane 2010 community plan	<a href="http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/">http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/</a>
Newcastle City Council (NSW)	Sustainable Community Indicators details	<a href="http://www.ncc.nsw.gov.au/">http://www.ncc.nsw.gov.au/</a>
Hurstville Council (NSW)	Hurstville Snapshots, Annual Community Wellbeing report	<a href="http://www.hurstville.org/">http://www.hurstville.org/</a>

**Appendix B: Examples of Community Wellbeing frameworks**

**Table B1. Sustainable Community Progress Indicators: City of Port Phillip**

Priority issue	Potential indicators
1. Maintain/increase availability of affordable housing.	Home ownership affordability Private rental affordability Proportion of social housing to total dwellings Number of rooming houses Number and type of dwellings in Port Phillip
2. Maintain the role of neighbourhood shopping centres in meeting all local convenience needs.	Local Shopping Index (under development)
3. Maintain diversity of local industries and employment and volunteer opportunities.	Percentage of people who live and work in the City of Port Phillip Business Sustainability index (under development)
4. Improve cost of living in the City of Port Phillip.	Cost of a salad roll and soft drink Number of local residents accessing emergency relief
5. Conserve local native plants and animals.	Number of bird species in Port Phillip Number of clutches of penguin eggs in a breeding season
6. Increase non-car based transport usage.	Number of cars registered in Port Phillip Number of car parking permits per household Number of people using public transport How children get to school
7. Reduce pollution - air, water, noise and waste.	Air quality - bad air days Number of days per year beaches closed to the public Amount of litter in public places Waste generation per capita Waste reduction and recycling per capita Noise complaints received by council
8. Increase environmentally friendly development & buildings.	Number of new planning permits using ecological sustainable design in development
9. Value diversity.	Percentage of population that believes City of Port Phillip is an accepting place for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds Change in age structure in Port Phillip Change in proportion of population with a birthplace other than Australia Change in weekly household incomes
10. Retain local icons and character.	Number of performing and visual arts venues in the City of Port Phillip Maintenance or protection of heritage buildings, landscapes and other cultural icons Multi-unit developments approved
11. Improve community participation.	Percentage of population who feel they have opportunities to participate in affordable local community events and activities of their choosing Voter turnout at council elections Participation in social, cultural and sporting clubs, and community programs and/or activities
12. Improve neighbourhood connectedness.	How long a household lives in the City of Port Phillip Enrolment in local schools Social links between neighbours Change in number of school age children Number of people residents feel they could regularly talk to in their street or block
13. Improve perception of safety.	Syringes disposed of appropriately Change in total crime in Port Phillip compared to change in total crime across Victoria Change in specific crime types % of population who feel safe walking to the local shops or travelling by public transport Perception of change in personal safety Perception of change in crime in Port Phillip

**Table B-1. VicHealth: Mental Health & Social Wellbeing Framework**

Key Determinants of Mental Health & Themes For Action.		
Social Inclusion	Freedom from discrimination & violence	Economic participation

↓

Population Groups & Action Areas.	
Population groups	Health promotion action
Children Young people Women and men Older people. Indigenous Communities. Culturally diverse communities. Rural Communities	Research, monitoring & evaluation Direct Participation Programs Organisational development Community strengthening Communication & Marketing. Advocacy legislative & policy reform

↓

Sectors & Settings for Action						
Housing Transport	Community Corporate	Educat'n Public	Workplace Arts	Sport & Rec. Local Govt.	Health Justice	Acad- emic

↓

Intermediate Outcomes			
<b>Individual</b> Projects and Programs which increase: Involvement in group activities Access to supportive relationships Self esteem & self efficacy. Access to education & employment Self determination & control	<b>Organisational</b> Organisations which are: Inclusive Responsive Safe & supportive Working in partnerships across sectors Implementing evidence based approaches to their work	<b>Community</b> Environments which are safe, supportive & inclusive. Enhanced community connectedness. Enhanced Civic engagement. Increased awareness of mental health & wellbeing issues	<b>Societal</b> Integrated & supportive policy & programs. Strong legislative platform Resource Allocation
<b>Long-term Benefits</b>			
Increased sense of belonging Improved Physical Health Less stress, anxiety & depression. Less substance misuse.	Integrated intersectoral resources and activities ↓	Improved productivity at work, home & school. Community valuing of diversity and actively disowning discrimination Less violence & crime.	Reduced social & health inequalities. Improved quality of life & life expectancy

**Table B-3. Growing Victoria Together: Summary of Key Issues and Progress Measures**

<b>Important issues</b>	<b>Demonstrating Progress Measures</b>
Valuing and investing in lifelong education	Victorian primary school children will be at or above national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy by 2005 90 per cent of young people in Victoria will successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent by 2010 The percentage of young people 15-19 in rural and regional Victoria engaged in education and training will rise by 6 per cent by 2005 The proportion of Victorians learning new skills will increase
High quality, accessible health and community services	Waiting times and levels of confidence in health and community services will improve Health and education outcomes for young children will improve Waiting times for drug treatment will decrease as will deaths from drugs, including tobacco and alcohol
Sound financial management	An annual budget surplus Victoria's taxes will remain competitive with the Australian average Maintain a Triple A rating
Safe streets, homes and workplaces	Violent crime and fear of violent crime will be reduced Road accidents and deaths will be reduced by 20 per cent over the next five years
Growing and linking all of Victoria	The proportion of freight transported to ports by rail will increase from 10 per cent to 30 per cent Rail travel times will be reduced to Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo and the Latrobe Valley Travel in Melbourne taken on public transport will increase from 9 per cent to 20 per cent by the year 2020
Promoting sustainable development	Renewable energy efforts will increase Energy consumption in Government buildings will be reduced by 15 per cent and the use of electricity from Green Power by Government will be increased to 5 per cent by 2005 Waste recycling efforts will increase and the use of land fill as a waste disposal method will be reduced Waste water reuse in Melbourne will increase from 1 per cent to 20 per cent by 2010
More jobs and thriving, innovative industries across Victoria	Victoria's productivity and competitiveness will increase. We will see this through increasing GDP per worker. There will be more and better jobs across Victoria The proportion of Victorians learning new skills will increase A greater share of innovative R&D activity will be in Victoria
Building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities	The extent and diversity of participation in community, cultural and recreational organisations will increase In a crisis there will be more people Victorians can turn to for support. Inequalities in health, education and wellbeing between communities will be reduced
Protecting the environment for future generations	The Snowy River will be returned to 21 per cent of its original flow within 10 years and over time to 28 per cent The quality of air and drinking water will improve The health of Victoria's catchments, rivers and bays will improve The area covered by native vegetation will increase There will be a real reduction in the environmental and economic impact of salinity by 2015
Promoting rights and respecting diversity	The proportion of Victorians aware of their legal and civil rights will increase More Victorians from all backgrounds will have the opportunity to have a say on issues which matter to them
Government that listens and leads	More Victorians will be consulted on issues which matter to them There will be regular reports on progress in improving the quality of life for all Victorians and their communities

**Table B-4. Tasmania Together: Key goals**

<i>In 20 years, Tasmania will have</i>
(1) A job for everyone who wants one
(2) An inclusive and compassionate society
(3) A world-class reputation for innovation, imagination and intelligence
(4) A society with a focus on whole of life, whole of community learning.
(5) An ecologically sustainable future
(6) A high quality of life and healthy lifestyle
(7) A form of government that is inclusive, open and close to the people
(8) An international reputation for excellence in the arts and culture
(9) Invigorated rural and regional communities
(10) A proud and confident community

**Table B-5. UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Headline indicators**

<b>Themes, issues and objectives</b>	<b>Headline indicators</b>
<b>Maintaining high and stable levels of growth and employment</b>	
Our economy must continue to grow	Total output of the economy (GDP and GDP per head)
Investment in modern plant and machinery as well as research and development is vital to our future prosperity	Total and social investment as percentage of GDP
Maintain high and stable levels of employment so everyone can share greater job opportunities	Proportion of people of working age who are in work
<b>Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone</b>	
Tackling poverty and social exclusion	Children in low income households, adults without qualifications and in workless households, elderly in fuel poverty
Equip people with the skills to fulfil their potential	Qualifications at Age 19
Improve health of the population overall	Expected years of healthy life
Reduce the proportion of unfit housing stock	Homes judged unfit to live in
Reduce both crime and people's fear of crime	Level of crime
<b>Effective protection of the environment</b>	
Continue to tackle our emissions of greenhouse gases now and plan for greater reductions in longer term	Emissions of green house gases
Reduce air pollution and ensure air quality continues to improve through the longer term	Days when air pollution is moderate or higher
Improve choice in transport; improve access to education, jobs, leisure and services and reduce the need to travel	Road traffic
Improving river quality	Rivers of good or fair quality
Reverse the long term decline in populations of farmland and woodland	Population of wild birds
Re-using previously developed land, in order to protect the countryside and encourage urban regeneration	New homes built on previously developed land
<b>Prudent use of natural resources</b>	
Move away from disposal of waste towards waste minimisation, reuse recycling and recovery	Waste arisings and management

**Table B-6. Swinburne Institute for Social Research: proposed Victorian Community Wellbeing Indicators Framework**

Social and community wellbeing				Democracy and governance	Economic wellbeing	Environmental wellbeing
Individual wellbeing	Group wellbeing	Community wellbeing				
		Qualities	Structures			
Health and wellbeing (physical and mental)	Children and families	Fairness, equal opportunity, social mobility	Public and civic institutions	Democracy	Viable and sustainable productivity	Health and sustainability of ecological systems
Education and training (whole of life)	People on low incomes	Social capital and trust	Planning and physical infrastructure	Human rights	Economic vitality	Environmental quality (air, water, land)
Income, wealth and poverty	People with disabilities	Health and viability of communities	Community services	Justice and legal rights	Appropriate job creation	Environmental diversity (species etc.)
Safety and security	Women	Citizenship and community participation	Transport	Good governance, effective management	Healthy regional, local economies	Sustainable use of natural resources
Personal development	Older persons	Creativity, enterprise and innovation	Media and communications	Local government		
Housing	Ethnic and NESB groups	Crime and social dysfunction	Culture and the arts			
Employment and work life	Indigenous people		Recreation and sport			
	People in remote and rural communities					

## **Appendix C: Social and Community Indicators Activity Scan Workshop: Participants and summary of outcomes**

Held at Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, November 5, 2003. Approximately 30 participants from: local government, state government agencies, health and welfare bodies, community agencies, universities.

### **1: Your interest/work in indicators**

How would you describe your own, or your organisation's, main interest or area of work related to social and community indicators in the past 5-10 years?

#### **Summary of responses**

The main interest or policy areas related to social and community indicators of workshop participants were:

- Health (public, inequalities, mental, changes in, socio/eco determinants)
- Community development (community well-being, community building, cohesion, sustainability, neighbourhood composition, local participation etc)
- Democracy (engagement, social action and change)
- Governance (social/public policy making, evaluation, accountability planning)
- Local government (capacity, accountability, understanding)
- General statistics and research
- Economic
- Culture

The main uses or benefits of indicators given were:

- Measuring well-being, equity and sustainability (local, national etc)
- Improving understanding of issues, causes and conditions
- Supporting research
- Strengthening democracy and community engagement
- Stimulating social change, influencing policy
- Informing and evaluating programs and policies
- Improving planning and standard setting

## 2: Current state of play

How would you summarise the overall international and Australian state of play in relation to the development and use of social and community indicators?

### Summary of responses:

*(Figures in brackets show number of responses supporting this view)*

- Overall, it is still an emerging and experimental field. (7)
- There is a great deal of different activity happening, at international, national, state and local levels, and with many organisations. (8)
- Internationally, Europe is generally the leader; the US work is interesting but erratic. (3)
- In Australia, social indicators had been behind economic and environmental ones in their development, but are now receiving much more attention, especially social capital (4)
- But much of the current indicator activity is fragmented and duplicated, with too many narrow indicators ... (2)
- ... and confusion about whether indicators are meant to measure general wellbeing or specific disadvantage. (1)
- Much of the activity is contained within certain sectors, including the academic, and not sufficiently shared or spread across sectors, explained to the public or converted into practical policy applications. (5)
- Generally, there is quite a degree of shared commitment, expertise and good will, and much potential for long term benefits. (3).
- But there is a lack of will and support at the political levels. (2)
- Indicators are in vogue with government, but they haven't been translated into programs or reporting frameworks. (1)
- Currently there is a great need for coordination and leadership in this whole field, at national, state and local levels. This would require common standards and frameworks, a common language and better information and education. Great benefits would flow from this. (21)

## 3: Most valuable recent initiatives

Focussing particularly on Victoria and Australia, what have been the two or three most valuable social indicator initiatives over the last 5-10 years?

### Summary of responses

The 'most valuable initiatives' named included a wide range of local (especially), state and national, and six international, cases with an emphasis on practice over theory.

Most of these were examples of 'triple bottom line' or 'whole community' well-being measures or frameworks, but there were also quite a few from specific fields such as health, inequality, social capacity and the economy.

Specific work or initiatives most frequently cited were:

- Mike Salvaris SISR work on community & state indicators and democracy (7)
- DHS Victorian population health survey (6)
- The ABS 'Measuring Australia's Progress' (MAP) project (4)
- DHS Environments for Health project (2)
- Jenny Will's VLGA and ALGA work on local wellbeing indicators (2)
- Maureen Rogers 'Small Towns Big Picture' project (2)
- Jesuit 'Unequal in Life' reports (2)
- GPI (the 'Genuine Progress Indicator') (2)
- Fran Baum's work on social capacity (2)
- 'People Together' community audits and report (2)

#### **Question 4: Most important lessons**

Focussing particularly on Victoria and Australia, what do you believe have been the most important learnings/lessons about the development and use of social indicators?

#### **Summary**

The most important lessons about the development and use and development of indicators have been:

##### *Coordination and agreement (19 responses)*

- Good social and community indicators can be an important influence on government and public policy debate. However, the process of developing good indicators is slow, complex and costly and conservative resistance should be expected.
- Good indicator frameworks must be community owned and shared with government. They require political will, public support, and coordination and agreement at national, state and local level.
- Political support is needed to provide the resources, and ensure the rigour and independence of the reporting regime.
- Agreement is needed on purposes, policy applications and essential indicators, and the development of a common framework and set of principles. This should be supported by a clearing house for ideas and research and training for practitioners.

##### *Community and local indicators (7)*

- Local indicators need special attention with more initiatives and extra funding. The Census should regularly include questions on key community wellbeing issues
- The development of community based indicators is feasible and an important way to build community capacity and involve citizens

##### *Elements of good indicators/frameworks (7)*

- A good indicator framework should:
  - be integrated at national, state and local level
  - be comprehensive and 'Quadruple Bottom Line' (i.e., include measures of social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being)
  - include measures of both individual and societal or system wellbeing (such as equity)
  - measure assets and strengths, as well as deficiencies and liabilities and both abstract and material qualities (like social uniqueness)
  - be focused on current needs and issues, not historical ones

#### *Indicators and data (5)*

- Individual indicators must be simple; relevant; sustainable and comparable. A clearer distinction needs to be made between indicators of program or staff performance and those measuring social and community outcomes.
- The limited success of indicators in policy application is partly due to poor data (especially at the local level) and ignorance as to its use. New policy frameworks will require a commitment to develop new data (which is costly) and new application methods.

### **5: Priorities for the future**

What investments and actions should be the highest priorities for future research, policy development and capacity building?

#### **Summary of responses**

*(Figures in brackets show number giving response in this category)*

**More resources and stronger incentives (11):** Substantial increases in the current investment in researching and developing indicators and new data, stronger incentives within government, and greater engagement of ABS resources and expertise.

**More collaboration and cooperation (16):** Collaboration is a key future priority, between and across the main stakeholders and participants: practitioners, government, community/NGOs and academics, and between data users and generators. Collaborative projects and vehicles included networks, a clearing-house, discussion forums, and various strategic and pilot projects.

**Government taking stronger leadership role (4):** Government leadership is important, especially at state and national level. This would be more likely if there were some clear 'champions' in government, and if government itself developed a longer term vision and internal 'champions' for indicators.

**Build public support and political pressure (13):** The need to build public and political support for indicators is a priority, and some of the main strategies needed are: pressure on opposition political parties; the appointment of a Victorian human wellbeing commissioner; campaigns to show the value of indicators to the wellbeing of ordinary people and to

particular social problems; and an emphasis on the democratic and community value of the development process.

**Improved government coordination, 'whole of government' approach (9):** A key requirement for the future success of indicators is stronger coordination and 'whole of government' systems being developed by state and national governments, both in policy and planning, and in research and information processes.

**Develop agreed frameworks, definitions, universal indicators (10):** There is a strong need to develop a uniform national (and Victorian) framework for wellbeing, using standard indicators, based on an open, participatory process, underpinned with agreed principles, and incorporating local community aspirations.

**Emphasise good models and priority areas (2):** It will be important for future development to be more strategically focused on areas of agreed importance and on projects which have had greatest success in practice.

**Strengthen local projects and local capacity (8):** Many participants stressed the importance of the successful development of local and community wellbeing indicators, and suggested processes for this including; more support for local government, from state government and research bodies; improving current local government survey and information processes; and a major pilot project on indicator development between local governments, peak bodies and VicHealth, linked to the Population Health Survey.

**Recognise limitations of data, indicators:** It was also thought important to recognise the limitations of indicators and measurement; the first priority is to determine the outcomes and values they measure.

**Connect indicators better with existing policies, data (7):** Another agreed priority was to identify strategic opportunities offered by existing programs and data sources for indicator development, and build indicator development more directly into them: for example, Growing Victoria Together, the Community Safety survey and improvements to administrative data.

**Specific issues needing attention in indicator framework, use (5):** Participants identified a number of important specific issues relating to indicators, including social exclusion, better analysis, and VicHealth's outcome measures.

## Appendix D: Proposal for a Victorian Indicators Project

### Purpose

The proposed *Victorian Community Indicators Project* (VCIP) will support the development of an agreed process, framework, indicators, data sets, base line and progress reports showing outcomes and trends in relation to issues important to the wellbeing of Victorian communities at the local (LGA) level. The key products from the project will be the publication of regularly updated 'Health of Victorian Communities' reports showing the state of play and trends in relation to wellbeing indicators for each Victorian Local Government area.

### Benefits

The development of an integrated approach to local community wellbeing indicators and data sets will:

- Provide all levels of government and local communities with information on key social, economic, environmental, cultural and governance trends and outcomes at local (LGA level).
- Provide the evidence base for more informed consideration of policy trends, impacts and priorities by local communities and by local, State and Commonwealth government agencies.
- Be an important contribution to the next stage of the implementation of the Victorian Government's 'Growing Victoria Together' framework
- Be a valuable basis for facilitating and evaluating the wide range of community strengthening initiatives currently being explored and supported by all levels of government.
- Build on and augment the valuable initiatives and experiments in the development and use of local community indicators already being supported by many Victorian local governments
- Make an important contribution to meeting commitments contained in the recently passed Victorian Local Government Democratic Reform Act for improving mechanisms for engaging local communities in the identification local priorities and progress measures.
- Build on and augment the work of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Productivity Commission in designing and implementing agreed measures of community strength, wellbeing and social capital.
- Provide VicHealth with a comprehensive and comparable set of indicators and data sets for monitoring and learning from local community health and wellbeing projects, trends and outcomes.

## **Issues and choices**

Important threshold questions for the project will include:

1. The scope of the definition of 'community wellbeing' indicators (ie. should this include the full range of social economic, environmental, cultural and governance outcomes or focus more narrowly on social development and social capital trends and outcomes?)
2. The range of LGAs to be included (ie. is this a statewide project or will it initially focus on a selected number of LGAs?).
3. The balance to be struck between ensuring indicators reflect issues important to each community and the benefits in reaching agreement on some common core indicators.
4. The balance between focussing on the achievement of intermediate, medium term goals or longer term social change and outcomes.
5. The processes to be used for involving communities and stakeholders in the identification and prioritisation of indicators.

## **Auspice, partners and funding sources**

It is envisaged that VicHealth would provide the auspice for the project in collaboration with a range of partners including: the Victorian mental Health and wellbeing Centre, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Victorian Local Governance Association, the Department for Victorian Communities, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. A small policy research team would be commissioned to carry out the project.

Potential funding sources for the project include VicHealth, DVC, the Victorian Community Support Fund, participating local governments and philanthropic trusts.

## **Indicative work plan**

The following indicative 3 year work plan provides an illustration of the key tasks, outcomes and timelines.

### *Year 1*

- Consultation with potential partners leading to finalisation of detailed project brief including auspice, partners, funding etc.
- Commission research team
- Design process for involving and consulting with local communities and stakeholders on identification and prioritisation of issues and indicators.

- Develop framework of indicators in consultation with local government and community stakeholders including agreed range of indicators and guidelines for the way in which indicators can be used for community engagement, policy development, implementation and evaluation
- Liaise with other States and Commonwealth to maximise opportunities for developing comparable local community indicators and data sets across all States.
- Audit existing data collections and sets to check availability of appropriate, valid and reliable data for all relevant indicators at LGA level.
- Design and initiate research strategies for filling gaps in LGA level data sets.
- Design strategy for improving capacity of relevant State Government, local government and community sector organisations and staff to develop and use community progress and wellbeing indicators.
- Design action research evaluation methodology for capturing learning from process of developing and implementing comprehensive local community progress and wellbeing indicators (including possible ARC Linkage Grant application).

#### *Year 2*

- Continue to implement strategy for filling gaps in LGA data sets
- Implement strategy for improving capacity of State Government, local government and community sector organisations and staff to develop and use community progress and wellbeing indicators. This could include the design and implementation of appropriate professional development training programs, tool kits and resource publications.
- Prepare base line reports on 'Health of Victorian Communities' showing local community well being state of play and trends.

#### *Year 3*

- Continue to implement strategy for filling gaps in LGA data sets
- Prepare first state wide 'Health of Victorian Communities' progress report, bringing together full set of local 'Health of Victorian Communities' reports.
- Complete initial evaluation of learning from Victorian community progress indicators project.
- National/international conference on learning about design and implementation of local community progress and wellbeing indicators?

## Appendix E: Sources and further information

### References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992), *A Guide to Australian Social Statistics*, AGPS, Canberra.
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## Useful internet links

Alberta Government Performance (Canada.)  
[www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/measuring](http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/measuring)

Atkinson Charitable Foundation (Canada)  
[www.atkinsonfoundation.ca](http://www.atkinsonfoundation.ca)

Calvert-Henderson Quality of Life Indicators (USA and international),  
<http://www.calvert-henderson.com/>

Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN)  
<http://www.cprn.org/en/network.cfm?network=3>

European Union Social Indicator Framework  
[www.gesis.org/en/social\\_monitoring/social\\_indicators/EU\\_Reporting/publ.htm](http://www.gesis.org/en/social_monitoring/social_indicators/EU_Reporting/publ.htm)

Florida Benchmarks (US)  
<http://fcn.state.fl.us/eog/govdocs/gapcomm>

Genuine Progress Indicator (USA, Canada and Australia)  
[www.tai.org.au/Publications\\_Files/DP\\_Files/DP14SUM.pdf](http://www.tai.org.au/Publications_Files/DP_Files/DP14SUM.pdf)

Glaser Progress Foundation (US)  
[www.progressproject.org/program\\_areas/measuring\\_progress.asp](http://www.progressproject.org/program_areas/measuring_progress.asp)

Glenorchy Council (Tasmania.)  
[www.gcc.tas.gov.au](http://www.gcc.tas.gov.au)

Government of Denmark, 'International Benchmarking of Denmark'  
[www.fm.dk/uk/pubuk/benchmark00\\_uk/](http://www.fm.dk/uk/pubuk/benchmark00_uk/)

GPI Atlantic Community Progress Indicators, Nova Scotia (Canada)  
<http://www.gpiatlantic.org/pdf/communitygpi/community.shtml>

Hart Environmental Data (US and general)  
[www.subjectmatters.com/indicators](http://www.subjectmatters.com/indicators)

Hurstville (NSW) Council: Hurstville Snapshots  
[www.hurstville.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hurstville.nsw.gov.au)

Index of Social Health (Canada)  
<http://www.hrdc.gc.ca/sp-ps/arb-dgra/publications/research/r-97-9e.pdf>

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) (US and international)  
<http://iisd1.iisd.ca>

Jacksonville: Quality Indicators for Progress (US)  
[www.unf.edu/faculty/clifford/jcci](http://www.unf.edu/faculty/clifford/jcci)

Measures of Growth (US)  
[www.mdf.org/megc/growth00](http://www.mdf.org/megc/growth00)

Measuring Australia's Progress  
[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/5883EAD30A3CFD59CA256A8B007F8B8B?Open](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/5883EAD30A3CFD59CA256A8B007F8B8B?Open)

Measuring Community Success (US)  
[www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/community\\_success](http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/community_success)

Minnesota Milestones (US)  
[www.mnplan.state.mn.us](http://www.mnplan.state.mn.us)

Moreland Council (Victoria)  
[www.moreland.vic.gov.au](http://www.moreland.vic.gov.au)

New Zealand Standards and Indicators  
[www.mfe.govt.nz/monitoring/indicators](http://www.mfe.govt.nz/monitoring/indicators)

Newcastle (NSW) Sustainable Community Indicators  
[www.ncc.nsw.gov.au/about/sustainable/fullreport.pdf](http://www.ncc.nsw.gov.au/about/sustainable/fullreport.pdf)

North Central Regional Centre for Rural Development (US, extensive reference list)  
[www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/indicators](http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/indicators)

OECD social indicators (good overview paper)  
[http://www.statistik.admin.ch/events/symposium/abstracts/martin\\_internet.pdf](http://www.statistik.admin.ch/events/symposium/abstracts/martin_internet.pdf)

Oregon Benchmarks (US)  
[www.econ.state.or.us/opb](http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb)

Portland Multnomah (US)  
[www.p-m-benchmarks.org](http://www.p-m-benchmarks.org)

Redefining Progress (International network)  
[www.rprogress.org](http://www.rprogress.org)

Small Towns – Big Picture (Victoria)  
[www.bendigo.latrobe.edu.au/smalltowns](http://www.bendigo.latrobe.edu.au/smalltowns)

Smart Guelph (Canada)  
[www.smartguelph.ca](http://www.smartguelph.ca)

Social Indicators Launchpad (Canada Council on Social Development)  
[www.ccsd.ca/lp](http://www.ccsd.ca/lp)

Social Indicators Network News (Duke University, US)  
[www.social.duke.edu/dept/sinet](http://www.social.duke.edu/dept/sinet)

Sustainable Measures (general indicators clearing house)  
[www.sustainablemeasures.com/](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/)

Sustainable Seattle (US)  
[www.scn.org/sustainable](http://www.scn.org/sustainable)

Swinburne Institute for Social Research (see Citizenship and Social Policy, Social Indicators)  
[www.sisr.net/programcsp/csp.htm](http://www.sisr.net/programcsp/csp.htm)

Tasmania Together  
[www.tasttogether.asn.au](http://www.tasttogether.asn.au)

The Progress Project (US)  
[www.prgoressproject.org](http://www.prgoressproject.org)

Tucson, Arizona: Livable Tucson (US)  
[www.ci.tucson.az.us/lt-indicators](http://www.ci.tucson.az.us/lt-indicators)

UK Quality of Life Counts Indicators (goal based, built into government)  
[www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sustainable/quality99/](http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sustainable/quality99/)

UNDP Human Development Reports  
<http://stone.undp.org/hdr/reports/>

Waverley Council (NSW)  
[www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/)

World Bank: World development indicators  
[www.worldbank.org/data/wdi](http://www.worldbank.org/data/wdi)

Wyndham Council (Community Plan)  
<http://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/qcpframe.htm>

## Endnotes

*'Above' denotes details in 'References' section above.*

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  - <sup>2</sup> VicHealth, Strategic Directions 2003-2006, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 2003, p. 5.
  - <sup>3</sup> VicHealth, Mental Health Promotion Plan Foundation Document: 1999-2002, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 1999.
  - <sup>4</sup> VicHealth, 2002. *'Leading the Way: Councils Creating Healthier Communities'*, Carlton, Victoria.
  - <sup>5</sup> Bauer, R. 1966, above.
  - <sup>6</sup> Cobb and Rixford, above.
  - <sup>7</sup> Waring, above.
  - <sup>8</sup> UNDP, Human Development Reports, above.
  - <sup>9</sup> Robert Kennedy quoted in Halstead chapter, Eckersley 1998, above.
  - <sup>10</sup> One of the most prominent in the research field was Richard Estes of the University of Pennsylvania, with his International Indicators of Social Progress
  - <sup>11</sup> UNDP, 1996, above: iii
  - <sup>12</sup> UNDP, Human Development Reports, above.
  - <sup>13</sup> Canadian and European Social Framework
  - <sup>14</sup> References to Sustainable Seattle, Jacksonville, Oregon Benchmarks etc.
  - <sup>15</sup> (Vinson and Homel, 1976).
  - <sup>16</sup> Commonwealth Grants Commission
  - <sup>17</sup> Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee, 'A System of National Citizenship Indicators' May 1995., report, Committee report
  - <sup>18</sup> 'Australia: State of the environment', 1966. An independent report published by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra.
  - <sup>19</sup> These documents are available on the websites of the Australia Institute and the ABS respectively
  - <sup>20</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.nsf/22b99697d1e47ad8ca2568e30008e1bc/3af45bbd431a127bca256c22007d75ba!OpenDocument>

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- <sup>21</sup> Australian Collaboration: see [www.australiancollaboration.com.au/booksreports/index.html](http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/booksreports/index.html)
- <sup>22</sup> Jesuit Social Services, 1995. 'Unequal in Life', , Richmond, Victoria.
- <sup>23</sup> ARC Project, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, 1996 - 1999
- <sup>24</sup> Tasmania Together, [www.tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au](http://www.tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au)
- <sup>25</sup> See the WA Auditor General's web-site: <http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/performanceindicators.html>
- <sup>26</sup> Growing Victoria Together
- <sup>27</sup> Department of Human Services, Victoria.
- <sup>28</sup> See, for example, Wilkinson and Marmot 1998, above.
- <sup>29</sup> A useful summary of health sector wellbeing measures can be found in Garcia and McCarthy 1994.
- <sup>30</sup> Bauer, 1966, above, p. 1
- <sup>31</sup> Canadian Policy Research Networks 2001, above.
- <sup>32</sup> Redefining Progress 1998, above.
- <sup>33</sup> Land 1974, above
- <sup>34</sup> Refs on cultural and governance indicators
- <sup>35</sup> Fallowfield 1990, above.
- <sup>36</sup> Redefining Progress, 1998, above